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From Language to Identity: Cultural Expression in Chinese Multidialectal Theatre - A Study of The Drama *The Village*

Yuxin Zhu

1. Introduction

Dialects, an essential discourse in everyday life, are widespread in China's entertainment and arts. As subdivisions of a language, dialects are shaped by both "geographical barriers" and "divisions of social class"[1], often leading to a perception of inferiority compared to the dominant "standard" language. In Chinese theatre, dialects are frequently tied to power dynamics or regional stereotypes, often being used to rural or humorous contexts. This limited portrayal, however, overlooks the deeper identity-related potential of dialects as a representation of cultural expression.

In Chinese TV and films, dialects are rarely used in modern settings; instead, they are typically confined to rural-themed and county-themed productions with characters from smaller cities or lower social classes often depicted through dialects. For example, the Sichuan dialect might evoke imagery of slower-paced county life, blue-collar workers, or even gangsters. When dialects appear in Mandarin-dominant works, they are usually associated with less educated or older characters from other regions. In Chinese drama arts, accents and dialects are often used as iconic markers to create specific character types or comedic effects, as seen with the frequent use of Northeastern dialects in comedies. Furthermore, most scholarly works on Chinese dialect theatre discuss traditional regional plays, such as Yue Opera or Hu Opera, which are performed in local dialects. Except for the functions discussed above, a few plays are performed in one dialect to better connect with the local audiences.

However, dialects are much more than tools for caricature or regional color. As branches of a language, they are elements of identity experienced in the self and issued from the self.[2] The ongoing process of urbanization in China has led to mass migrations to cities like Beijing and Shanghai, where dialects are not simply indicators of class—all classes speak dialects—but natural reflections of regional identities. In this context, theatre can embrace dialects as vehicles for cultural representation, offering a richer, more nuanced way to connect with audiences and express diverse regional experiences.

Alongside this evolving view of dialects, I believe the function of dialects to convey identity themes in theatre aligns with the concept of *heteroglossia*, a term named by Bakhtin to describe the multiplicity of socio-ideological discourses, languages, and speech genres that penetrate and are performed through utterance.[3] Human identity is often complex, shaped by interactions with diverse cultural and linguistic contexts. For instance, when an entire play is presented in one dialect, the dialect itself may not become a notable form of artistic expression but simply a tool for communication. However, when different characters use different dialects or when a single character engages in code-switching—some speakers use two or more varieties of the same language under different conditions—this heteroglossic use of language adds layers of meaning to the characters' identities.

[1] David Crystal, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, 6th ed. (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2008).
[2] Joshua Fishman, "Ethnicity as Being, Doing, and Knowing." In *Ethnicity*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 63–69
[3] M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

Common examples of heteroglossia and identity expression include the literary work *The Hate U Give*, where the protagonist switches between African American Vernacular English in her Black community and standard English at her predominantly white school. This shift reflects a change in her identity and the behavioral constraints under different identities. Similarly, the musical *Come From Away* uses heteroglossic codes to highlight cultural diversity, rather than focusing on power dynamics between ethnic groups, emphasizing the richness of human experience across different communities.

I was surprised by the lack of information when researching dialect theatre and its connection to heteroglossia. In Marvin Carlson's work *Speaking in Tongues—— Language at Play in the Theatre,* he also pointed out the indifference of theatre historians to dialect theatre.[4] I was astonished by the lack of research on the heteroglossic dialect theatre that employs theatre for cultural expression. This oversight is particularly striking in the context of China, a country with such linguistic and cultural diversity, where dialects offer ample opportunities for theatre artists and scholars to explore identity and expression.

This paper aims to suggest the extended possibilities of applying dialects in theatre, particularly in the context of Chinese heteroglossic theatre. After reviewing existing literature on heteroglossia theatre and failing to find a term that adequately defines dialect theatre used for identity expression, I propose the concept of *multidialectal theatre*. A prime example of multidialectal theatre in China is Stan Lai's play *The Village* (2008), which delves into the cultural identity struggles of three generations living in a military dependents' village in Taiwan. The play features over ten Chinese dialects, authentically recreating the linguistic landscape of the village. The use of dialects in *The Village* is not just for authenticity; it is central to portraying the villagers' identity struggles, particularly the children who grow up in the village and are often referred to as "third-culture kids." Through the diverse dialects, Lai captures the complexities of life in the dependents' villages, while reflecting broader cultural and identity issues in contemporary Chinese society.

