

新時代大登臺

日治時期新劇運動浪潮



English

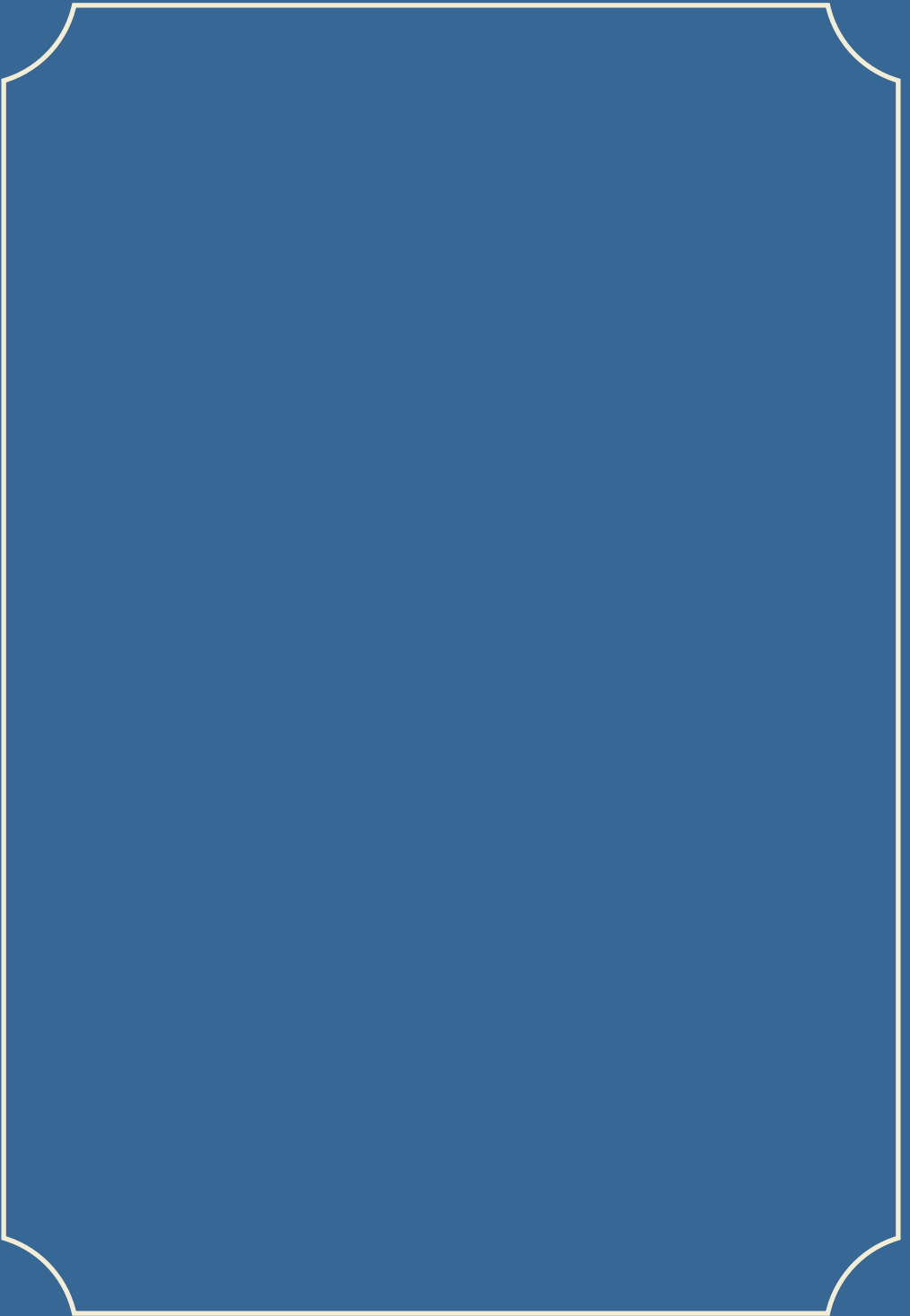
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Stop!





The Birth of a New Era

The New Theater Movement During the Japanese Colonial Period

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The Formation of “Meteors” Despite Political Oppression: Cultural Wave of the New Theatre Movement in Taiwan During the Japanese Colonial Period

During the Japanese colonial period at the end of the 19th century, the influence of Western literary and artistic trends and modernized society inspired the development of a new type of drama in the theatres of Taiwan. Known as “New Theatre”, unprecedented changes occurred in the format and content of this new type of drama, which was distinctively different from traditional opera. Participating in the New Theatre Movement was a group of concerned intellectuals, who became the main driving force behind New Theatre in Taiwan by learning theatre education and activities from their counterparts in China and Japan. Among the New Theatre activists in Taiwan, some were youths who believed in Early Socialism, such as anarchism. Others were local gentry or international students, while most were members of the Taiwanese Cultural Association. They prized the new theatre format as a symbol of civilization. To advocate for the “new”, it seemed necessary to be completely against the “old”. As a result, they harshly criticized Taiwanese opera. However, the lack of supporting conditions for theatre and the suppression and intervention of the colonial government prevented the full development of a new format of drama. Thus, the most popular drama type of the times, Taiwanese opera, could not be completely subverted by new theatre activists. At the time, professional

