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“OUR TOWN” IS IN TAIWAN - AN INTERCULTURAL
ANALYSIS OF “ANPING, OUR TOWN” BY
TAINANER ENSEMBLE

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Synopsis:

This Study will use the “hourglass” intercultural theory by Patrice Pavis as the main methodological base to analyze “Anping, Our Town” by Tainaner Ensemble, in order to better understand how the group treat the source culture from a foreign play like “Our Town”, by either keep the original references, or replace, integrate them with elements from the group’s own target culture, to create a play that may be more understandable and appreciated by the local audiences.

Our Town is in Taiwan – an Intercultural Analysis of Anping, Our Town by Tainaner Ensemble

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Abstract

Written in 1938, the renowned three-act play ‘Our Town’ by American playwright Thornton Wilder has been adapted in the US and around the world in different media, and by various performance groups, this is no exception in Taiwan. The source material was adapted and localized as the original play ‘Anping, Our Town’ in 2013. Tainaner Ensemble, a performance group based in Tainan, Taiwan, retold the story of a remote American town from the perspective of Taiwanese locals. They integrated the history and experiences of local people, and produced a completely new intercultural play. This study will employ the hourglass intercultural theory by Patrice Pavis as the main methodological base to analyze ‘Anping, Our Town’ by Tainaner Ensemble. It aims to examine how the group interprets the source culture of a foreign play like Our Town, by either keeping original references, or replacing them with elements from the group’s own target culture, to create a play that may be more relatable and appreciated by the local audiences.

Keywords: ‘Our Town’, Intercultural Theory, Intercultural Theater, Patrice Pavis, Tainaner Ensemble, ‘Anping, Our Town’

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In 1938, Thornton Wilder's now famous play had its stage debut at Princeton, New Jersey, and moved to the Henry Miller Theatre in New York, where it gained lots of attention and acclaim from audiences and critics. Brooks Atkinson, a New York Times reviewer of the period, called the play "*one of the finest achievements of the current stage.*" (Bloom, 2009) Pulitzer Prize winner Willa Cather also sent a letter to Wilder stating that the play was "*the loveliest thing that has been produced in this country in a long, long time.*" (Woodress, 1987) The acclaimed play won Wilder a Pulitzer Prize in Drama in the same year. A series of adaptations began to emerge in different forms and on various media. Several examples include a film of the same name directed by Sam Wood in 1940, a production in which Wilder himself was involved, but was ultimately not satisfied with. There was also a radio drama adaptation at the Lux Radio Theater in the same year, two TV series in 1955 and 1977, a musical adaptation in 1987, several recent TV documentaries and mini-series, a ballet in 1994, and an opera in 2010. This is in addition to the countless staged and studio productions in the US and around the world. The popularity of the play can be summarized by Gale's *Study Guide for Thornton Wilder's Our Town*.

It is quite possible that on almost any given day of the year, somewhere in the world, Our Town is being performed by either a professional company or an amateur troupe of actors. (Gale, Cengage Learning, 2015)

The three act play uses three times from a daily cycle – morning, noon, and night to depict three important stages of the human life cycle – birth, marriage, and death. The play starts in the morning in a small town named Glover's Corner, and ends at eleven o'clock in the evening in the same town. Many elements of the play were considered unconventional – or even revolutionary at the time in American theater. First notable characteristic was the lack of scenery, which did not follow the contemporary realist convention. The set was simple – only chairs and tables. No other props were involved so the audience had to recognize item interactions and events through the dialogue and the acting alone. The stage design may have been inspired by the influence of Far Eastern theatre. (Saint-Denis, 2008) The play was not performed in a traditional manner either. The events were not performed in a chronological order. The role of Stage Manager also contributed to the alienation effect. The stage manager jumps and reverses time at will, and his constant fourth-wall breaking with the audience and in the meta-drama all make the viewers clearly aware that they are watching a play. However, the play has lots of universal qualities. The lack of sceneries makes it tough to relate the play to a specific location, so it can happen in anyone's town. The plot does not have extraordinary or heroic conflicts and struggles.

It depicts the events in an ordinary life of two families in a small American town such as birth, dining, daily routines, house work, town meetings, weddings, and funerals. It explores the inner reflection of these events, and can apply to anyone.

Despite the universal qualities of the play it still leaves much room for retooling. Other than experimental student works, professional Taiwanese troupes did not make many attempts to adapt the play. There were only two notable examples. The Godot Theatre Company did the first ever professional theater adaptation of the play in Taiwan in 1989 and re-titled it *Our Town in Tamsui*, which relocated the setting from a small American New England town to the coastal northern Taiwanese town of Tamsui, and set in the 1960s. Over the last 25 years, this play became part of the regular repertoire of the Godot Theatre Company. The production has been reprised seven times, and many famous Taiwanese actors and entertainers have taken part in the performances. Another instance was produced by the Tainaner Ensemble in 2013, titled *Anping, Our Town*. This time the location was moved to a southwestern coastal fishing town called Anping. Although both productions incorporate Taiwanese elements into the source material, *Anping, Our Town* strongly emphasizes regional (Tainanese) qualities in contrast to the counterpart produced by Godot Theatre Company, which presents a more homogeneous Taiwanese experience.

In the remainder of this paper, the hourglass intercultural theory proposed by Patrice Pavis will be used as the foundation to analyze how the Tainaner Ensemble handled their cross culture reinterpretation of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* in Taiwanese, especially with a Tainanese context. The first section will give an introduction to the methodology used in this paper; the second section briefly describes the historic background of Tainaner Ensemble and the play - *Anping, Our Town*; the third section will look into the adaptation work in terms of setting, character, plot and other theatrical elements to analyze the tactical choices and modifications made by Tainaner Ensemble to fulfill their interpretation of *Our Town*, while the final chapter concludes the paper.

