

## **Voices from Two Theatrical Others: Labour Issues in the Theatres of Ireland and Taiwan**

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### **Abstract**

*Ireland and Taiwan, as two island nations, have always been comparable subjects in terms of their political and economic relationships with their respective mainlands. However, although their rapid economic growth stems, to a significant extent, from the contribution of the working classes, the voices of this social stratum are rarely accentuated, due to the mass media's more usual focus on captivating and dramatic global and national issues. This paper will therefore study a selection of Irish and Taiwanese plays that address labour issues, in an attempt to show how playwrights use the theatre as a medium to counteract the domination of exploitative class relationships by considering minority communities.*

### **Introduction**

At first appearance, the working classes of Ireland and Taiwan do not appear to have much in common, living on opposite sides of the world and speaking unrelated languages. Further, the two countries have never established standard diplomatic relations or had much cultural exchange. The leaders of their labour unions do not engage in reciprocal visits, nor do they support each other on relevant issues. Nevertheless, the working classes of the two countries have affected each other at a distance, long before the term 'globalization' arose as the focal point of attention towards the end of the twentieth century and transformed social, economic, and cultural situations worldwide. Specifically, Ireland has borne the unpleasant consequences of Taiwan, and other Asian countries, dumping their low-priced and machine-made products on other countries since the 1960s. The consequences, interestingly, are illustrated in Frank McGuinness's 1982 play *The Factory Girls*, which portrays Irish women workers' failure to maintain their production of hand-made shirts after machinery has taken the place of human labour: 'Do you know what a flooded market means? Shirts selling for half nothing from Korea and Taiwan' (McGuinness 1996 [1982]: 34).<sup>1</sup> This mention of Taiwan, though brief, suggests that Taiwan should not be excused for its role in causing

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<sup>1</sup> The distant but influential interactions between Irish and Taiwanese workers are discussed later in this article, including an analysis of female aspirations in McGuinness' *The Factory Girls*.

rising unemployment in Ireland in the mid-twentieth century, although Ireland may also have benefited from transforming its economy from reliance on labour-intensive farming to high technology. Ireland's (pre-crash) title of 'Celtic Tiger' and Taiwan's title of 'Asian Little Dragon' was at the expense of socially marginalized workers. What is worth noticing is how, due to their under-representation in the public domain, lack of education, and the domination of transnational enterprises, workers in the two countries have been largely disadvantaged and their interests often ignored. Only a small number of playwrights, particularly those with a working-class background, have attempted to mark the vicissitudes of their lives with certain social agendas. This article will explore the similarities, differences, and contradictions in the theatrical representations of workers and the social and political concerns common to both countries. Interest will be focused most particularly on how contemporary Taiwanese playwrights create new dramaturges to illustrate new representations of exploited labourers and empower their once-suppressed voices. A post-colonial approach will thus be adopted to examine the deprivation that has persisted into this century's era of globalization.

Ireland and Taiwan are often treated as comparable subjects, in that geographically they are both small island countries on the fringe of a continent and liable to isolation. Economically, they do not possess substantial natural resources; politically, there is a history of tense relationships with their neighbor: Great Britain is Ireland's former colonizer, while China is an emerging world power which takes Taiwan for granted as part of its territory. The working classes, as the silent but essential foundation of the industrial development of both countries, are objects easily neglected and unnoticed. However, Irish and Taiwanese playwrights, some with blue-collar backgrounds and sensibilities towards the deprived, have dramatized their nations' dilemmas and concerns as a way that calls attention to social inequalities, unsettling national male-dominated social hierarchies. Moreover, many Taiwanese and Irish women labourers are still subjugated by ideologies which can hardly be resisted, Confucian or Catholic. Without other role models available, many women workers continue to be silent, submissive, and self-restrained in the context of male-centred families.

Despite liberation from colonialism, the working class may remain 're-colonized' or continuously subjugated by political antagonisms, literary censorship (against leftism), or denominational vendettas. Local corporations and transnational enterprises dominate, and working-class subjectivity remains vague and divided. Oppression may also come from within workers' social circles or unions. The dramas which this article will discuss illuminate, to differing degrees, the working class sub-culture and the prejudices which force the working classes into the social margins. In this way, they attempt to provide a voice for the deprived and to construct a recognizable identity with particular social agendas.

In the post-colonial perspective, theatres are perceived not only as places of entertainment, but also as centres for the exposition of different self-reflexive responses to national formation. Playwrights do not always endorse 'the pedagogical' discourse of nationalism, socialism, or religious ideologies, but, as proposed by Bhabha (1990: 293–322), instead manoeuvre the power of 'the performative' to critically examine political and cultural intricacies. In Bhabha's view, 'the performative', which applies repetitious, recursive strategies in nation formation, conflicts with 'the continuist, accumulative temporality of the

pedagogical', in that the former always 'intervenes in the sovereignty of the nation's self-generation by casting a shadow between the people as 'image' and its signification as a differentiating sign of Self, distinct from the Other of the Outside' (1990: 146–147). Acting as meta-novelists, some playwrights challenge conventional dramaturgies by presenting the fictional and the real in more ambiguous ways, questioning authority, omniscient authorship, and historical chronology. This article considers how dramatists jeopardize the pedagogical given, noting how socially marginalized characters interact with the politically and economically advantaged, and how dramatists produce recursive strategies. Issues of social hierarchy, gender, and politics are considered, as well as how some working-class dramas create a 'third space of enunciation', or a 'contradictory and ambivalent space', for the isolated and unprivileged (Bhabha 1994: 35, 37).<sup>2</sup> This article will attempt to reconstruct the 'third space of enunciation' of the working class particularly through the experimental tent theatre of Chung Chiao (鍾喬) in Taiwan.

The article focuses on several plays that address class issues with a distinctly political, but not necessarily socialist, agenda: Fred Ryan's *The Laying of the Foundations* (1902); Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* (1924); Brendan Behan's *The Big House* (1957); *Castrated Rooster* (1943), by Zhang Wen-Huan (張文環) and Lin Tuan-Qiu (林搏秋); and *The Wall* (1946), by Jian Guo-Xian (簡國賢) and Song Fei-Wo (宋非我).<sup>3</sup> The current article will also consider the Uhan Shii Theatre Group (歡喜扮劇團) and the Assignment Theatre Company (差事劇團), founded by Peng Ya-Ling (彭雅玲) and Chung Chiao (鍾喬) with the agenda of addressing the exploitation of labourers in the age of industrialization and globalization.<sup>4</sup>

The 'New Theatre' movement (台灣新劇運動) (1923–1936) was initiated by a group of Japanese-educated Taiwanese elites, some with leftist leanings. They aimed to create new plays with Taiwanese scenarios, using more refined styles.