playwrights and directors were scarce among new theatre troupes, and the actors also lacked professional training. In addition, the performances were often banned by the colonial government due to anti-Japanese themes, so most of the troupes survived only for short periods. Even though the Taiwan New Theatre Movement extended to two to three years after the war, most of the activities and impact were limited to the 1920s. Soon after the war, the political environment eliminated any room for further development. In retrospect, what was the significance of New Theatre, which ultimately seemed to end in “defeat”? In terms of Taiwan during the Japanese colonial period, the significance was the process and the intentions of the intellectuals putting their ideals into practice. It also ushered in a new wave of new theatre across the island, and initiated a self-identification of the people in Taiwan.

Furthermore, the cultural theatre troupe served the purpose of enlightening the general audience, focusing mostly on tours across villages in Taiwan, and set a new trend in theatre across the island. In comparison with the situation today, where resources for theatre are centered around Taipei, the cultural dramas of the Japanese colonial period brought new resources to rural villages, demonstrating the foresight of dramatic artists at that time. Even though the history of Taiwanese drama names numerous people associated with the New Theatre Movement, only a few have been actually identified. Even if someone has been identified, little is known of their performance activities. These people and events seem like “meteors” with a minimal amount of illumination, working hard to perform in the night sky under political pressure during the Japanese colonial period. Those from afar only see how they quietly flashed by. This exhibition has collected the stories of these “meteors” to show everyone how the cultural wave of the New Theatre Movement once took place during the Japanese colonial period in Taiwan, embodying the ideals and romance of that era.

At the end of the 19th century, the drama during the Japanese colonial period began to be influenced by the literary trend of thought from the West and the modern society, and began to try a new type of drama. The "new drama" was introduced to Taiwan by Taiwanese students who were studying in Japan and China. The term of "new drama" was born in contrast to traditional dramas. This exhibition “The Birth of a New Era: The New Theater Movement During the Japanese Colonial Period” presents both the meaning of "on stage" and "landing in Taiwan" of new dramas.

The top-left photo: showa 2 (1927) performed in Wufeng | Source : Jiang Zihang

Participating in the New Theatre Movement was a group of concerned intellectuals, who became the main driving force behind New Theatre in Taiwan by learning theatre education and activities from their counterparts in China and Japan. Among the New Theatre activists in Taiwan, some were youths who believed in Early Socialism, such as anarchism. Others were local gentry or international students, while most were members of the Taiwanese Cultural Association. They prized the new theatre format as a symbol of civilization. To advocate for the “new”, it seemed necessary to be completely against the “old”. As a result, they harshly criticized Taiwanese opera. However, the lack of supporting conditions for theatre and the suppression and intervention of the colonial government prevented the full development of a new format of drama. Thus, the most popular drama type of the times, Taiwanese opera, could not be completely subverted by new theatre activists. At the time, professional playwrights and directors were scarce among new theatre troupes, and the actors also lacked professional training. In addition, the performances were often banned by the colonial government due to anti-Japanese themes, so most of the troupes survived only for short periods. Even though the Taiwan New Theatre Movement extended to two to three years after the war, most of the activities and impact were limited to the 1920s. Soon after the war, the political environment eliminated any room for further development. In retrospect, what was the significance of New Theatre, which ultimately seemed to end in “defeat”? In terms of Taiwan during the Japanese colonial period, the significance was the process and the intentions of the intellectuals putting their ideals into practice. It also ushered in a new wave of new theatre across the island, and initiated a self-identification of the people in Taiwan.

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The Emergence and Development of the New Theatre Movement in Taiwan

The New Theatre Movement in Taiwan emerged due to the influence of dramas from Japan and China. When the movement first began, its mission of promoting a new culture prompted activists to declare a cultural opposition to traditional opera. However, its amateur nature could not provide satisfactory entertainment to viewing audiences, and failed to diminish the popularity of Taiwanese opera. Furthermore, its political nature brought suppression from the colonial government, leading to its ultimate demise. Nevertheless, a development genealogy may be derived from the New Theatre activities of intellectuals, demonstrating their ideal to support the cultural movement with the new format.

The top photo: Xing-Guang Theatre troupe photoed in Yilan | Source : Sunnycgate Phototimes

The Emergence of New Theatre in Taiwan Inspired by Japan and China

Inspired by Japan and China, Taiwan's New Theatre Movement emerged in the 1920s, and all the new dramas performed by the Taiwanese Cultural Association were called "cultural drama". The so-called "new theatre" and "cultural drama" were not distinguished objectively, but only conveyed the concept relative to the traditional opera (old drama). The cultural dramas were also known as cultural operas, and the troupe members were mostly related to the Taiwanese Cultural Association. The term "new theatre", meanwhile, could cover all the theatrical performances that were not traditional operas. Thus, "new theatre" were also referred to as improved operas, main dramas, new theaters, cultural dramas, literati dramas, and imperialized dramas.