Drawing on my own experience watching *The Village* in July 2024 in Shanghai and analyzing its script, I will explore the question: *How does Stan Lai's The Village use heteroglossia and dialect to explore cultural identity issues in contemporary Chinese theatre?*

2. Historical background of *The Village*

2.1 The history of the military dependents' village

The Village records the stories of a special community in Taiwan, China: the military dependents' villages. These villages were established in the aftermath of the Chinese Civil War (1945–1949), when the Kuomintang (KMT), led by Chiang Kai-shek, was defeated by the Communist Party of China (CPC) and retreated to Taiwan. Along with government officials and KMT soldiers, many of their families fled to Taiwan. Due to the urgency of the situation, most of the soldiers and officers were unable to contact their families or inform them of the specifics before fleeing across the Taiwan Strait.

At the time, the KMT authorities believed that they could quickly regroup and launch a counterattack to reclaim the mainland. They expected a brief stay in Taiwan, so the military

[4] Marvin Carlson, *Speaking in Tongues* (University of Michigan Press, 2010), 67.

families were settled in temporary housing in an empty area of Taipei. However, the "counterattack the mainland China" plan didn't succeed as the KMT expected and ended in 1972.[5] They continued living in what were initially considered temporary residences for decades. The houses formed a special community in Chinese history called the military dependents' village.[6]

As mentioned, since KMT created the expectation of returning to the mainland, everyone hoped to reunite with their families and return to their hometown soon, building their houses simply and crudely. However, their dream fell through after the plan was bankrupt. Moreover, the tense relationship between Taiwan and mainland China made their dreams even more unrealistic, evoking deep nostalgia and sorrow for the villagers. Since then, the village residents have started to repair their houses, making them more comfortable like homes.

The military dependents' villages became an essential part of Taiwan's social fabric. By 1951, there were 172 such villages in Taiwan, housing approximately 21,342 families—about 19.4% of Taiwan's foreign population.[7]

As Taiwan's economy prospered in the 1970s and 1980s, the children of these villagers grew up and aspired to leave the villages for broader opportunities in the cities. After the first group of children with the courage to venture into the outside world left the villages, more and more left this once-closed community. Now, the children who grew up in these villages are spread throughout Taiwanese society, making the military dependents' village an integral part of modern Taiwanese culture.

However, it declined as more of the second generation left the villages. Many of the houses, built hastily and simply in the 1950s, became dilapidated as they aged. By the mid-1990s, with fewer residents and more houses in disrepair, the Taiwanese government passed the "Old Military Dependents' Village Reconstruction Act" in 1996, marking the demolition of these villages and rendering them a part of history.

2.2 Multiculture and multidialectal environment in the military dependents' village

The military villages naturally form a multicultural environment, containing people from all regions in mainland China, including Shandong, Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Sichuan. There are various cooking styles in the villages, shown in *The Village*, where people bring foods from their hometown and share local dishes with their neighbors; there are various customs and dialects. As *The Village* presents, there are Mandarin dialects, such as the Beijing dialect, and Wu dialect, such as the Shanghai dialect. Since the dialects from the mainland and the local Minnan dialect in Taiwan are too distinct language systems, the villagers could hardly communicate with the locals, leading to a relatively closed environment. The villagers formed a closed and intimate neighborhood, exchanging each other's culture, the communication of these languages has resulted in the fusion of languages, and the most distinctive words and

[5] Sina, "东山岛战斗：蒋介石反攻大陆梦破碎（2）," https://sina.cn/, October 17, 2013, https://baike.baidu.com/reference/11049202/533aYdO6cr3_z3kATPeJyqiiMi2WP9Wt6ODXWuNzzqIP0XOpQIf2Tocg-Zks9_lmWgjEvdZhbpkXnaegXRgEregScew2X7QigHf4TDLBzbnh_ts0mb5GvckbHPBL.