1. Method

Patrice Pavis first proposed his hourglass model in his 1991 work: *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*; this model is a semiological-based concept which works like a multi-layered filter. We can imagine that a source (original) culture or play as sand. When it goes through a series of intercultural process to become the final product for target culture, it is similar to sand falling through the narrow neck of an hourglass. The model can help us exam what is preserved from the source culture, and what is

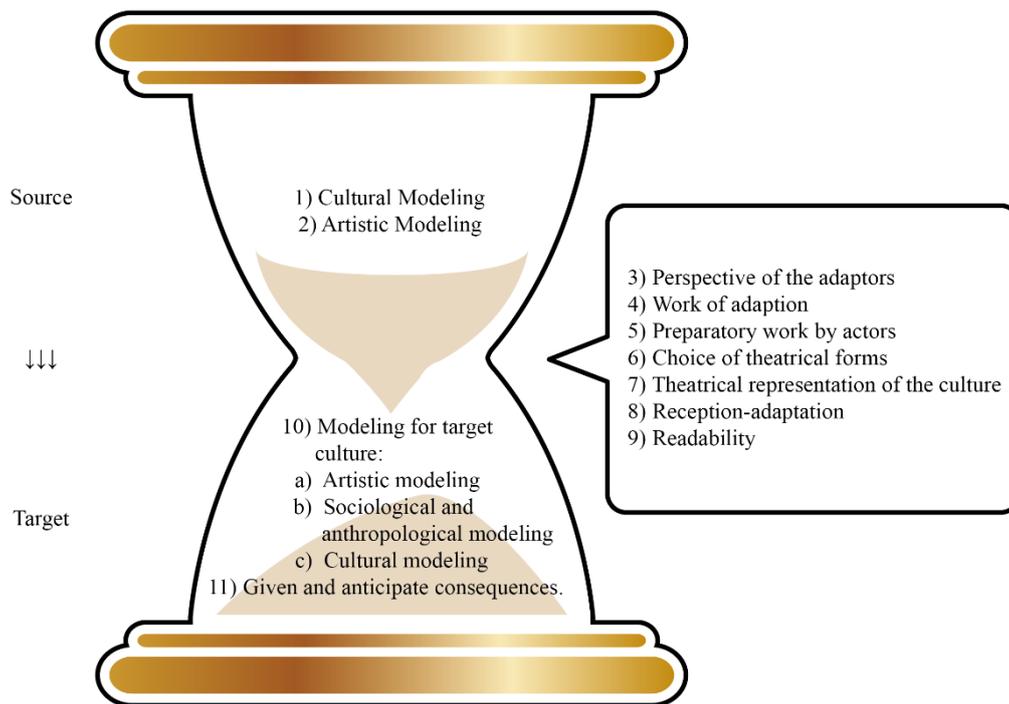
altered or omitted by the target culture through each layer.

In order for an intercultural adaptation to be considered complete, Pavis believes the adaptors need to first understand the cultural background from the source play and grasp its themes and context. He suggests analysis of the basic cultural and artistic modeling of the source during the receiving stage of an adaptation. The cultural and artistic modeling of the source culture can be interpreted differently based on the perspective of the adaptors. The perspective of an adaptor is determined by his or her cultural and social background, and knowledge towards the source culture. Once in the theater, this perspective will help determine the preparatory work by actors, the choice of theatrical forms, and the theatrical representation of the culture.

The adaptors work as translators for intercultural plays. They are receivers because they receive and familiarize themselves with the source material. At the same time they are adaptors who aid in comprehension of something foreign for their target audience. The readability of the source material also determines how the modification, interpretation, and presentation of the source material within the target culture context will look like. Comparing the source models and the target models can reveal the changes made to fit the target culture. Finally, no play can escape the fate of critics. Once the adapted work is out of the hands of receptor-adaptor, it is up to the spectators to finally decide the artistic and cultural values of a final product.

The process from source culture to target culture goes through eleven phases, or filters. The order of each filter can sometimes be rearranged, depending on the preference, experience, and purpose of the adaptors. Some filters may be purposefully or unintentionally adjusted to be more stringent than others. Pavis argued that, if a source culture is strong, it will eventually go through all the filters and reach the target culture, no matter how much time it may take. The eleven filters are in figure 1. Filter 1 and 2 are from the source culture, and filter 3 to filter 9 are adaptors work to translate source culture to target culture. Filter 10s are the aspects presented in the target culture while filter 11 is the spectators reaction and interpretation to the target culture.

Figure 1 List of Filters in Pavis' Hourglass Theory



The central concept of Pavis's hourglass model is to identify the source culture and target culture. In order for the sand to drip through the hourglass, the inter-culture transition has to happen in a linear fashion from one side to another, namely the source to the target. The process can be reversed freely, in which case the source would become target and vice versa, and each filter layer can be arranged depending on the preference of the adaptors. This one-way hierarchy became the cause of many debates and criticisms. Some critics expressed that Pavis's theory was too western-centric. Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert are among the method's critics. They argue that the hourglass model "*cannot account for alternative and more collaborative forms of intercultural exchange*" (Lo & Gilbert, 2002) What Lo and Gilbert proposed was a new model that allows extensive exchange between the source and target cultures to fix the one-sided relationship proposed by Pavis's hourglass model. However, both of these models were designed to explore the details of cultural modeling, artistic modeling, adaptors, actors, and theatrical forms. Lo and Gilbert also admitted that, even with its flaws, the hourglass model is still a more systematic model for dealing with intercultural exchange throughout the academic world, and their model was built on the framework provided by Pavis. While it fixed some problems present in Pavis' model, it did not go beyond his original concept. (Lo & Gilbert, 2002)