Before the rise of the New Theatre Movement, troupes from Japan and China came to perform in Taiwan, including Kawakami Otojiro's troupe in 1902, Hogetsu Shimamura and Matsui Sumako's Art Troupe in 1915, and the Shanghai crude stage plays performed by the Minxing Group in 1921. In addition, New Theatre dramas were also performed by Japanese people in Taiwan, such as the "Taiwan Main Theatre Training Center" established by Takamatsu Toyojiro in 1909. In addition to the troupes from China and Japan, which performed in Taiwan to provide Taiwanese people the opportunities to enjoy new theatre, other intellectuals also began attempting new theatre performances after getting to know this new style of drama when they studied abroad in Japan and China. Thus, new theatre was introduced to Taiwan by overseas troupes and Taiwanese students studying in Japan, inspiring youths in Taiwan to perform new theatre.

The earliest new theatre took place in Tokyo. It was a student drama performed in Tokyo by the Tokyo Taiwan Youth Association between 1922 and 1923. Subsequently, in the winter of 1923, Changhua students formed the first New-Theatre club after they returned to Taiwan from Xiamen. In 1924, youths from the Dadaocheng area in Taipei also began putting on new theatre performances, which appeared all across Taiwan in local troupe performances. Many of the theatre troupes established independently by Taiwanese people were theatre promotional organizations initiated by a group of people aiming to promote the mission of the parent organization using the new theatre format, or to raise funds with the proceeds from new theatre performances. Some were new theatre research organizations with

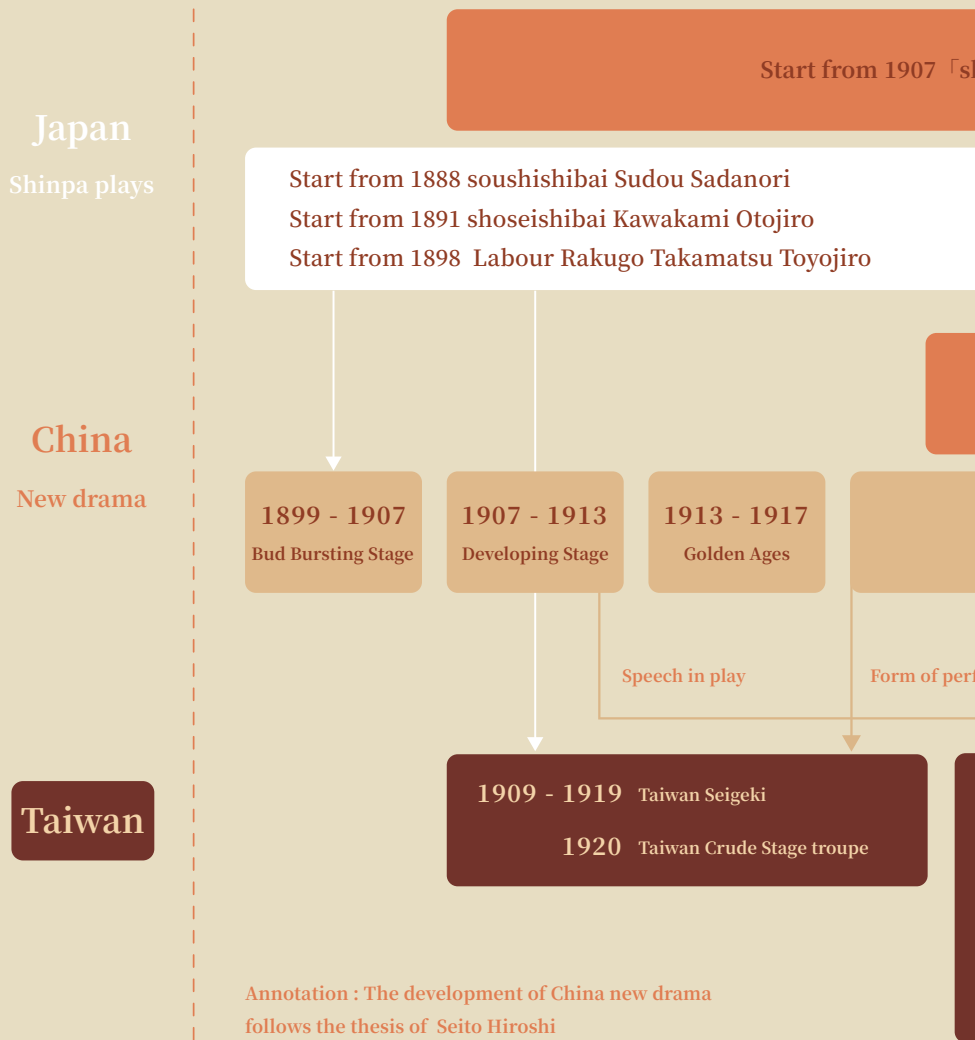
the mission to perform, while others focused on the study of the art of theatre, and would only perform when it met their standards. Some theatre audiences enjoyed the performances and sought opportunities to perform themselves. Even though the characteristics of the troupes differed, the common goal of these groups was to “promote the culture” in Taiwan, and served as the new life force of the new cultural movement in Taiwan.