<sup>2</sup> The 'third space of enunciation' is phrased by Bhabha as a mode of articulation, referring to a hybrid identity emerging from a contradictory and ambivalent space. This 'space' 'm[ight] open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based... on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity' (Bhabha 1994: 38). It aims to blur and test the boundaries and limitations of existing identities and culture.

<sup>3</sup> Jain was a novelist and playwright whose work was banned, and he disappeared during the 2-28 Massacre in Taiwan. Song was a cultural activist and radio broadcaster.

<sup>4</sup> Other plays which also deserve mention in this context include A. Patrick Wilson's *The Slough* (1914); Oliver St John Gogarty's *The Blight* (1917); Daniel Corkey's *The Labour Leader* (1919); James Plunkett's *The Risen People* (1958); John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy's *The Ballygombeen Bequest* (1972); and Jimmy Murphy's *Brothers of the Brush* (2001). The first three were premiered at the Abbey Theatre. *The Slough* was regarded as the first play at the Abbey Theatre that specifically addressed Irish urban poverty, and was written nine months after the Great Lockout of 1914, 'indict[ing] the political and economic structure of the city for its urban conditions and to arouse his Dublin audience's sympathy by exposing the plight of Dublin's starving poor' (Burch 2003: 66). The effectiveness of these dramas lay in the fact that the working-class struggle was brought to the Abbey's predominantly middle-class audiences. *The Wall*, by Jian Guo-Xian, portrayed the huge social gap between rich and poor and was produced before the 2-28 Massacre.

The pioneers were the Star Drama Society (星光演劇研究會), founded by Zhang Wei-Xian (張維賢) in 1924, and the Ding-xin Society (鼎新社), and they garnered a great deal of critical acclaim. The Pacific War brought this dramatic movement to a halt after 1943.<sup>5</sup> Most of the 'New Theatre' scripts are no longer extant, and are traceable only sparingly through secondary sources such as memoirs and newspapers.<sup>6</sup> Martial law from 1949 to 1983 further cut off Taiwanese intellectuals from the theatrical legacy of their 'New Theatre' (新劇) predecessors. Consequently, there are only a few plays which challenge sensitive labour issues. Zhang's *Castrated Rooster*, which was commissioned by the Hou-sheng Drama Society (厚生演劇研究會), was performed in 1943 and was probably the final play of the movement. It was banned by the Japanese for having characters refer to Taiwanese folklore. Nevertheless, Zhang's original short story is widely recognized as a masterpiece, and it is one of the very few 'New Theatre' stories which still returns to the stage from time to time, most recently in a 2009 adaption by the Tainaner Ensemble (台南人劇團) at the National Theatre in Taipei.<sup>7</sup> Jian's and Song's plays provide an in-depth understanding of the social contexts of the following period, during which the KMT government retreated to Taiwan, while the contemporary Taiwanese theatres of Peng and of Chung show how the critical agenda of the 'New Theatre' has been restored through ground-breaking dramaturgies.

In the case of Ireland, although early scripts are still likely to be available, the public suspicion of playwrights' political motives and denominational leanings would often dismay those who wanted to dramatize the truths they perceived. Riots following the premieres of W.B. Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* are notable examples from the early twentieth century, even though these playwrights contributed to the revival of Irish

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<sup>5</sup> The details of the 'New Theatre' movement can be seen in Chiu (1991). Jiang (1997) details all recorded performances up to 1997.

<sup>6</sup> For possible reasons for this loss, and for the history of theatrical productions, see, for example, Lu (1961) and also Yang (1994). In 1991, Chiu Kuen-Liang expended Lu's and Yang's studies to cover 'new dramas' after 1936 (Chiu 1991). These publications, however, are mostly sociological and historical, and do not consider textual sources which would help to reconstruct the neglected experiences of labourers. In contrast to other forms of literary endeavour, research into theatre during the Japanese ruling period is very limited.

When writing up this article, the author attempted to approach the families of a few playwrights for scripts; for instance, that of Chen Qian-Yun (陳乾雲), the renowned organizer of Xun-Feng Theatre Group (薰風劇團) active from the 1930s to 1940s. According to his family, the scripts of his theatre might have been either destroyed out of fear during the 'White Terror', or simply lost during several home moves. It is likely that the unavailability of scripts is due largely to political considerations of the period. Public awareness of the historical significance of those playscripts came too late. Chen himself no longer gives interviews. A record of Chen's contributions is provided in Chiu (2000: 227).

<sup>7</sup> Zhang's original short story was first published in Japanese and has had a number of translations. The original script for the 1943 premiere has been lost; the version used in this article was translated by Chen Ming-Tai (陳明台) and collected in Zhang (2002). According to Jiang, at least five amateur and professional theatre groups have worked on productions of *Castrated Rooster* in Taiwan since 1990.

culture and identity by highlighting working-class experience in rural and urban areas.

The Irish and Taiwanese dramas analysed below, though not quite intertextualized in terms of their plots and characters, will place them into a critical and international perspective. In other words, the intertextuality, if discernible, lies in the social, or sometimes socialistic, concerns that playwrights hold for the lower strata of the working class.

### **The Long Wall: War Between the Classes**

Irish and Taiwanese playwrights in the early twentieth century approached colonial bureaucracy and social corruption in a similarly Ibsenian style. Their shared approach testified not only to the effectiveness of modern dramaturgy in dissecting social issues, but also to their intention of making the theatre 'performative', in contrast to 'the pedagogy' of capitalistic and other prevalent mechanisms. One example is Fred Ryan's *The Laying of the Foundations*, which was staged by the Irish National Drama Company in 1902, and which dealt with the conditions of tenement dwellers. Ryan exposed how jerry-builders and landlords would make fortunes by evicting tenants and using the land for other purposes. In this play, the tenements are demolished to make way for an abattoir, thus showing how the underclass and poultry are alike strangled for the benefit of the rich. The evicted tenants and their families become homeless or, if lucky, find temporary shelter in an asylum. No working-class characters ever appear on stage, but their living conditions ('unfit for beasts') and impoverishment are constantly brought to the audience's attention through a socialist protagonist, Michael, who is also the son of a member of a building syndicate. The father and his contractors care only about maximizing profit through using 'the worst class of yellow brick and... the cheapest stuff' for a new asylum (Ryan 1970 [1902]: 30). The 'rights of labour' are for the most part absurd to the builders, who support Irish patriotism only when it can maintain their profit: '[patriotism] doesn't run to two shillings a week for an Irish workman. Patriotism, to the capitalist, is for use only at election time' (Ryan 1970 [1902]: 28, 32). The class distinctions appear to be almost inviolable, while Michael, the young inheritor of the syndicate and a city architect in charge of public security, is firmly opposed to his father's and the contractors' municipal jobbery. His stance as a socialist is typified by his refusal of a bribe and insistence on justice as the basis for building a new Ireland:

We are building a new city and we must build square and sure. In the city of the future, there must be none of the rottenness which you and your class made in the city of old; in the new city you will have no place... The city whose foundations are laid in Liberty and Truth... The city of the future demands it. It can be nothing else but war.