[6] 张云鹏, "浅析台湾眷村语言," *当代教育实践与教学研究* 16, no. 12 (December 2016), https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.2095-6711.2016.12.484.

[7] 李廣均, "臺灣「眷村」的歷史形成與社會差異：列管眷村與自力眷村的比較," *臺灣社會學刊* 2015, no. 57 (September 2015): 129–72, https://doi.org/10.6786/tjs.201509_(57).0004.

expressions in each dialect have converged together, forming a heteroglossic "village language."[8]

3. Defining Multidialectal Theatre

After watching *The Village*, which uses more than ten Chinese dialects to simulate the linguistic environment in the military dependents' villages, I found it difficult to categorize it within existing theatre frameworks based on its linguistic features. Possible terms I found that are close to *The Village* are *multilingual theatre*, *dialect theatre,* and *multicultural theatre*. However, none of these fully capture the nuanced way in which dialects are used in the play.

3.1 Multilingual theatre

As section two showcased, the heteroglossic use of dialects in *The Village* is indeed a reflection of the multidialectal environment in Taiwan. In an article by John B. Weinstein, *Multilingual Theatre in Contemporary Taiwan*, he introduces Taiwanese plays similar to *The Village* and the formation of this type of theatre in Taiwan. He mentioned that since the early 1980s, theatre artists in Taiwan proposed to create a unique theatre that relates to their lives, and the inspiration for this kind of play stems from the variety of languages spoken every day in Taiwan. In John's work, he called this type of theatre "multilingual theatre."[9] He explained that these works "do not wholly substitute another language for the national language Mandarin but instead combine Mandarin with other languages within a single play, a single scene, or even within a single conversation."[10]

This is the first time this kind of theatre is defined by its linguistic property. In another scholarly paper by Diana Milree Garles, written in 2011, she mentions that the only source using "multilingual theatre" is John's work,[11] indicating a lack of discussion on this definition of multilingual theatre. John argues that "multilingualism is a necessity, not just a clever gimmick to sell more seats,"[12] which, in my opinion, captures the core of this kind of play. In this kind of theatre, dialects are not used to evoke laughter as a humorous tool and solely attract more local audiences but digging into "the intertwined issues of language and identity hover beneath the surface of the play."[13] This understanding leads us to the discussion of *stage dialect*. *Stage dialect* is a concept introduced by Jerry Blunt: "a normal dialect altered as needed to fit the requirements of theatrical clarity and dramatic interpretation."[14] That is, to my understanding, the type of theatrical usage of dialects that is somewhat just "a clever gimmick to sell more seats." Angela Pao has expressed her concern regarding stage dialect, in which the foundation is technical skill without significant engagement with the culture behind the dialect, which has the potential to lead to ethnic or racial stereotypes.[15] Both John and Angela's arguments highlight the importance of seeing the value of culture represented by the dialects when using them in theatrical creation, and again question the current definition of various theatrical terminologies

[8] 张云鹏, "浅析台湾眷村语言," *当代教育实践与教学研究* 16, no. 12 (December 2016), https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.2095-6711.2016.12.484.
[9] John B. Weinstein, "Multilingual Theatre in Contemporary Taiwan," *Asian Theatre Journal* 17, no. 2 (2000): 269–70, https://doi.org/10.1353/atj.2000.0026.
[10] Same as 9.
[11] Diana Garles, "Multilingual Theatre: Community Value and Future Education Multilingual Theatre: Community Value and Future Education Necessity Necessity," 2011.
[12] Same as 9.
[13] Same as 9.
[14] Jerry Blunt, *Stage Dialects* (Woodstock, Ill.: Dramatic Pub. Co, 1996).
[15] Angelo Chia-yi Pao, "False Accents: Embodied Dialects and the Characterization of Ethnicity and Nationality," *Theatre Topics* 14, no. 1 (2004): 353–72, https://doi.org/10.1353/tt.2004.0008.

that do not consider this function of dialects. Despite this contributive understanding, the term *multilingual theatre* still requires further discussion due to John's work's lack of justification and explanation.