1905 Kawakami drama 《The crown》 in Meijiza I Source : Japan Archives

The development of Taiwan New Drama under the influences of Japan and China

Refer to 《New Drame Movement Genealogy of Taiwan Cultural Association during Japanese Occupation Period (1921-1936)》 written by Pai Chun Yen



Annotation : The development of China new drama follows the thesis of Seito Hiroshi

「Xingkeji」 Literature and Art Association

1919 - 1949 「Drama」

1917 - 1949

Recession Stage

Performances

Script

Script

1923 - 1928 Ding-Shin Club

1924 - 1928 Xing-Guang

1930 - 1934 Min-Feng

1927 - 1936 WenXi play

1930 Later Period Amateur new drama troupes

1937 - 1945 Kominkageki Youth Drama

1950 Professional New drama troupe

When new theatre met the old

Prior to the introduction of new theatre / cultural drama, the old operas dominated the cultural scene in Taiwan. In addition to Chinese Peking Opera, there was also the Taiwanese Opera developed in Taiwan. In the 1920s, intellectuals in Taiwan began advocating a new type of theatre called new theatre / cultural drama, in hopes of inspiring “cultural improvements”, and enhancing the art of the theatre. This art and cultural enlightenment movement was an imagination of the ideal mixed with the romantic.

In the era of new theatre / cultural drama, films and music (Western classical music) had become available in Taiwan, and indeed “cultivated a taste for elegance” for the fashionable youths. However, the actual impact of cultural drama performances requires further research and analysis. In particular, Taiwanese operas became widely popular during the late 1920s. Intellectuals promoting new theatre / cultural drama were opposed to traditional operas (especially Taiwanese operas) and the “vulgar tradition” of rituals during the Ghost Festival, which became their key cultural declarations. However, they could not halt the trend of the Taiwanese opera becoming the most representative drama format in Taiwan. By the late 1930s, the importance of new theatre / cultural drama had diminished in Taiwan.

When new theatre met with old operas, even though the latter became the target of criticism, the lack of entertaining elements in new theatre made it difficult to develop theatre art. The additional pressure of the strict ban of the new theatre, as well as the deliberate attempt to boost the development of the traditional drama (especially Taiwanese operas), reduced the space for new theatre development. Therefore, even though new theatre conveyed the ideals of the intellectuals, the restrictions due to various political and social conditions prevented new theatre from taking roots in the common people’s life of entertainment, and could not reduce the public’s enthusiasm for Taiwanese operas. When the new theatre met old operas, the new and old collided and each won out in their own best space and time, which was the Taiwan society 100 years ago!



Stage photo of Cultural Drama of Taiwan Culture Association
Source : National Museum of Taiwan Literature



Minfeng theatre troupe commemorative photo of the establishment | Source :Sunnygate Phototimes