(Ryan 1970 [1902]: 36–37)

Ryan's play is socialist propaganda rather than a work of art, directing the audience to see current Irish troubles as a struggle between capitalists and proletarians, or between exploiters and the exploited, in contrast to taking a nationalist perspective. This socialist, or leftist, influence also gave intellectuals in

Taiwan a theoretical basis for how the oppressed could be liberated from their downtrodden condition. Some of the Taiwanese elite involved in the anti-Japanese movement in China greeted the 'New Theatre' with expectations that the movement would solidify ethnic identity and therefore strengthen cultural and nationalistic awareness; this was similar to how Irish Revivalism was received in Ireland, and it has been noted that many Taiwanese anti-imperialist advocates regarded Irish independence as a paradigm for Taiwanese cultural separation from Japan (Yang 1994: 50).<sup>8</sup>

Mid-twentieth century Taiwan, especially after the Japanese defeat, was marked by social corruption, inequality, price fluctuations, and political agitation, and there were the same kind of class exploitation as found in Ireland. Politically, most of the native Taiwanese elite were excluded from key government positions, and many were executed without trial during the 2-28 Massacre for suspected socialist leanings or for making anti-KMT criticisms. Disillusionment with the nationalistic KMT government led some playwrights to turn to Marxism to explore the social functions of literature. Their devotion to the exploited – who suffered hierarchal suppression – was in expectation of building up a new nation, not necessarily independent from mainland China, which would ensure proper social development. Jian Guo-Xian, Song Fei-Wo (宋非我),<sup>9</sup> Lu He-Ruo (呂赫若), and Lan Ming-Gu (藍明谷), amongst others, endowed their dramas with socialist concerns about the suppressed Other, or the proletariat, whose own voices were censored by the KMT government, and promoted a new Taiwanese literature.

Like Ryan, Jian was deeply concerned about the divisions that created an underclass, and *The Wall* has similar concerns to those of *The Laying of the Foundations*. Jian portrays two families, from very different social classes. These are the families of Chen Jin-Li (陳金利), an affluent and snobbish landlord and business magnate, and of Beggar Hsu (許乞食), who rents a small and squalid next-door room from Chen. The stage is divided by a high wall, on either side of which Hsu and Chen lead strikingly different lives. The play begins with Chen repetitively calculating his income, identifying him as a miser at a time when a large number of families are just above the starvation line. As a landlord, he is delighted that his house is 'awash with money'; he feels that 'business is no different from playing a cheap trick'; and he experiences gastric distress from overeating (Jian 2006 [1946]: 159).<sup>10</sup> By contrast, Hsu, his tenant, is ill and impoverished, barely able to afford the rent and making his son earn a living as a peddler. Class distinctions are shown even more clearly when Hsu's hungry son is forced to steal food from Chen's livestock, which are well-fed on human leftovers.

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<sup>8</sup> According to Yang, the example of Ireland was introduced by Liang Qi-Chao (梁啟超), during his visit to Taiwan in 1911. This was at a time when the Japanese colonial government was trying hard to erase Taiwanese culture and identity. Lin Xian-Tang (林獻堂), who hosted Liang at his estate in Tainan, was one of these. However, it seems likely that Liang meant 'independence' in the context of minimizing Japanese influences, rather than the political separation of Taiwan from China (Yang 1994: 50; Tsai *et al.* 1971: 285).

<sup>9</sup> Song Fei-Wo was the pseudonym of Song Xian-Zhang (宋獻章), and was used from the age of seventeen to express his anarchist ideals. In Song's own words, 'Fei-Wo' means 'not I for myself' ('非我之我') (cited in Lan 2006: 65).

<sup>10</sup> Translation mine.



Having been caught stealing, Hsu's family is evicted. Ironically, the eviction is carried out by a monk who is over-friendly with Chen and avaricious of secular wealth. Hsu, in despair, after poisoning his son and blind mother, commits suicide by banging his head against a wall. The play ends tragically with his cry of desperation:

'The wall, the wall! On the other side of you is rice hoarded as high as the house, with all the luxuries that only a paradise deserves, while you are only a hungry ghost on this side of the wall, scarce with food. I am so doomed in this hell that I cannot but end my life now... Oh, the wall is so thick and high that my little fists and thin arms cannot break it. Oh, the wall, the wall! Why cannot this wall be shattered? Oh, the wall, the wall!'

(Jian 2006 [1946]: 176)

The play, which realistically portrays the bitterness of the proletariat and contrasts the nouveau riche and the working class, enjoyed huge success and positive reviews. A reviewer from *Xin-Sheng Daily* (新生報) commented that, '*The Wall*, in order to present a contrast and dramatize the complex facets of society, is most critical of the unreasonable social hierarchy, and urges the necessity of social reform. This play, which has become popular through word of mouth, is worthy of recommendation' (1946, cited in Lan 2001: 47). Another reviewer, Lin Qian-Da (林千達), from *People's Directives* (人民導報) (1946), elaborated on how a realistic play such as *The Wall* could promote the solidarity of the underclass, and speak to the needs of reformists:

Arts enrich human spirituality, and human beings cannot be parted from community life and social reality. Thus, a drama that is both artistic and pragmatic must show social contradictions between the dominator and the dominated, and the struggle between the exploiters and the exploited. Only this kind of play can incur the empathy of the audience and maintain its modernity.

(cited in Lan 2001: 51)

However, *The Wall* was banned after four runs as 'unsuitable for the public' and for provoking class conflict (Lan 2006: 120).

