

Images of Multi-colonial Taiwan in Three Types of *Enka*: Self-reconstruction through Highlighting Differences in Similarities

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ABSTRACT

Under the Japanese colonial rule, Taiwan and Japan shared many cultural legacies, such as five-seven syllables ballads and pentatonic scale. During the “Kōmin-ka movement” (transforming Taiwanese people into Japanese imperial subjects), Japanese rulers even rewrote lyrics of Taiwanese popular songs in Japanese. Despite such similarities and policy of assimilation, Taiwanese popular music had shown an unambiguous propensity in its development to distinguish itself from Japanese *Enka*.

However, in the early postwar period, Taiwanese in their pursuit of being assimilated embraced Japanese *Enka* with great enthusiasm. At that time, both Taiwan and Japan were undergoing similar social transformation marked by rural-urban labor migration under rapid economic growth. A number of Japanese “Urban *Enka*” were adopted, recomposed and became popular in postwar Taiwan. It is worthy to note that these “reproductions” from Japanese *Enka* were characterized by high social realism and had undergone further refinement in the process of localization. Compared with their original versions, “Taiwanese *Enka*” depicted even more vividly the pain, sadness, loneliness, helplessness and anxiety of the Taiwanese migrant workers.

Taiwanese Urban *Enka* quickly became popular island-wide, yet only among the local Taiwanese and not the Mainlanders. These two ethnic groups differed in language spoken, social status and occupations held. The Mainlanders would hardly understand or be touched by Taiwanese Urban *Enka*, whose theme was mainly social imparity. Instead, in the early postwar years, the Mainlanders introduced Mandarin popular songs, filled with compliments of a prospering Taiwan. Nevertheless, after the 1970s, Mandarin popular songs were also recomposed from Japanese *Enka*, giving rise to “Mandarin *Enka*”. Japanese, Taiwanese and Mandarin *Enkas* all shared similar melodies but what the lyrics depicted widely differed. While Taiwanese *Enka* retained the resentment of the weak, as in Japanese *Enka*, Mandarin *Enka* focused on

the theme of love. Such contrast between Taiwanese and Mandarin *Enkas* was not resulted from differences in culture or language, but the political structure with uneven distribution of social resources among the ethnic groups.

The intermingling of the three types of *Enka* in Taiwan epitomizes the coexistence of post-colonial, re-colonial and anti-colonial situation in Taiwan. Under the intricate political atmosphere, while Mandarin *Enka* was a cultural dissemination phenomenon, Taiwanese *Enka* in contrast emphasized the social plight faced by the local ethnic under the new rule of the Mainlanders, and the need of the local Taiwanese for self-reconstruction through highlighting differences in similarities.

Since then, Taiwanese *Enka* has become an essential part of the local literary experience, and has been repeatedly utilized in literary and political discourses, serving as an icon of and source of nourishment to local Taiwanese culture. On the other hand, Mandarin *Enka* has become part of Taiwanese people's collective memories of popular culture.

Keywords: similarities, differences, urban *enka*, recognition of inequality, the resentment of the weak