李公
定



演劇挺身隊

南進座
隊員台南州下に移動公演

The “task force” of Taiwan's new cultural movement – New Theatre Movement

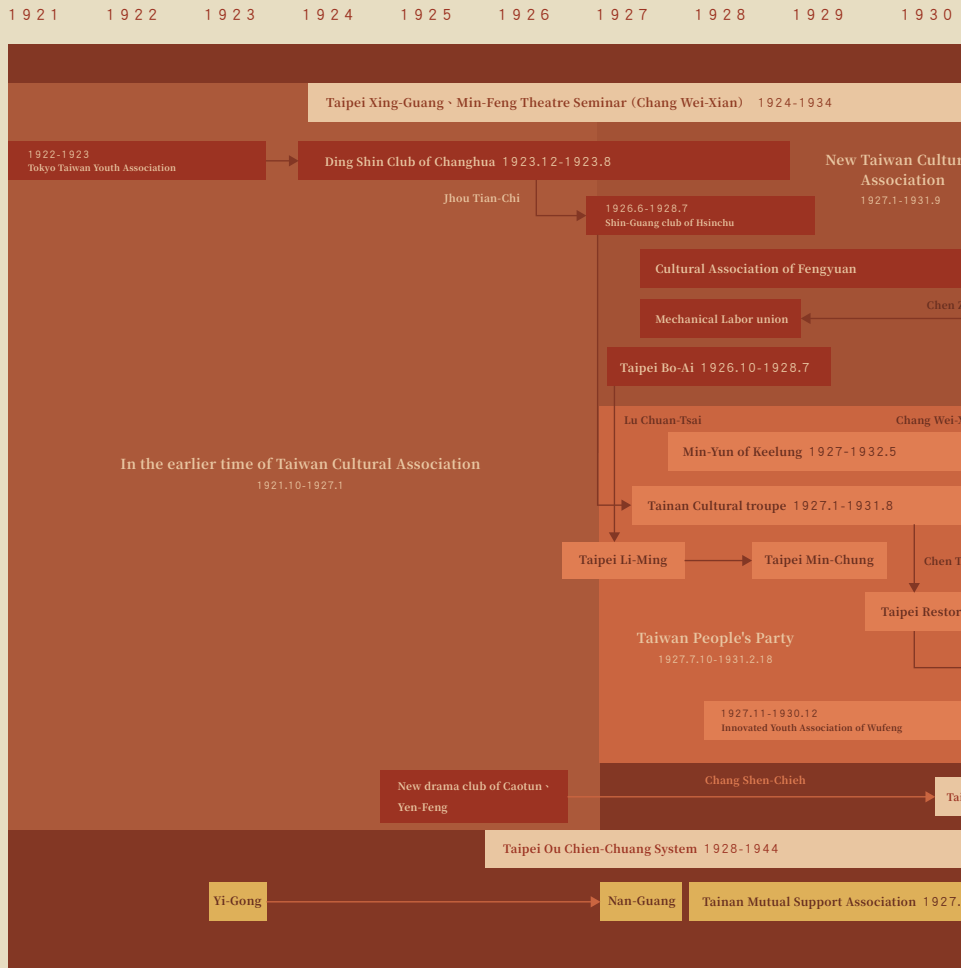
The New Theatre Movement advocated by the Taiwanese Cultural Association in the 1920s and 1930s was a “special force” to promote new culture. The establishment of various theatre groups may have a little or a lot to do with the Taiwanese Cultural Association, or had direct or indirect relationships. Most of the members were of the intellectual class with basic public school education, or had geographical or academic-associated relationships. They co-founded the theatre groups because of their similar social standings, or similar political and social ideals.



The illustration refers to the stage photo of Ding-Xing club 《L'Echelle》

《New Dramatic Movement Genealogy of Taiwan Cultural Association》

Refer to 《New Dramatic Movement Genealogy of Taiwan Cultural Association during Japanese Occupation Period (1921-1936)》 written by Pai Chun Yen



1931 1932 1933 1934 1935 1936 1937 1938 1939 1940

Color	Parent association constitution / Type	Parent association	Relevance to Political Movement
1	1. Earlier TCA 2. Earlier TCA -> New TCA	✓	✓
2	1. Earlier TCA -> TPP 2. TPP	✓	✓
3	Charity fundraising · Community Construction	✓	✗
4	The main purpose of theatrical performances	✗	✗

Wufeng I-Sin Association 1932.3-1936.3

Taichung Hu-Tieh 1932-1936.8

1935.11



A new wave struck @ Dadaocheng

Dadaocheng was the economic cultural center of northern Taiwan. The Ghost Festival organized by the Taipei Xiahai City God Temple and the enjoyment of old operas were all daily routines for the general public. As Western modern culture was introduced to Taiwan, a new cultural thinking emerged, and the new and old culture met in Dadaocheng. The New Theatre, which was part of the new cultural format, was performed at various locations including the New Dance Stage, Yongle Troupe, Cultural Forum, People's Forum, and Jiantai Tea Shop. It also became the most effective promotional methodology of the new cultural movement. The intellectuals in Taiwan not only advocated new culture, but also actively opposed old culture, such as the prohibition of Taiwanese operas, and opposing superstitious traditions, etc. However, despite the high-profile attacks from new intellectuals, the popularity of old culture persisted. In this cultural battle, there were the romantic ideals of the intellectuals as well as the deep-seated cultural norm of the general public. Regardless of the winner or loser, in reality all the factors enriched this important cultural space for the people in Taiwan.

The celebration of Dadaocheng City God's Birthday | Source : National Taiwan Library

Dadaocheng, the birthplace of New Theatre in Taipei

In the early 1920s, various emerging art and culture gathered in the Dadaocheng area in Taipei. It was an important location for the promotion of the New Culture Movement by the Taiwanese Cultural Association, as well as the birthplace of the New Theatre Movement in the Taipei area. Various theatre troupes were formed in this area, including the Xing Guang Performance Research Association co-founded by Chang Wei-xian and Oh Jian-chuang, the Taipei Bo' ai Performance Research Association founded by Shue Yu-long, the Taiwan Mechanical Trade Union Performance Art Department, and Liming, Minzhong, and Weixin theatre troupes established by the Taiwanese People's Party. In the Dadaocheng area, new theatre performances had taken place at various locations, including the New Dance Stage, Yongle Troupe, Cultural Forum, People's Forum, and Jiantai Tea Shop. Among the venues, the New Dance Stage and Yongle Troupe were theaters that offered entertainment to the public, while the Cultural Forum and People's Forum were the cultural enlightenment bases established by the Taiwanese Cultural Association and the Taiwanese People's Party. Jiantai Tea Shop was also chosen as a performance venue due to its wide-open space. In addition to being a venue for the performance of new theatre dramas, the tea shop was also the best place to promote cultural ideals. Indeed, the Cultural Forum rented a space from the tea production factory. Using the space of a tea shop for the promotion of new culture did not occur in any other region in Taiwan. In a sense, the tea industry in Dadaocheng became an indirect contributor to the new culture movement in Taiwan.