Ryan's *The Laying of the Foundation* and Jian's *The Wall* share similar sympathies for those in the lowest social stratum, and provide a new perspective from which social injustice can be revealed to the audience. The stage, in this way, helps formulate a socialist discourse and possible solutions to relevant social complaints. In Ryan's drama, Michael, the saviour or hero, is celebrated for his courageous stand against corrupt builders, with a call for 'class war'. Intellectuals noted that *The Wall's* banning 'makes clearer the intention of the authorities concerned, for they expect citizens not to reveal the truth... If the government supposes that social satire is illegal, and is unwilling to overturn the ban, we could not feel more helpless' (1946, cited in Lan 2001: 56).

The following year, Jian was arrested as part of the 2-28 Massacre, and he was sentenced to death in 1954. Lu He-Ruo and Lan Ming-Gu also perished during this

period of 'White Terror', while Song Fei-Wo was exiled to China.<sup>11</sup> The KMT regime further suffocated theatrical development in Taiwan over the next four decades, until the late 1980s. Only dramas morally unproblematic and securely in line with the prevailing patriotism could be produced.

### The 'New Theatre' on Radio

The playwrights of the 'New Theatre' movement also wrote radio dramas and worked as broadcasters, thus highlighting the close relationship between radio entertainment programs and political argument.<sup>12</sup> Song Fei-Wo stated that 'through the wireless I simply wanted to indirectly bring the anti-Japanese campaign into effect' (cited in Lan 1993: 27), and in an interview with Lan Bo-Zhou (2006: 87), he recalled that 'my scripts were often based upon Jian Guo-Xian's drafts in Japanese... and I was the first one who criticized the government and its policies through drama.' The mobility of underground broadcasting, and of radios, allowed broadcasters to evade censorship and brought drama to those unable to attend the theatre. Radio dramas therefore reached their anticipated performative effects against the rulers and deserve serious study.<sup>13</sup>

Jian's *The Wall* was among the plays broadcast, and Song also produced a series of plays entitled *Tour of the God of the Land around Taiwan* (土地公遊台灣), which continued to be broadcast even after the defeat of Japan. These plays told the story of how Tu-Di-Gong (土地公), the God of the Land, a respected household deity, dealt with the social corruption prevailing in almost every corner of the island. Tu-Di-Gong and his wife, both in human form, are greatly displeased with the corruption of officials and the desperation of the people. As expected (by the audience), the deity became a man of justice, fearless of revenge from social superiors. The plays' popularity derived from the truth they manifested. Although no scripts are extant, Song is known to have structured his plays in a lively

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<sup>11</sup> Song returned to Taiwan in 1987 and left again in 1989. Reportedly, he died in a car accident in Quan-Zhou (泉州) in 1992.

<sup>12</sup> The first radio station in Taiwan was set up on 16 June 1925, to Nipponize (皇民化) Taiwanese people and to celebrate the thirty-year anniversary of Japanese rule in Taiwan. Broadcasting lasted for ten days, and resumed on 1 November 1928. Despite its Nipponizing purpose, the station began to air radio dramas in Taiwanese from October 1942. Although there are few records as to why the Japanese government started to air programs in the Taiwanese dialect, Lu (1961, cited in Chen 1999: 39) notes that many programs during this period were war-time propaganda, and it seems likely that the government wanted to counteract underground stations which they could not censor but which were popularizing anti-Japanese sentiment.

<sup>13</sup> Research into radio dramas as a source of entertainment during the Japanese period has been hindered by the attitude of the KMT rulers after Japan's defeat. The KMT had a Chinese-centred historiography, and Japan's contribution to Taiwan went unrecognized. Documents were not preserved, and Japanese publications were banned, in the words of governor Chen Yi (陳儀), in order 'to quickly eradicate the slave mentality of Taiwanese people and to construct a revolutionary mindset' (cited in Huang 1991: 103–104). The ban effectively forbade Taiwanese elites and creative writers from using Japanese, their most familiar language, to communicate with the public.



manner, 'calibrated with twists and humour' so as to 'allow the social problem to be dissected more precisely' (Lan 2001: 66). Song's mastery of the Japanese and Taiwanese languages also contributed to the popularity of his plays, which not only reflect the everyday situation of the underclass, but significantly deepen listeners' understanding of social problems and of their government. Jian and Song's collaboration continued until the outbreak of the 2-28 Massacre in 1947.

Similar to Song, Brendan Behan was also a prolific writer for both theatre and radio. One Behan radio drama, *The Big House*,<sup>14</sup> revolves around an Anglo-Irish landowner who resides in a big house, and his tenants, who can only entertain themselves in a pub ironically named 'The Big House'. The lives of all the characters are lived in or around 'big houses', while the rigid social class structure drastically differentiates them in terms of life quality. Mr Baldcock, the landlord, has strong prejudices against the Irish: 'If an ass is born in a stable, does that make it a horse?' (Behan 1978 [1957]: 362). In his eyes, nationalists such as Eamon de Valera, who are jeopardizing the given superiority of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy, are rebels to be condemned. As landlords become afraid of the growing Irish unrest and grow desperate to return to England, rent collection and evictions are entrusted to local police and to land agents, represented in this play by Mr Chuckles. Agents form a new class between landowners and tenants, and take all manner of advantage behind the landlords' backs. Their lands are sequestered by agents who, politically, always fall between two stools like 'a tea leaf', should there be a fortune to make (374), and they justify their illicitly-taken advantages with observations such as 'old Baldcock got the land off Cromwell's soldiers by using his load... the same as I'm using mine' (374). The greater suffering remains that of the proletariat, who own almost nothing but are subject to all the classes above them. Mr Chuckles is presented as deserving little sympathy from the audience.

Behan, Song, and Jian, amongst other Irish and Taiwanese playwrights, have contributed significantly to working-class historiography, challenging the official line that is usually imposed by the social elite and/or which favours the advantaged. Nevertheless, their shared sympathy for deprived labourers does not bar them from depicting their wickedness, but rather illuminates how oppression passes down unrelentingly from one social rung to another. In *The Wall*, the monk who works for the rich landlord as a messenger to Beggar Hsu, and those who refuse to give him spare change, are depicted metaphorically as the murderers of his family. Likewise, Behan, whose father had been a house-painter, stated about his community that: 'I think that the Irish that I know and the Irish who I like, who are ordinary blokes, taxi-drivers, house-painters, bookies' runners – I don't say honest workers... some of them are extremely dishonest workers – but they're the people I care about' (Behan 1982: 145). The Irish and Taiwanese playwrights under discussion seem always to present their homelands in a bitter way, although another remark by Behan can also apply to his Taiwanese comparators: 'the world is divided into two classes: invalids and nurses. I'm a nurse... I'm a nurse in the sense that in my plays and in my books I try to show the world to a certain extent

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<sup>14</sup> Behan's *The Big House* was first commissioned as a radio drama in 1957, and staged at the Pike Theatre Club on 6 May 1958. It can be said that the radio served as a more economical channel for playwrights as the budget for performances was limited, and that it possibly had further-reaching effects on a nationwide working-class audience.

what's the matter with it, why everybody is not happy' (Behan 1982: 142–143). Consequently, their characters are less the products of authorial imagination as drawn from real people with whom the playwrights once talked, drank, and celebrated life. However, they also form part of national memory, to be re-awakened, re-justified, re-built, and possibly refuted, but not easily erased.