The hourglass model does apply well to Tainaner's many adaptations, the interactions between the source (For example, Wilder's *Our Town* and other famous western plays) and Tainaner's productions are nearly one-way, which is evident even in the name of the performance series entitled *The Taiwanese Language Translation and Performance Project for Western Classical Plays* (西方經典台語翻譯演出計畫). Since there was no collaboration between Tainaner and international theatres during these productions, and coproduction with the deceased authors of these classical plays was impossible, there was no simultaneous intercultural exchange between the western source and the Taiwanese target. The target culture carried out a one-way absorption, translation, interpretation, reflection process, then the adaptation was presented to Taiwanese spectators as a one-way show and receives.

2. Tainaner Ensemble and the Play

2.1 History of Tainaner Ensemble

Tainaner Ensemble was established in June 1987 in Tainan City under the name of Hwa Deng Theatre Troupe, based in Hwa Deng Art Center. The founding members were a group of young men who were interested in theatre arts. The troupe's director Li Wei-Mu (李維睦) was among one of them. They were encouraged by Fr. Donald Glover, M.M., director of the Art Center to form a performance group, and the theatre troupe was born. At the time, most contemporary Taiwanese theater groups were based in larger cities such as Taipei, Hwa Deng Theatre Troupe claimed to be the first contemporary theater group in Tainan ever since the Republic of China government established its rule on the island of Taiwan in 1945. Hwa Deng's performances were usually of original works. It is clear that at this period, the group already had a strong awareness of local cultures, evident from the content of several plays they produced. A performance named *Fong Jian Chun Ciou* (封劍春秋) tells the story of a local Taiwanese hand puppet master, another play called *Cing Chun Ciou Meng* (青春球夢) depicts the baseball craze of Taiwan at the time, and the play *Fong Huang Hua Kai Le* (鳳凰花開了) retells contemporary Taiwanese history.

Just like many theater groups that started out in non-conventional art spaces, the space in Hwa Deng Art Center soon became too limited for rehearsal. Since the art center is also a public space, it became difficult to host other types of artistic events when Hwa Deng Theater Troupe occupied most of the resources. In November 1996, the troupe decided to move out and procure a new space. In June 1997, the troupe renamed their group name to "Tainaner Ensemble" in celebration of their 10th anniversary. This also serves as clarification to the public who might otherwise mistakenly associate the independent ensemble as part of the Hwa Deng organization.

Under the supervision of Lu Bo-Shen (呂柏伸), the artistic director of Tainaner who joined in 2001, the ensemble now had several missions and goals.

First, it would introduce famous plays from other countries, and reinterpret and localize the play to make them more acceptable to local audiences. For example, adapting Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* for local audiences under the title *Anping, Our Town*.

Second, Tainaner seeks to promote theater education and cultivate local young artists. They used a Theatre-in-Education approach in their workshops to promote an exposure of theatre to general attendees. They also host an annual young people's theater camp to give any local students who are interested in drama to a chance to learn, produce, and perform a play of their own. Tainaner hosted an exchange program in 1999 where they invited Greenwich and Lewisham's Young People's Theatre from the UK to Tainan. The general concepts and direction of the annual young people's theater camp were solidified during that time. The inaugural session began a year after, and has continued operating since.

In their adapted works, Tainaner Ensemble took a similar approach to Hwa Deng, but differed in the material they used, and the scale of "local" culture. Tainaner Ensemble produced and localized many foreign plays, some of the examples include *Antigone* (2001) by Sophocles, *Macbeth* (2003), *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (2009), and *Hamlet* (2014) by William Shakespeare, *Endgame* (2004) by Samuel Beckett, *Lysistrata* (2006) by Aristophanes, and *Seagull* (2012) by Anton Chekhov. They also performed contemporary western plays such as *Die arabische Nacht* (2015) by Roland Schimmelpfennig and Taiwanese classical plays such as *Castrated Chicken* (2008) by Lin Tuan-Chiu (林擲秋). One of the signature traits of the adapted works performed by Tainaner is the extensive use of Taiwanese Hokkien language. Although Taiwanese Hokkien is a widely spoken language, especially in the southern part of the island amongst the elderly, it is not common practice for Taiwan's contemporary theater to use it as the predominant language in their plays. The exception is when the production has some association with traditional Taiwanese theater forms such as Taiwanese opera. Another characteristic of Tainaner's productions is that they're often performed in non-conventional performance spaces; many venues are famous landmarks of Tainan. One most prominent example was the production of *Lysistrata* (2006), which was not performed on a typical stage, but in the open field in a Qin dynasty cannon fort called Eternal Golden Fort. This decision solidifies the link with the locals and amplifies the themes of war and anti-war in the play. These unique

artistic decisions from Tainaner indicate a shift in focus of their cultural focus from Taiwan as a whole, to the city of Tainan itself. While both are considered localized culture, the latter can be more specific with its experiences, which is more relatable to local audiences.