The celebration of Dadaocheng City God's Birthday | Source : National Taiwan Library



Taiwan New Stage I Source : National Taiwan Library



Dr. Minami gave a speech at Eilakuza I Source : National Taiwan Library



Members of Taipei carpentry workers union photoed in front of Dadaocheng People Venue

Source : Chiang Wei-shui's Culture Foundation

臺北建泰老茶行

自社長陳雨經氏歿後 益陷經營難究何善後

臺北建泰茶行（株式會社組織）招牌最老。即故社長陳雨經氏。父子兄弟子姪經營數代者。本籍在廈門地盤在三寶壟。一族人丁百餘人。自初兼營他業。間有失敗。且生活費繁。臺北茶業。勢漸難支。及雨經氏。為社長當事。更不得不割肉醫瘡。遂至相當負債。客秋因到三寶壟整理茶賬。擴張生意。年老事煩。竟患腦病以歿。先是派子松熙君駐三寶壟松洲君駐臺北。而已時往來於兩地。以統制之。歿後。一者不相聯絡。臺北雖買茶配南洋。三巴壟支店。有無引受。時有不知且罕匯款到臺北。財政木難之該行。益加棘手。逮春茶開市。用陳濟卿氏為

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結局必將

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The report of Chien-Tai tea house | Source: Taiwan Daily News

The Scripts and Troupes of the New Theatre Movement

In addition to the audience and stage, actors (theatre troupes) and scripts (stories) are also indispensable elements of a theatrical performance. A troupe consists of individuals who share the same beliefs, and their thoughts and intentions were often presented depending on the selection of their scripts. Within the New Theatre Movement in Taiwan, each troupe always adhered to their own principles. Below is an introduction of several troupes and scripts. Let's take a look at the type of brilliance available in the river of new-theatre history due to the meteor-like troupes and scripts. The ticket-selling machine presents the ticket prices of new theatre dramas during the Japanese colonial period. Different fees were charged based on the performance venue and nature.

1. Free of charge when the performance space was rent-free.
2. A ticket price of 10 to 60 yuan when a rental fee was charged for the performance space. Attendance of a New Theatre performance may be free of charge as promotional giveaway tickets.

Discounted tickets were also offered along with full-priced ones. During the performance, if a fee was required for use of the performance space, a discounted ticket or a fee of 10 to 60 yuan may be charged. Performances were free if conducted in the space outside of a theatre, or in the empty square in front of a temple. However, family reunion entertainment held at a theatre was also free of charge. The cheapest New Theatre performance of 10 yuan was only the cost of half of a lunch box for Huang Wang-cheng. Let's take a look at the ticketing machine to see the ticket prices of a new theatre performance at that time!

The Scripts and Troupes of the New Theatre Movement

When the New Theatre Movement first emerged, the dramatic literature in Taiwan had not fully developed. Scripts from China or Japan, or original scripts by Taiwanese playwrights were sometimes printed in the Taiwan Minpo and Taiwan Daily News newspapers. Only a few plays were performed multiple times in Taiwan, such as “An Important Event in Life” by Hu Shih, which was reprinted in the La Jeunesse paper.

Most of the other scripts were only dramas on paper.¹ Since the original scripts written by Taiwanese playwrights were not fully developed, most dramas performed by troupes in the early years borrowed the scripts from China (and a few borrowed scripts from Japan). For example: My Beloved Children, The Poor Moon in the Bedroom, and Social Class. After some time, some actors began creating Taiwan’s local scripts for performances by the troupe they belong to, such as Broken Crisis. In the 1930s, some scripts by new writers published in literary magazines were chosen by theatre groups for stage performances, such as “Whose fault is it?”. Actually, very few new theatre scripts from the Japanese colonial period had been preserved, and these are the few scripts that remain completely intact.



Scan QRcode to listen to the excerpts of scripts

- (1) 《 My Dearest Child 》
- (2) 《 Social Hierarchy 》
- (3) 《 Alone with the Moon in the inner chamber 》
- (4) 《 Whose Fault is it 》
- (5) 《 Crisis of Broken Order 》



A Theatre Troupe was a Collection of People with the Same Beliefs

Limited by the material and cultural conditions of video technology, we are unable to observe the actual performances of new theatre dramas during the Japanese colonial period. In addition, due to the political nature of new theatre dramas, they were destroyed automatically or forcefully in the oppressive social environment after the change of the ruling regime. This is a historical drama without theatrical performances, and it is impossible to conduct an overall theatrical research of the drama troupe based on the stage effects, actor professionalism, or script literature. However, each theatrical organization was formed by a group of individuals with the same beliefs. From the perspective of social network relations, it is possible to decipher the relative positioning of the New Theatre Movement activists within the overall new theatre network structure, the similarities among New Theatre Movement activists, as well as the structure patterns of their positions. It is also possible to determine different sub-groups based on the interpersonal relationships, to understand the dynamics among the groups.