### The Silence and Defiance of Women Labourers

The experiences of lower-class women also feature in Irish and Taiwanese drama; two examples are Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) and *Castrated Rooster* (1943), from a short story by Zhang Wen-Huan (張文環) and adapted for the stage by Lin Tuan-Qiu (林搏秋).

*Castrated Rooster*, as discussed above, is one of the most significant works performed during Japanese rule as part of Taiwan's 'New Theatre' movement. The play depicts the rise and fall of two traditional families in the 1920s, when a town is about to be urbanized. As a plan to acquire some valuable land, Yu-Li (月里), the daughter of a Chinese pharmacist, is forced to marry the only son of a local shipping magnate, A-Yong (阿勇). The marriage is arranged for Yu-Li's father to obtain the 'golden area' near a planned train station in the neighbourhood of the shipping company, and for A-Yong's father to procure the pharmacy as Yu-Li's dowry.

As a woman labourer in a patriarchal society, Yu-Li, although possessing much passion and intelligence, has no freedom to acquaint herself with other suitors, nor is she able to protest against the arranged marriage. The marriage becomes a deadly shackle, for she is expected to be a decent woman (良家婦女), unconditionally faithful to A-Yong so as not to disgrace her family. Unfairer still are the circumstances which soon follow; A-Yong's father dies very soon after Yu-Li's wedding, A-Yong becomes ill with malaria and is unable to work, and the government's urban planners decide not to build a railway in the anticipated 'golden area' after all. Facing huge debts and lacking options but unwilling to sell her soul, Yu-Li becomes a pig farmer at home while also working part-time in the city, and has to endure jeers and derision levelled at her by her community.

Urban planning is a game involving various interested parties and the government; its decisions do not necessarily benefit the working classes, but rather further disillusion them with government. Unable to resist all these subjugating forces, Yu-Li can only repress herself, comforting her husband as a proper wife: 'I am pleased that you don't want to give up. You see how tearful I am now...' (Zhang 2002 [1943]: 133). Lin's stage adaptation simplified Zhang's story to make Yu-Li less passionate and sexual, but his adaptation consolidates the sense of patriarchal morality and fits into the general expectation of an ideal wife, whose hardships are all for others but not for herself.<sup>15</sup> Regardless of Lin's

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<sup>15</sup> As noted in footnote 7, the original script has been lost. However, the stage version referred to in this article is believed to be closest to that of the premiere, although the ending is different from that of the original short story. In this stage version, Yu-Li is consistently faithful to her husband in her arranged marriage, while in the short story she has a love affair with an artist, with whom she later commits suicide. Yu-Li's striving for freedom is remarkable, and so are the curses against her.

intention, *Castrated Rooster* shows how women labourers in a land-based farming community are constantly under exploitation and emotionally oppressed. Her tears are thus signs of all the unpleasant feelings and experiences in this arranged marriage. She is no more than an object, under double deprivation of traditional patriarchy and Japanese rule. Both Yu-Li and A-Yong are the embodiments of the 'castrated rooster', which is not only physically incomplete but dysfunctional, and they both have to bear the capitalistic, colonial, and patriarchal violence that casts them from the social centre to the margin.

Yu-Li's story exemplifies how Taiwanese women were/are subject to the patriarchal teachings of Confucianism, whether cast as loyal assistant or sole breadwinner. Likewise, their counterparts in Ireland were/are also under the double influence of Catholicism and Victorian culture, often restricted to the domestic arena as 'the angel in the house'. Most women in Taiwan have to fulfil patriarchal obligations, behaving in accordance with the 'three rules and four virtues of obedience' (三從四德), as Confucian teachings prescribe. Self-esteem is bound up with devotion to sustaining the dignity of their fathers, husbands, male siblings, and relatives. The same expectation is also applicable to Catholic Irishwomen, who should by all means honour their husbands: 'if [women] want to find out about something, ask their husbands at home. It is a disgraceful thing for a woman to speak in church' (1 Corinthians 14: 35). Unmarried women should be as 'consecrated virgins', and restrict themselves from any intimacy with men. This highly conservative ethos in Taiwan and Ireland thus prevented female workers from being prominent in labour movements, and usually from leadership positions. Only in recent years in Taiwan have female activists outspoken on issues of employee rights, domestic violence, female sexuality, and the rights of sex workers received some degree of respect and media attention.

In O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*, Juno, the mother, is the only working member of her Catholic family, in contrast to her drunkard husband, Jack Boyle, who continually evades work by feigning illness. Her son, Johnny, has lost an arm in the Irish Civil War and is thus unable to work. Mary, her daughter, joins the lock-out, as the trade union expects. The family is economically deprived by the forces around them and is almost below the starvation line. Worse, a lawyer who falls in love with Mary and makes her pregnant later brings a false message that a distant deceased relative has left them a large amount of money as a bequest. Expecting, but not having received, the money, the Boyles purchase a few luxuries on a mortgage. The whole course of events turns out to be a disaster for the family, as the lawyer disappears after taking advantage of Mary, and the Boyles fail to pay back the loan and are evicted by the landlord. Jack spends the last of their money in a pub; Johnny is killed by the IRA for being unwilling to join its campaign after losing his arm. Mary is disowned by her father and has to find shelter, with her mother, in a relative's house. This play, overshadowed by the Civil War, criticizes the war's inhuman consequences and how those in power take advantage of the underclass and drive them further into destitution.

The play has received mixed reviews. According to Raymond Williams, 'O'Casey fails to dramatically engage with the "feelings of the fighters" or with the "need and the oppression" which drove them to take up arms... [The play became] the sound... of a long confusion and disintegration' (Williams 1978: 151). By contrast, Christopher Murray judged *Juno and the Paycock* to be a social drama in which

the traumatic birth of the nation is 'most passionately, most powerfully and most memorably dramatized', with 'a greater range of vivid and original characters, male and female' (2001: 88). The mixed reviews of the play suggest that what concerns the playwright is not the social privileges enjoyed by the well-to-do, but the tyranny that is imposed on the oppressed.