A switch in focus does not imply that Tainaner abandoned more general audiences, they also produced an extensive collection of original plays such as *K24* (2005), *Q&A* (2010), *Mulan* (2009), *Re/turn* (2011), and *Solo Date* (2016), most of these have been performed throughout the country multiple times, and gained them many loyal followers and new fans. However, as the troupe gained popularity and became more influential, Li Wei-Mu became skeptical about the troupe's direction, which he stated ironically, "*there are only three troupe members who are actually from Tainan, we are not that Tainanese after all.*" (Siao, 2011) Since most of Tainaner's audiences reside in larger cities, in an interview from 2011, Li expressed his worry, "*If the troupe had become a troupe for Taipei, what about Tainan? Is there any difference between us and other Taipei-based troupes now?*" (Siao, 2011) *Anping, Our Town*, is perhaps his answer to this question.

2.2 *Anping, Our Town*

Anping, Our Town was the fall production of the Tainaner Ensemble for the year of 2013 as part of the *Taiwanese Language Translation and Performance Project for Western Classical Plays*. It was directed by Liao Ruo-Han (廖若涵), while Xu Zheng-Ping (許正平) was responsible for reimagining the script in collaboration with the Tainaner Ensemble, and Lu Bo-Shen took the position of producer and artistic director. The play was first performed on October 4, 2013 in the performance hall at the Tainan Cultural Center in Tainan city. A total of five performances were carried out that year, with two in Tainan and three in Taipei (at Hsin Wu T'ai).

Anping, Our Town set its location in Anping, a seaside district in Tainan city. The area was separated from rest of the city by Tainan Canal, and was the capital of Taiwan under the rule of Dutch colonists and Koxinga in the seventeenth century. The play set its time period in the 1970s and 1980s – an unsettling period when martial law was still enforced in Taiwan, and the economic bubble had just started to burst. The Gibbs and Webb families in the original play were localized as the Islander family of Lin³ and Mainlander family of Ding⁴. The characters from the Lin family usually speak in

³ "Islanders" usually referred to people who immigrated to Taiwan before the rule of Chinese nationalist government in 1945.

⁴ "Mainlanders" referred to people who immigrated to Taiwan with the Chinese nationalist government, usually in or after 1945.

Taiwanese Hokkien, the Ding family members speak exclusively in Mandarin. Similar to the source material, *Anping, Our Town* is divided into three acts. The first act is “The Day of Anping”, which shows a regular day in Anping town from morning to late night. The second act is “The Love of Anping”, which shows the wedding of the second generation of the Lin and Ding families, and explores love, marriage, and family life. The final act is “The Dusk of Anping”, in which the Stage Manager turns back time for Ding Pei-Pei, the deceased female protagonist, to allow her to relive her childhood, and say a proper farewell to her life.

Exposition

The play starts with all actors sitting in a row on stage facing the audience while the stage manager Tsai, Pao-Chang(蔡柏璋) introduces the actors by their real names and provides exposition of the play. He sets the location in Anping and winds time back to May 7, 1975, then he dons his headset and announces the title for the first act - The day of Anping. The actors vocally imitate ambient sounds of a typical Anping morning. An old photo of Anping is projected on the backdrop scenery board. This introductory scene lasts about two minutes.

Act I, The day of Anping

The Stage Manager describes the life on a street in Anping in 1975 as the actors become the characters described by the Stage Manager, the scene runs about seven minutes. The Stage Manager then calls for a break and summons the actors to gather on stage. He gives them instructions on performing the next scene, and defines designated areas on the stage as the Lin and the Ding household. The Stage Manager then reequips his headset, and the actors sit back in their row in preparation to perform their roles while the Stage Manager narrates the story. The main characters are introduced and start to move, the Lin family at stage right, and the Ding family at stage left (members from either families can enter the stage from either side). The lives of the two families occur simultaneously, while other actors and the Stage Manager throw-in occasional sound effects or expositions. The timeline starts from the birth of Ding Pei-Pei(丁沛沛) and Ding Long Long(丁龍龍), and end when they reach high school. The scenes in this act cover breakfast with the two families, first day of school for the four children, interaction between the matriarchs of the two families, Mr. Ding’s job (and his interrogation), Li Wei-Mu’s interview, interactions between Ding Pei-Pei and Lin Da-Hai (林大海), and an evening scene with both families. This act lasts about seventy minutes.

Act II, The Love of Anping

The Stage Manager announces the title of this act and sets the time to summer of 1978. The scene starts out as another typical Anping morning. The adult Lin Da-Hai rushes over to his neighbor's house to discuss his marriage to Ding Pei-Pei with Mr. Ding, and to ask for advice. Time rewinds several years to explore the start of Da-Hai and Pei-Pei's relationship. After the Stage Manager calls another short break, time jumps to the wedding scene of Da-Hai and Pei-Pei. This act lasts about forty minutes.

Act III, The Dusk of Anping

The Stage Manager opens the scene with a gravely tone, and recounts how each character met their death as each actor enters to sit on the chairs. Pei-Pei appears after sometime and joins the dead; she comments on her life while Da-Hai can be seen upstage mourning his deceased lover in the rain. A moment later, Pei-Pei expresses her desire to go back in time. The Stage Manager interjects, and gives her the right to choose a date to revisit. She chooses her twelfth birthday on February 11, 1972, and is given a whole day to relive her past life. However, the day went by very fast, and she never had the chance to fully fulfil any of her desires. Under the starry sky, Pei-Pei returns to the world of the dead, and the Stage Manager gives his closing remarks to end the scene. This act lasts about thirty-five minutes.