Tainan cultural troupe performed in Anping, Lu Bing-Ding (The one standing on the left)
 The leader of labor union in Anping Chen Ming-Lai (The one sitting on the left)

Source : National Museum of Taiwan Literature



The members of Chikan Labor and Youth Association | Source : National Museum of Taiwan Literature



1949 Jhou Tian-Chi (the front with glasses) photoed with family | Source : Jhou Wan-Jhen



Huang Shin | Source : wikimedia commons



Chang Mu-Nien | Source : National Taiwan Library

Crossover! My Life in the Theatre

During the Japanese colonial period, the New Theatre Movement was part of the New Cultural Movement, and the development or characteristics of the groups varied depending on their mission. Most of the actors were amateurs with limited stage training, and many of them focused on politics rather than dramatic arts.

As a result, their actions were often subjected to colonial politics and intervention. Some even died due to political persecution, and records about them were not preserved after their deaths. The New Theatre Movement brought many ideals into Taiwan, but its development was fragile due to the oppressive environment under colonial rule. Even though a lot of people became involved in the movement, most flashed by in the sky just like meteors, and the details of their performances remain difficult to obtain. We can only discover a little bit of the background and personal information of the players in the New Theatre Movement and the troupe they belonged to from the remnants of history.

To pay tribute to these historical “meteors” of the New Theatre Movement, the Wide Game will present seven different troupes. We will also introduce the major troupes and actors, so that the audience may learn about the choices made by the youths of the movement, as well as how they embarked on their dramatic journey with new theatre and initiated a new era in the turbulent history 100 years ago!





A Pioneering Leader of the New Taiwanese Cultural Association — Xue Yu-long

Theatre troupe : Taipei Bo-Ai Troupe

Features : Taipei Bo-Ai Theatre was founded due to influence from Taipei Xi-Guang troupe. It was the first political theatre company affiliated with a political association.



Propaganda promoter of Taiwan People's Party — Zhuang Song-Lin

Theatre troupe : Tainan Cultural Troupe

Features : The troupe performed plays of anti-superstition during Ghost Festival to promote the Taiwan People's Party's goal of transforming ill social customs.



Philanthropist — Huang Xin

Theatre troupe : Tainan Mutual Support Association

Features : The association performed regularly in Tainan to raise funds for its charity work. It even traveled to New Stage in Dadaocheng, Taipei to perform.



The Community Reformer — Jiang Lian-Ding

Theatre troupe : Wufeng I-Sin Association

Features : Jiang participated in all kinds of local activities founded by Taiwan Cultural Association and also joined the performance of new plays.



The collaborator of the New Taiwan Cultural Association — Jhou Tian-Chi

Theatre troupe : Ding Shin Club of Changhua

Features : Jhou was a member of Taiwan's first troupe "Ding Shin Club of Changhua" and assisted Taiwan Cultural Association to organize cultural troupes. He was a leader in the movement of New Drama in Taiwan.



Pioneer of Arts — Chang Wei-Xian

Theatre troupe : Taipei Min-Feng troupe

Features : Chang focused on the research of theatrical arts and training of performers. He would not put a play on the stage if the performance did not meet his standard.



The Persistent Advocate of Art — Ou Chien-Chuang

Theatre troupe : Taipei Xing-Gunag Troupe

Features : Ou emphasized the preference of the audience and was constantly searching for performing opportunities. He was the most persistent advocate of the New Drama.



Want to travel through time?

Scan the QRcode to read more about their stories.

Epilogue

Even though each eventually became independent theatrical formats, the Shinpa dramas from Japan and the Crude Stage Plays from China inspired the emergence of the New Theatre Movement in Taiwan. However, due to intervention and oppression by the colonial government, the development of the dramatic arts of Taiwan's New Theatre was interrupted, and failed to develop fully into a dramatic format. Nevertheless, numerous politics-free theatrical troupes were not affected by oppression and continued to perform in the 1930s, such that some theatrical elements and traditions were able to endure. Even in the 1940s during the imperialized drama control period, some short-lived realistic dramas written by Taiwanese writers kept Taiwan's national identity and consciousness.

After 1937, during the Japanization period, Taiwanese people were forced to perform imperial dramas that promoted the concept of Japanization, and the spirit of a cultural association promoting new culture ceased to exist. However, Taiwanese still continued to perform dramas full of the Taiwanese spirit, such as the performance of *Capon* and more by the Kosei Theater Society in 1943.