O'Casey grew up in a working-class Protestant family, and was at one time secretary to Jim Larkin, a socialist leader during the 1913 Dublin Lockout. He skilfully draws the attention of the audience to the problematic natures of Irish patriotism and the labour movement, through the eyes of ignored female working-class characters and across denominational divisions. In other words, what prompts Juno to find work is not just her husband's joblessness or idleness, but also the long-term political unrest that has resulted in a widespread economic depression. She can only take a few odd jobs on an irregular basis; as for the 'workers' principle', for which Mary is an enthusiast, she may not have realized that its anti-capitalistic agenda also involved an anti-colonial element, as most of the economic advantage from work went to the Anglo-Irish ascendancy and British investors. It is probable that she does not even think about the fact that the trade union, whose members are largely Catholic, does not consider gender equality. Her position in the union is doubly marginalized, so that its patriarchal nature remains secure. Her out-of-wedlock pregnancy further implies her failure in this power struggle, given that the runaway lawyer not only takes her virginity and leaves her holding the baby, but also shatters the family and leads to its dispossession. Johnny's lost arm, meanwhile, makes him a damaged man with no job prospects. Ironically, the union, which has been incapable of helping those who are physically well but hungry due to joblessness, cannot secure Johnny's working rights. That he is murdered by the IRA is thus no less different from being starved to death, as he has no chance either way. The Boyles, inarguably, are under the tight control of capitalism and can survive only with extreme difficulty.

Many of O'Casey's works were banned in Ireland, including *Within the Gates* (1933), *Windfalls* (1934), *I Knock at the Door* (1939), and *Pictures in the Hallway* (1942).<sup>16</sup> Comparing *Juno and the Paycock* with the Taiwanese dramas of Jian, Song, and Zhang discussed above, it can be seen that their plays were banned or led to controversy most probably because of their supposed Marxist standpoint in favour of the dispossessed. Further, the working-class characters whom these playwrights portray are either ill or disabled in some way; they are thus like the 'castrated rooster' which is to some extent dysfunctional, but they still manage to live on with some little dignity.

The role of working-class women as breadwinners, or as the central pillars of a family during a national crisis, means that their voices need to be taken into account in social and political analysis. The following section will therefore examine how contemporary Taiwanese and Irish playwrights delineate the ignored experiences of women of the underclass, in order to build up a working-class 'her-story', within a still male-led historiography.

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<sup>16</sup> Clerical antagonism against works by James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, and O'Casey prompted O'Casey to forbid all professional productions of his plays in Ireland until 1964.

### Social Minorities and Transnational exploitation

As discussed above, theatres can be political or 'performative' spaces where dramatists express criticisms or suggest areas for reform. Theatres can provide the audience with an escape to the unreal, or a chance of self-recognition through the stories being enacted on stage. Contemporary Irish and Taiwanese dramatists engaging with this approach pay particular attention to minorities in different corners of society, whether defined by ethnicity, geography, or economic situation.

*We Are Here* (我們在這裡),<sup>17</sup> was written and produced in 2000 by Peng Ya-ling (彭雅玲), director of the Uhan Shii Theatre Group (歡喜扮劇團).<sup>18</sup> The play is particularly concerned with the almost *triply* marginalized women of the Hakka diaspora. What is peculiar about this play is that it aims, as the dramatist specifies in the prologue, to unearth 'the ignored experiences of this diaspora around the world, while their familial ethics, musical conventions, language, culture and traditional industry, of which they used to be proud, are being buried consciously and unconsciously' (Peng 2002 [2000]: 237). The drama consists of four episodes, and features the lives of working-class Hakka women of differing ages and the hardships which they bear but which are largely ignored outside their community. The four episodes, though performed by different characters and consisting of disparate stories, are connected by the oldest actress carrying a blue cloth shoulder pack throughout the play. The working-class women of the Hakka diaspora are shown to be subjected to male domination throughout their lives: as infants, they can be 'exchanged' for daughters of other Hakka families as future 'daughters-in-law' (童養媳).<sup>19</sup> They are mostly deprived of personal choice, or even of an identity, long before they can be aware of having one. The price for choosing their own husband is heavy, as shown by the protagonist Jiao-Mei (蕉妹) in the fourth episode. She is disowned by her family for marrying a mainlander rather than a Hakka.<sup>20</sup> She is warned by her own mother that she will be 'chopped into pieces of pig food', and further admonished: 'do not ever come back home' (Peng 2002 [2000]: 274). Nevertheless, those of her siblings who marry Hakka men are

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<sup>17</sup> The play is available to watch online: <<http://catalog.digitalarchives.tw/dacs5/System/Exhibition/Detail.jsp?OID=2510203>>.

<sup>18</sup> The Uhan Shii Theatre Group was established by Peng in March 1995. The actors and actresses are mostly seniors, aged 65 years old or older. Their repertoire consists of plays based on the real experiences of the theatre members, who come from different ethnic groups in Taiwan; these include Minnan, Hakka, and mainland-born. The aim of the group is to introduce theatrical performance to both seniors and young people, attempting to bridge the generational gap and to present the overlooked historiography of the socially marginalized. The group has toured with the Age Exchange Theatre Trust in Europe and the USA, and been well received.

<sup>19</sup> This is probably done in order to maintain the purity of the Hakka diaspora, which is constantly on the move. Also, as soon as they are able, future daughters-in-law can provide labour for a working-class or farming family.

<sup>20</sup> 'Mainlander' here refers to immigrants from China who are unable to speak Hakka. Their immigration to Taiwan began in the seventeenth century, and huge numbers arrived with the KMT from 1949. Mainlanders claimed most of the political and economic advantages, and tense relationships ensued with local ethnic communities.



not necessarily guaranteed a good life, but can usually expect to be 'blamed, abused, without respect, spending their whole life with endless complaints' (Peng 2002 [2000]: 255). They can never be financially independent but must rely on the meagre incomes of their working-class husbands. The lack of money is a common cause of family dispute, and Hakka women are often forced to take odd jobs. Never receiving adequate attention within the patriarchal Hakka community, they often keep a blue cloth pack with them to take wherever they are exiled, and they have to come to terms with all manner of hardships.