The play received a generally positive review from audience and critics. Wu Cheng-Han (吳政翰), a drama critic praised the performance as being “*One of the best classical adaptation of Our Town, be it nationally or internationally.*” (Tainaner Ensemble Official Facebook Page, 2016) Chen Fang (陳芳), a professor of Chinese from the National Taiwan Normal University commented that the play was as “*As simplistic as a poem, as free as water. It's like reality and illusion coexist, very entertaining, yet makes us reflect. It's a shame for anyone who missed it.*” (Tainaner Ensemble Official Facebook Page, 2016) The success of the first run encouraged Tainaner Ensemble to reprise the production in 2016, with three performances in Tamsui, New Taipei City at the Cloud Gate Theater, and two performances each in both Tainan and Kaohsiung.

3. The Intercultural Adaptation Tactics in Anping, Our Town

This section will try to identify the intercultural adaptation tactics used by the production team of *Anping, Our Town*. Some elements of the hourglass model are not immediately obvious in the adapted work, so this paper will try to present evidence for the existence of the individual filters, and explore the adaptations made to fit the Taiwanese (Tainanese) context.

3.1 Adaptors' Point of View

Even though the opening of the play suggests the location depicted in *Our Town* is Grover's Corners, New Hampshire, it is clear that Wilder's intention for this play was not to invoke nostalgic and sentimental emotions about 20th century rural life in New England, neither was his goal to entertain the audience for entertainment sake. Wilder made sure the audience was somewhat alienated from the setting, so they could focus more of their attention on the psychological and reflective elements of the play. The simple scenery and the fourth-wall breaking from the Stage Manager were all devices designed to create the effect of alienation. He even explained in the preface of *Three Plays* (1957) the reason he opposed decisions by Jed Harris, his first producer-director, of making the play more entertaining.

Our Town is not offered as a picture of life in a New Hampshire village; or as a speculation about the conditions of life after death... It is an attempt to find a value above all price for the smallest events in our daily life...(Wilder, 1957)

Xu Zheng-Ping also commented when being asked about his revisions.

After I reached my thirties, I started to discover something hidden in the play which I didn't realize in my twenties when I first approached it. The play was not about a tangible life experience, or the feel of wonder from days past. The author wanted to exclaim something, he wanted to showcase the ironic elements of life. I want to expose these ironies from the seemingly peaceful and mundane passages. That's my goal for this adaptation. (Tainaner Ensemble DVD, 2013)

Director Liao Ruo-Han used a simple phrase to describe the theme of *Our Town*: "*the understanding of life*". She wanted the spectators to "*witness ordinary life in an alternative way, so they can pay more attention to the present they constantly ignore.*" Her simple philosophy is reflected in her designs of the sound effects, manipulation of viewing angles, and video projections.

However, even with a grasp of the major themes, the plot structure, and characters, both Xu and Liao were somewhat dissatisfied with the ideas presented in *Our Town*. Xu mentioned some of his thoughts regarding the adaptation of *Our Town* in the programme: "*It is interesting that the exposition and instructions given by the Stage Manager and the Doctor about Glover's Corner were rarely being questioned.*"

(Tainaner Ensemble DVD, 2013) Liao also spoke of her concerns.

I do not want [Anping, Our Town] to be a verbatim reproduction of the original set simply in a different town. I also wish to experiment with some theatrical techniques we've never employed. (Tainaner Ensemble DVD, 2013)

Their reluctance to conform to an authoritative or ubiquitous interpretation stem from their personal histories. Both Xu and Liao were born in the 70s and 80s, a period of rapidly changing social attitudes due to the deaths of Chiang Kai-Shek and Chiang Ching-Kuo. Martial law was abandoned and the propaganda of the ruling Kuomintang were demystified. When the presumed truths told by authority figures were actually lies, people reacted in complicated manners. Xu and Liao performed extensive field research regarding the history of Anping. They went out to the streets to hear stories from elderly Anping residents. They exchanged ideas with Li Wei-Mu, who was born and raised in Anping. It is unknown whether Wilder depicted Glover's Corner based solely on his life experience, but the adaptors' method can ensure their representation of Anping Town contained multiple points of view.

Our Town praises the values of life through a small town American lens; the adaptors are able to preserve its values and quaintness while increasing the relatability by moving the small town to Anping. They also approximate the set design by Wilder – simple to facilitate the alienation effect. The plot structure and most important scenes also remain intact, while the settings and the characters are re-imagined as Taiwanese analogs. However, the adaptors insert their own artistic vision, and challenge ambiguous elements from the original. The following section explains how the adaptors use their choice of theatrical forms to represent Taiwanese culture with the scenery, characters, and plot.

3.2.1 How Taiwanese Culture is Represented: The Scenery

The scenery for *Anping, Our Town* is slightly more complex than what would be required in a conventional *chair and table* production of *Our Town*, however, the set still maintained a simplistic spirit. At center stage is a raked slope on which actors can step to gain some elevation, it also contains two hidden doors that lead to a space for actors to hide in and stash props. A wooden backdrop cut in the shape of a house is used as a screen which displays various photo and video projections. The flat also has window-like openings. When an actor is behind the opening it appears as if they are in a house interacting with people outside. Between the slope and the wooden backdrop is a hidden moving platform, which is used in several scenes to recreate the movement

of a boat, a setting specific to Anping because of the town's canals. There are several chairs and a microphone stand down stage, where the Stage Manager positions himself as the narrator. The microphone stand is constantly adjusted to enhance or diminish the importance of the Stage Manager. There is also a camera and several stage lights far at both sides of the stage to constantly remind the audience that this play is an act, but also serves the purpose of enabling real-time video projection. All sound effects are performed by one or more actors in real time vocally (such as bird songs and dog barks), or by hand-held mechanical devices (such as phones and bus bells). The real-time sound effects also contribute to the alienation effect on the audience.