Chang Gen-Shen (Left side with suit) attended the performance of Commercial and Industrial Association
Zhushan Branch Performing Arts Propaganda Department | Source : Nantou Zushan Chang Yang-Hao



1943 《Capon》 Still | Source: Lin Chia-Yi, Digital Archive : Taiwan Film & Audiovisual Institute



Conclusion

Within the politically oppressive time and space during the Japanese colonial era, the New Theatre Movement activists in Taiwan persisted with their ideals of social reforms and intellectual enlightenment via the dramatic arts. Their efforts enabled the public to learn and grow while enjoying entertainment – that was their spirit of “rejoicing in hardship”. Although the people and events of the New Theatre Movement in Taiwan during the Japanese colonial period have vanished into the historical galaxy, we attempted to discover a few of the barely recognizable meteors. Hopefully, they may cluster into a beam of light in the dark, illuminating the path back to history for us. Today, as we travel together in this journey of time, which meteors do you recall?



1943 《Capon》 StillSource: Lin Chia-Yi, Digital Archive : Taiwan Film&Audiovisual Institute

Reference





Official Site

Taiwan New Cultural Movement Memorial Museum



Facebook

Taiwan New Cultural Movement Memorial Museum

Education Activities

The subject of the educational activities will be the content of the special exhibition. Please visit our website and Facebook for announcements.

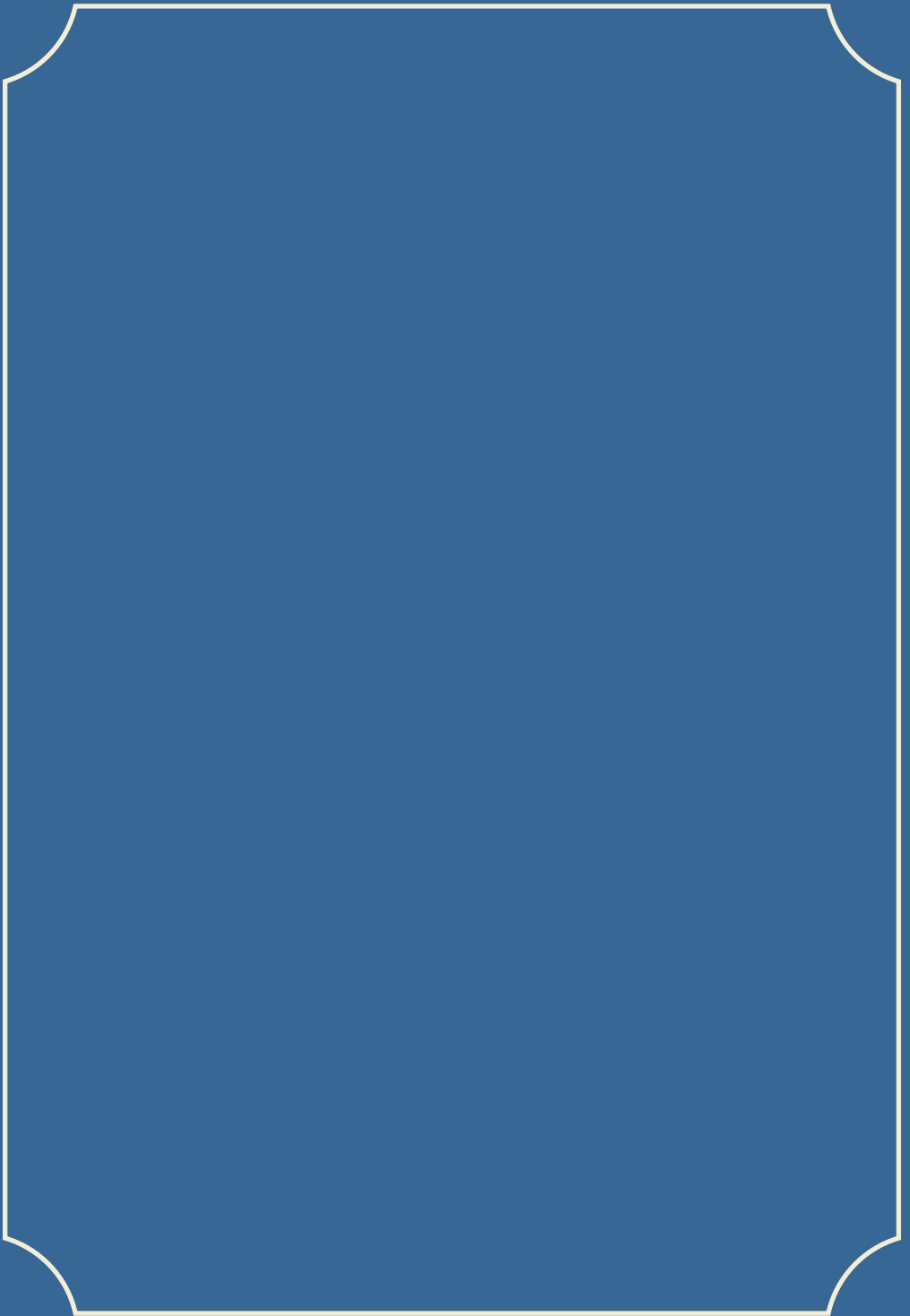
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09:30-17:30 | Closed on Mondays | Free entry

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