The Hakka women in the separate episodes of the play do not know each other, although the audience can see that they share similar circumstances in that their happiness is determined by capitalism. Their individuality is usually undeveloped, and integrated within the male-led community, and they are triply marginalized by a multitude of political, economic, and cultural forces. As the Hakka community will never be a political majority in Taiwan, unlike the communities of mainlanders and Minnans, there is little political, economic, or social support they can claim. Lacking social assistance, many even choose to conceal their minority identity when outside their own community. Women in the Hakka community are thus disadvantaged and always remain lookers-on from the social margins. It is ironic, but also a factor evoking sympathy, that it is often only when these working-class Hakka women have retired, or after their children have started their own families, that can they start to reconstruct their own individualities. Peng's Uhan Shii Theatre Group therefore provides these senior amateur Hakka men and women with a chance to demonstrate themselves as artists.

While *We Are Here* provides a voice for largely-neglected working-class women on the social margin in Taiwan, Frank McGuinness's *The Factory Girls* (1982) might be its Irish counterpart. *The Factory Girls* realistically exemplifies how Irish female workers are subjugated by local patriarchal forces, and, distantly but influentially, by Taiwan's extensive export trade. Superficially, the Irish and Taiwanese working classes have never shared any reciprocal relationships, but Irish workers have been affected by Taiwan's cheap labour and low-priced exports; this is documented in *The Factory Girls*, as quoted at the beginning of this article. The low-paid Hakka women workers of Taiwan, along with other ethnic groups, have caused female factory workers in Ireland to lose their jobs. Underpaid and aware of the threat of being laid off, the women workers in *The Factory Girls* go on strike by locking themselves inside a factory, disregarding the condemnations of the parish priests and pressure from their own community. Although Taiwan is mentioned only in passing, it can be argued that McGuinness intended to show how workers, exploited by a socially privileged class, can clash across borders. The winners will never be the exploited but the entrepreneurs, who not only dominate their human resources but enjoy all the social and economic advantages that industry brings.

What makes *The Factory Girls* special amongst working-class dramas is not only that it revolves around issues concerning the working conditions of a small factory in Donegal, 'a jiggeldy-piggeldy bit at the top of the country' remote from Dublin, but that the factory is presented as an epitome of the power conflict between the classes during the early stages of globalization (McGuinness 1996 [1982]: 23). That is, a global market can be of little benefit to those who are always on the lowest social rung, and they continue to be exploited. In McGuinness's



observation, Irish entrepreneurs facing massive imports from abroad and possible bankruptcy are rarely concerned with the welfare of employees, but always with maintaining their pecuniary advantage: 'A unit of production that I need to see go out this factory quicker and in greater numbers if against all the odds I'm to make this hole of a place survive' (McGuinness 1996 [1982]: 37). To increase the factory's output of hand-made shirts and in the face of machine-made imports, the owner sacks older employees, cuts salaries, and, worst of all, disallows the workers from taking breaks. These female workers are therefore turned into cheap 'slaves' competing against machinery, and describe themselves as such (McGuinness 1996 [1982]: 33).

Ironically, the workers' union takes a condescending attitude towards these female labourers, who can get support from nowhere else and so resort to rioting. The union disapproves, and indeed helps the factory owner to turn down their petition, resulting in more tension between the oppressors and the female working class. The male representative from the union, Bonner, boldly condemns senior workers who do not accept 'voluntary redundancy' as 'very foolish' (McGuinness 1996 [1982]: 35). Lacking community support but under tremendous pressure, these women workers are greatly isolated, or even demonized for not behaving with proper respect towards God.

McGuinness, by depicting a rather small-scale Irish riot in a remote shirt factory which is close to being closed down due to imports from Taiwan, demonstrates that the exploitation of the working class is transnational. In both *The Factory Girls* and *We Are Here*, inadequately educated female workers are deprived of career choices but devote themselves to working primarily for their families. *We Are Here*, as noted above, shows how Hakka girls would be exchanged with other families to provide labour from a very young age. There is no independent female role model for them to aspire to in their community. In *The Factory Girls*, women have to support themselves by either 'tak[ing] the boat [to emigrate] or getting married' (McGuinness 1996 [1982]: 45). Those who are unable to get married and cannot afford a passage abroad have to find a factory job, as the Irish economy was so depressed at the time. They ask: 'where will [Irish men] get the work to support us?' (McGuinness 1996 [1982]: 45). Compared with the frequently abused and underrepresented Hakka women, the Irish female workers, though not physically injured in *The Factory Girls*, suffer a similar mental suffocation. However, whether or not they choose to riot against the given power structure, their action will hardly change the fact that they are born to be 'martyrs' on the social fringe, lacking choices. If working conditions remain unimproved and there is continuing and relentless deprivation of workers, 'martyr' looks set to remain a current term in the context of globalization. A transnational corporation will probably be more desperate to find cheap labour from across national boundaries, but this will leave class conflicts unresolved and lead to prolonged suffering.

Although the reference to Taiwan in *The Factory Girls* implies that Taiwan gained the upper hand in the 1980s through cheap exports, its success actually resulted in even worse conditions for Taiwanese workers during the following two decades. The enormous impact of transnational enterprises on the disadvantaged working class, although not fully developed in *The Factory Girls* and *We Are Here*, resonates in the productions of the Assignment Theatre Company (差事劇團), founded in 1996 by Chung Chiao (鍾喬). Unlike the dramas discussed above, most

of Chung's plays are in the style of magic realism, and are often produced in an open-air tent with an explicit concern for the most deprived of the working class in the age of globalization. The 'assignments' to which his tent theatre is committed, according to the playwright, include 'to accommodate those completely broken souls in the dominion of imperialism and capitalism; the tent is thus a performative arena in which these souls can be conjured up through imaginative power struggle', and so counteract the conventional, capitalistic manner of performance (Chung 2003: ix). Specifically, most of Chung's characters have been injured or poisoned during the process of manufacture, or are characters on the social margin whose lives have been directly or indirectly subject to the actions of gigantic native and foreign corporations.

One example is *The Platform of Memory* (記憶的月台) (2000). A-Gen (阿根) is a victim of dioxin pollution to which he has long been exposed in a hardware factory; Little Red (小紅) and Shen Hui (沈惠) suffer from radiation poisoning emitted by a nuclear power station. In *The Hotel at Sea* (海上旅館) (2001), a group of nameless, illegally-hired Chinese fishermen work night after night in fishing vessels that offer little comfort. *The Darkness of Tide* (潮暗) (2004) deals with a larger number of people at the very bottom of the society, and their much-ignored voices; for instance, foreign brides living with domestic violence, illegal immigrants who are drowned; a dying veteran who has given most of his life to fighting in the civil war but received little in return; homeless and aboriginal people who are desperate for social recognition. These socially under-represented characters and the open-air venues substantiate a distinctive collective discourse and aesthetic, providing 'an alternative to the highly stylized and commercialized mainstream theatres' (Chung 1999: 188).