Figure 2 A production photo of the set of *Anping, Our Town*



Alienation Effects

In *Our Town*, Wilder employed several tactics to ensure spectators are aware of the subtext of the play and not focus purely on the drama. The Stage Manager, numerous meta-dramas, simplistic scenery, and non-linear time sequences are all different methods to help achieve his goal. Tainaner Ensemble pushed this approach to the extreme. The Stage Manager constantly refer to actors by their real names as opposed to their stage personas and gives them staging directions. The lighting cues are vastly

different between the drama and the meta-dramas; the drama uses traditional theatrical lighting, while the meta-dramas, especially ones where the Stage Manager leads, uses general lighting as if in rehearsal, and everything on stage becomes visible to spectators. The Stage Manager also wears his headset to indicate “he is telling a story”. The video projection of characters narrating about themselves in the third person also serves to alienate. Finally, Li Wei-Mu would join some of the scenes and provide comments and anecdotes about Anping’s past and present. Since he is a notable figure and is constantly addressed by name, it makes the audience fully aware that they are watching a play because a non-fictional character is constantly breaking the immersion. In a scene from Act 1 where Mr. Ding is being questioned, Li actually tried to interject and is stopped by the Stage Manager with the reminder that “*your part is yet to come*”, this interaction amplifies the meta-elements of the scene.

3.2.2 How Taiwanese Culture being Represented: The Characters

The characters of *Anping, Our Town* are faithful to the original, we can find an analogous role of every major and minor character from the original in this adaptation (see Table 1). The main breadwinner of each family works the same job they have in the source, with Mr. Lin as a doctor, and Mr. Ding as an editor for a local newspaper. However, many characters possess a distinct cultural background that is an exclusive reflection of the society of Taiwan at the time.

Differences in Ethnic Background between the Lins and the Dings

Wilder did not provide distinct ethnic backgrounds for the two major families in *Our Town* - the Gibbsses and the Webbs, this however is not the case in *Anping, Our Town*. The Lins are a Han Taiwanese family that uses predominantly Taiwanese Hokkien (along with many other townsfolk in Anping), while the Dings are a Mainland Chinese family that speaks mainly Mandarin with a Mainlander accent. The way the two families interact in *Anping, Our Town* follows the original play with very little conflict between members from both families. They live in harmony and have a strong friendship between them; the children from the two families even end up getting married. This showcases a more peaceful side to the Islander-Mainlander relationship in Taiwanese history, while the plot also showcases the conflict side of these two ethnic groups (see section 3.2.3). Of course, there are still noticeable differences between two families other than the spoken languages. For example, during the breakfast scene in Act I, the Lin family favors congee and rice, while the Ding family favors steamed buns.

The Role of Phun-Á (潘仔)

Phun-Á is the counterpart of Simon Stimson in *Anping, Our Town*. He represents another ethnicity that is often forgotten when portraying Taiwanese life – the aboriginal people. Phun-Á is not this character's real name, rather a nickname given to him by the townsfolk. It's a derogatory Hokkien term that describes someone who is uneducated and an easy target to trick or deceive. The way he is portrayed in the play reflects a very stereotypical image of Taiwanese aborigines perceived by Han Taiwanese. He is shown to be an alcoholic who is good at nothing except singing, lazy and incompetent when working, and usually affiliated with Christian or Catholic churches. He only appears briefly on three occasions in the play. The first time he is inebriated and unintelligible, his background is exposed through the narration of the Stage Manager. The second time he gets too drunk and abandons his job in leading the church choir. The third time he is among the dead; through the Stage Manager, we learn he hangs himself in the attic of the church. He is the only one who detests his life before death, and comments that "there was nothing in life worth remembering".

Although Phun-Á shares a similar fate with Simon Stimson, it is more complicated than a problem with poverty and alcoholism. Phun-Á has a slightly more developed background than Simon Stimson – being an aborigine in Taiwan in the 1970s and 1980s is enough exposition to explain his suffering. As a minority, the aboriginal Taiwanese have a long history of being exploited and discriminated against by the majority Han Taiwanese population. Many men were forced to work long-hours in low wage jobs under poor conditions, while many women and children were sold, deceived or forced into prostitution.

The Tang Ying-Shen (湯英伸) incident in 1987⁵ was an iconic milestone for the Aboriginal Taiwanese rights movement. Tang Ying-Shen is a Tsou aborigine from the Alishan area. He was deceived by a human trafficking group and sold to a laundry shop. Not only did he owe \$3,500 to his boss as commission to the trafficking group, he was forced to work long-hours for a very low wage. His identification card was seized by his boss as collateral. One night after becoming inebriated he was woken up at midnight to work, he threatened to quit and asked for his ID but was met with resistance from his boss who wanted him to repay the commission owed. In Tang's rage, he stabbed his boss with a knife and killed his boss's wife and two-year old child. He later turned himself in to the police and was sentenced to death. He was executed a year later, but not before his case sparked a massive human rights movement. The enormous backlash forced Chiang Ching-kuo's government to enact new policies to

⁵ Aboriginal Taiwanese were only allowed to have Chinese name until 1995.

grant equal rights to the Aboriginal Taiwanese. How Phun-Á is portrayed in the play is reflective of the treatment of aborigines during that period.