By illustrating the misery of the socially marginalized, Chung's dramas challenge not only imperialistic capitalism but also social bureaucracy and stereotypes of blue-collar workers. In this way, he reveals the distressing facts of gender inequality and the unequal distribution of social welfare. The playwright's magic realism allows the traditionally less-attended working class to express freely their experiences and dreams in a convention that is more creative than naturalistic dramas. On the other hand, the visualization of neglected communities serves as a healing practice through which mentally scarred individuals may vent their resentments and rebuild their identities, although the harm caused is unlikely to be lessened so long as the tide of globalization keeps coming in. In terms of theatrics, Chung's magic realism is a significant breakthrough in the dramatization of social and humanitarian issues. That is, his plays create a platform on which the socially suppressed can visualize their dreams, unconstrained by traditional realism. Chung's series of tent dramas thus portrays exactly working conditions endured under the cloak of economic success. Notably, his theatre does not have a regular audience like other commercial theatre companies, but his non-mainstream, tent theatre allows him to conduct many theatrical experiments in characterization, theme, and setting. His theatre is, in the post-colonial sense, more 'performative' and conceptually radical, and in practice unerringly resists the transnational

exploitation which subjugates lower-skilled labourers during the process of globalization.<sup>21</sup>

## Conclusion

The story of Taiwanese dramas on labour issues as discussed in this article contains a hiatus between the 1940s and the 2000s. This is because of unrelenting censorship between 1949 and 1987 which left Taiwanese theatres and other media with few innovative dramas to produce, and which prescribed either patriotic and anti-communist or apolitical works. Critical plays on sensitive labour issues and social corruption like Jian's *The Wall* are scarce, as they tended to irritate the KMT. Most media 'consciously or unconsciously served themselves as a tool of propaganda for the ruling regime, and promoted the expected loyalism to the KMT/state' (Chen 1999: 76); KMT censorship resulted in self-censorship.

Irish artists also had to deal with The Censorship of Publications Bill, passed in 1928 and only gradually relaxed in the late 1970s. This censorship was not against alleged communist influences, as was the case in Taiwan, but rather had a religious mission of forbidding obscenity and information about abortion. This official censorship brought about a 'spiritual emptiness' which disabled Irish artists from producing new dramas as remarkable as those of their predecessors (Merriman 2003: 148). Once censored, playwrights in Ireland and Taiwan could only look inwards for insular and safe topics, rather than trying experimental theatrics. However, this in turn gave impulse to the playwrights of the next generation to produce works which either express critical views or are experimental. Taiwanese plays by Peng and Chung, for instance, are celebrated for their unconventional innovation and theatrical significance. It is worth noting that Chung and Peng, like their predecessors, Jian, Song, and Lu, and a contemporary critic, Lan, are all of Hakka origin. This does not mean that there are few playwrights of other ethnic origin prominent in Taiwan, but Hakka playwrights, being an ethnic minority, seem to know how to create plausible works from their usually harsh and exploitative everyday experiences. Ireland's Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre, established in 1997, can be viewed as a counterpart of Chung's experimental theatre, with a new dramaturgy that 'fuses the visual immediacy of dance with the narrative strength of theatre' (Fabulous Beast 2010). One key difference between Chung's theatre and Fabulous Beast is that the latter has made a successful transition from local experimental group to globally-renowned commercial project, while their productions are no less artistic and creative.

Having examined different styles in representing labour issues on Irish and Taiwanese stages, it can be seen that playwrights in both countries have endeavoured to give voice to the politically and economically marginalized. They

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<sup>21</sup> Another notable play is *The Story of Nei-Wan* (內灣線的故事, 1994), written and directed by Chiu Juan-Juan (邱娟娟), founder of the Corn Field Theatre (玉米田實驗劇場). This retrospective play documents the deprived life of miners during the period in which Taiwan was in a transition from farming to industrialization. Miners transferred to cement plants, which offered the most benefits but took little responsibility for deaths or injuries. These miners contributed to the globalization of Taiwan's industries, but their lack of education and voice have meant that their contribution has not been well documented.

take either a journalistic approach to the working class, or audaciously try a mixture of experimental dramaturgies: from naturalism to magic realism, framed stage to open air, professional playwriting to amateur story-telling, and narrative drama to dance theatre. Ireland and Taiwan, culturally and politically, have both experienced a de-colonial process; many nativists and intellectuals have strived to raise public awareness of lost tradition by reviving local languages or ethnic identities. Working-class dramas should thus be given more recognition within discussion of nation-formation in Taiwan. Significantly, although Jian, Song, and Zhang always delineated the social problems of their times through an idealized, socialist lens, their plays were mostly produced in Taiwanese, a language most familiar to their less educated native audience, rather than in Japanese, a foreign tongue which can easily reveal a self-endorsing elitism.

The Irish playwrights discussed in this article, from Fred Ryan to Frank McGuinness, do not appear to have considered language issues, and their work is in English rather than Gaelic. Although the public prevalence of English in Ireland is due partly to a failure of cultural nationalism in the early twentieth century, the use of English for theatrical performances does not bar Irish playwrights from critiquing local or transnational enterprises which subjugate personal life or the State. Even before the crash, it was suspected that globalization, once so celebrated in Ireland, had not ensured the stability of the Celtic Tiger, but rather triggered an increasing number of redundant, low-skilled (migrant) workers. Irish labourers, both local and migrant, are still heavily exploited in the global market. In both locations, workers have become similarly aware of the imperative need for counteracting the exploitation of cheap labour. Theatrical performances may not bring immediate relief to the unemployed or the exploited, but the collaboration of playwrights across national borders, in different forms, can help create a securer space of enunciation, as Bhabha suggests, in which labourers can identify with each other and their pending challenges. They may be able to forge an alliance, rather than, as McGuinness prophesies in *The Factory Girls*, remaining as foes or competitors in a global sweat factory. The working classes of Ireland and Taiwan, co-acting more cohesively and amplifying their voices in this age of globalization, might more effectively resist (in)visible powers wishing to exploit them. The power they accumulate will only be louder through words on stage, and it will set an inspiring example for those still suffering in the Third World.

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