The Role of Li Wei-Mu

If the Stage Manager is the one who provides exposition of the general settings to the audience, Li Wei-mu is the one who provides exposition about the real town of An-Ping to the audience. His existence is similar to Professor Willard's from the original, but he would occasionally join the cast as one of the townsfolk (as Uncle Wei-Mu in this case, who is a fisherman and ferryman), to carry students across the river to school. He also witnesses the developing relationship between Da-Hai and Pei-Pei. In the meta-drama scenes, he has conversations with the Stage Manager, and provides comments and anecdotes about the historical and present Anping. In Act I, he talks about Anping's past as a fishing town, and the life of a local fishermen. He also comments on the increase in tourism in recent years, and criticizes souvenirs catered to tourists that have no cultural link to the town. As previously discussed, he also serves as a device for enhancing alienation effects.

Li is also credited with the existence and creation of numerous scenes. Before the final script was completed, Li was the only person in the ensemble who had ever been to Anping, having lived there for nearly two decades. He led his team to Anping and pointed out the locations he felt had important stories to tell or were pivotal to his life. Some of these stories and scenes were incorporated into the script, such as the scene on the Anping canal.

Table 1 Character Comparison Chart

	<i>Our Town</i>	<i>Anping, Our Town</i>
Narrator	Stage Manager	Stage Manager (舞臺監督)
		Li Wei-Mu (李維睦)
		Random Narrators
Gibbs family	George Gibbs	Lin Da-Hai (林大海)
	Rebecca Gibbs	Lin Siao-Yu (林曉予)
	Dr. Gibbs	Mr. Lin (林醫生)
	Mrs. Gibbs	Mrs. Lin (林太太)
Webb family	Emily Webb	Ding Pei-Pei (丁沛沛)
	Wally Webb	Ding Long-Long (丁龍龍)
	Mr. Webb	Mr. Ding (丁編輯)
	Mrs. Webb	Mrs. Ding (丁太太)
Others	Mrs. Soames	Madame Shu (許老小姐)

	Professor Willard	Li Wei-Mu (李維睦)
	Howie Newsome	Lê-Á (螺仔)
	Joe Crowell, Jr.	Ô-Á (蚵仔)
	Si Crowell	Ô-Á (蚵仔)
	Simon Stimson	Phun-Á (潘仔)
	Constable Bill Warren	Kang Guo-Rong (康國榮)
	Sam Craig	Lin Da-Shan (林大山)
	Joe Stoddard	Chen De-Shun (陳德順)
		Tāu-Hue-Peh (豆花伯)
		Tsáp-Peh-Tsím-Pô (十八孀婆)

3.2.3 How Culture is Represented: The Plot

Anping, Our Town retained the structure and most major story elements from *Our Town*, but the meta-dramas underwent some major alterations. As mentioned in section 3.1, Xu and Liao incorporated the concept of questioning authorities in this play. They also omitted some references that did not translate into Taiwanese culture. The following sections will explore some instances of these changes.

Interrogation of Mr. Ding

In the latter-half of Act I, there is a scene of Mr. Ding's workday and how he is questioned by "people outside of the play". This scene is a parallel to the scene where Mr. Webb is questioned by people in the theater box. However, the questions featured in the Tainaner version are more sensitive and cynical, and Mr. Ding has a hard time addressing the inquiries. The interrogators address Mr. Ding with the first question.

What is your opinion on students being forbidden to speak Taiwanese (Hokkien) in school?

The second question follows shortly after.

Are you unable to address these allegations because of the position you are in?

A third person asks.

What is your opinion on people who disappeared due to political dissent?

And finally.

If you are offered the option to return to Mainland China tomorrow,

would you leave or stay?

To understand the origin of these questions, we turn to the newspaper publisher that employs Mr. Ding – China Daily News. China Daily News was a newspaper based in Tainan and operated by Kuomintang, and received direct funding from the party. During the time when the authority of the Kuomintang and the government were unopposed, China Daily News was in charge of full-scale government propaganda. While it was highly unlikely for an Islander to get a job in Kuomintang related organizations, the Mainlanders were provided much greater opportunities because of their affiliation with the ruling class. This is likely the reason why Mr. Ding, a Mainlander, was offered a position at China Daily News. Therefore, it is a sign of ruling class privilege and a subject to question. By accepting the position, Mr. Ding also became a representative of the government and open to being questioned.

The greater context behind these questions is the ongoing conflict between Islander and Mainlanders. When the Kuomintang government retreated to Taiwan under the Republic of China banner with Mainlander refugees in 1949, they brought with them the Chinese civil war. After the occurrence of a few catastrophic events, such as the 228 Massacres and White Terror, Taiwanese Islanders once again lost their faith in a Chinese ruler (the first mistrust arose when Taiwan was surrendered to the Japanese under Qin Dynasty rule in 1895.). Most Islanders identify themselves as culturally Taiwanese, and believe in a unique Taiwanese identity. Mainlanders identify themselves as Chinese, and believe the Taiwanese identity is part of a greater Chinese culture. This separation of identities is a result of unequal treatment towards Islanders and Mainlanders by the government. Mainlanders also exhibit nostalgic feeling towards the mainland. The situation is further complicated by the Republic of China's claim to be the rightful ruling government of China, an ideal recognized by their loyal followers, mostly Mainlanders. For a long time, children in the ROC were taught to include Taiwan as part of China, and Taiwanese students had to learn more about Chinese geography, history and society than that of Taiwan's. Children were also forbidden to speak their mother tongue in school. This discriminatory approach was a common experience for Taiwanese people who born before the 1990s, and was seen as an outdated ideology that became increasingly detested.

However, the play is not trying to portray Mr. Ding and the Mainlanders he represented as some evil faction. He is portrayed as a kind and caring father, loyal to his work and family. He also got along well with other locals, and even married his daughter to an Islander family. During his rebuttals, we learn that Mr. Ding expressed

a willingness to practice Hokkien, and that he dedicated much of his attention to local activities, news, and histories. The play wants the audience to distinguish the corrupt government from the mostly innocent civilians who actively contribute to Taiwanese society.

The Removal of the "Time Capsule" Scene.

One of the notable and symbolic scenes in the meta-drama of *Our Town* features the Stage Manager mentioning a time capsule buried in the foundation of a new bank. The capsule is filled with books and documents so "*when people a thousand years from now dig it up they will know about Grover's Corners.*" (Act I) The contents include a copy of *New York Times*, a copy of the local newspaper *Sentinel*, a Bible, the Constitution of the United States, and one of Shakespeare's plays. He also suggests putting in a copy of *Our Town*, because he feels it describes the wonders of present day life and can hold as much weight as historical documents. He hopes this will highlight the importance of the present. However, this scene can be awkward for the adaptors to implement. In *Our Town in Tamsui* by Godot Theatre Company, Shih Kuang-Sheng (石光生) points out that the existence of such scene under Taiwanese context is actually a cultural misrepresentation. In the play, townsfolk buried the *Three Principles of the People* by Dr. Sun Yet-Sen under a newly built town hall. It may seem legitimate at first for the *Three Principles of the People* to be analogous to the Constitution of the United States, and a town hall to a bank, but such practice of burying books in foundations of buildings never existed in Taiwan. In order for the two scenes to be fully analogous, Shih argues, "*the most common practice for this is to set a stone tablet to commemorate people who contributed to the construction.*" (Shih, 2007) It is possible that Tainaner Ensemble found such a scene to not fit the narrative, and used projections of old photos of Anping to replace the buried books instead.

3.3 Audience Reactions to the Adaptation

As explained in the previous sections, the intention for the adaptors of *Anping, Our Town* was to depict the life of Anping with elements that fit the narrative of Taiwanese society in the 70s and 80s. At the same time they wish to preserve the poignant messages intended by Wilder. Many spectators who commented and reviewed the play grasped the artistic vision of the adaptors without much difficulty. Some appreciated the story depicted, while the others enjoyed the depictions of Anping. One of the typical positive comments from the audience read like the following from Ms. Zhang.

This is not just a story exclusive to Anping, this is a story that can happen anywhere. It is a very intimate story, so brief it can disappear in the time of a breath. This story makes us value the most important and dearest people around us. (Tainaner Ensemble Official Facebook Page, 2016)

However, there were some controversies surrounding the adaptation created by Tainaner Ensemble. One commonly criticized aspect was the imbalance in the length of the three acts. The first act of *Anping, Our Town* is seventy-two minutes, close to the length of the second and third acts combined. Some complained the story development was overshadowed by the vivid depictions of Anping in the first act, and it made it harder to appreciate the accelerated character relations and stories in the later acts. One reviewer thought this inconsistency between the three acts might be a result of the adaptors being too faithful to Anping in the first act, and being too faithful to the original play in the second and third acts. (Dream2000, 2013)

Some viewers claimed certain theatrical choices employed in the play alienated them too much from the play's world. The use of Hokkien evoked some concerns with comprehension for people who weren't fluent with the language. (Siao, 2013) A spectator did not like the frequent intervention of the Stage Manager in the plot, and thought the character cut the plot into too many small fragments and made the plot hard to appreciate. (River, 2013) Finally, one critic pointed out the use of projection created a third level "*drama within a drama within a drama*", hence the supposedly recognizable Anping town became "*too alienated from spectators*". (Li, 2013)

4. Conclusion, Limitations and Possible Future Research Opportunity

Through the proposed analyses it is concluded the adaptors for *Anping, Our Town* not only understood the cultural references in the original work, but also had a unique perspective to add. They removed scenes that do not fit into the target culture's context, and replaced idiosyncratic cultural elements in the source with elements from the target culture. Some meta-drama scenes are altered to provide commentary about the original work. The adaptors also expanded on traditional theatrical forms and experimented with different theater techniques (such as video projections, vocalisms and mimicry), without losing the form of an alienated play. The end result resonated positively and most viewers appreciated the performance – both the story and the message it brings.

Through the intercultural hourglass process, we can see the adaptors at Tainaner

		original, and focused on localization details.
	10a) Artistic modeling	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Respect the artistic choices made by Wilder and try to modify it while preserving the basic concepts. 2. Scenery and Sets and such as moving platforms to represent Anping.
	10b) Sociological and anthropological modeling	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discuss contemporary Taiwanese issues instead of American issues from the 1930s. 2. Depict ethnic harmony and conflicts not addressed in the original play.
	10c) Cultural modeling	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Depict the everyday life of Anping in the 1970s and 1980s.
	11) Given and anticipate consequences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Positive: Most spectators appreciated the story and message. 2. Negative: Some spectators did not appreciate the theatrical choices made by Tainaner Ensemble and found themselves alienated from the play.

This research does have some limitations. The analysis was conducted primarily through script reading and viewing of a recorded performance, some elements and spontaneity of live theatre are lost when viewed through a single-camera recording. The analysis is primarily a subjection of the author's view, the validity of the analysis can be verified through interviews with the members of Tainaner Ensemble. Reanalysis with a newer intercultural model as the core methodology is also a likely future direction. Finally, a comparative analysis between the only two professional Taiwanese adaptations of *Our Town: Our Town in Tamsui* and *Anping, Our Town*. The two projects were produced nearly two decades apart, to examine the differences in methodology by the adaptors, and to dissect the context and messages in these plays will be an intriguing task.

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