Developed from John's work and other related studies, Diana defined multilingual theatre as "the use of language(s) foreign to the target audience as a theatre convention. Beyond linguistic communication, language itself is being used purposefully to affect the audience in some manner. Where there is language, culture usually follows, and vice versa." In this definition, Diana emphasizes the cultural meaning of the dialects but constrains the heteroglossia in the play to "language(s) foreign to the target audience." Although this definition aligns with the description of dialects by Marvin: "Dialects, like foreign languages, provide a potential disruption of the normal assumption that a theatre will utilize the same language as its surrounding culture,"[16] the use of "language" is still questionable, especially Diana spends most of her time discussing multilingual theatre using foreign languages in her work despite her reference to John's work about multidialectalism in the plays.

The boundary between language and dialect is ambiguous; however, there are differences. I want to quote a definition of *dialect* from Crystal's standard work, the *Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*.

> *A regionally or socially distinctive variety of language, identified by a particular set of words and grammatical structures. Spoken dialects are usually also associated with a distinctive pronunciation, or accent. Any language with a reasonably large number of speakers will develop dialects, especially if there are geographical barriers separating groups of people from each other, or if there are divisions of social class. One dialect may predominate as the official or standard form of the language, and this is the variety which may come to be written down. The distinction between "dialect" and "language" seems obvious: dialects are subdivisions of languages.*[17]

As Crystal concluded, dialects are subdivisions of languages. Moreover, Marvin has mentioned the general assumption that different dialects of the same language are mutually intelligible further differing between "multilingual" and "multidialectal." Therefore, the phrase *multilingual theatre* might fit better with plays that use multiple distinct languages that are not mutually understandable by each speaker, such as English and Chinese, Dutch and English. And plays like *The Village* that use multiple dialects of the same language don't fit this term.

However, I need to make clear for special cases in *The Village* about the lack of intelligibility between some dialects it used. In this play, many plots mention that the villagers could not understand each other's "language." That is because of the complicated language system in China. Mandarin, the national language, has ten general types of dialects that share similar linguistic properties such as pronunciation and semiotic rules,[18] and under each type, there are more subdivisions based on different regions. In other words, the dialects under each type are basically intelligible, while those under different categories might be hard to communicate across. For example, the Minnan dialect spoken by *Mrs. Zhu* in *The Village* belongs to the Min Dialect. This category is very different from other categories, such as the Mandarin dialects,

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[16] Marvin Carlson, *Speaking in Tongues* (University of Michigan Press, 2010), 62.
[17] David Crystal, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, 6th ed. (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2008).
[18] 中华人民共和国教育部, "中国语言文字概况（2021 年版） - 中华人民共和国教育部政府门户网站," www.moe.gov.cn, 2021, http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_sjzl/wenzi/202108/t20210827_554992.html.

including the Shandong dialect spoken by Mr. Zhu. Clarifying this point, I want to make clear that the intelligibility between dialects is an essential characteristic that differs between dialect and language, but it is not a necessity for dialects of the same language. Although the spoken dialects might be unintelligible to each other, the dialects share the same written language, and what really distinguishes a dialect from a language is whether it establishes a recognized cultural sovereignty over a group of speakers.[19]

3.2 Dialect theatre

3.2.1 Three types of dialect theatre

Another term related to the usage of dialects in *The Village* is dialect theatre. However, after exploring the various understandings of this term, I still find it inaccurate to describe the type of theatre *The Village* belongs to. As Marvin discussed in his book, there are three types of dialect theatre.

The most used understanding of dialect theatre is theatre created for a particular dialect community and plays in this tradition normally utilize that dialect throughout. However, for this type of dialect theatre, the language itself is not normally a central concern of the play,[20] meaning that the use of dialects doesn't really influence the generation of meaning.

The second type, which provides the most common use of dialects in theatre, utilizes the nature of dialects as a subdivision of language, often emphasizing "the tension-filled power relationship"[21] between the characters who speak dialects and those who speak standard languages.

The third form, "more common in earlier times and today than in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,"[22] has characters in the same play speaking various dialects. Although the description of this kind of dialect theatre underlines the heteroglossic feature, it is similar to the type of theatre that *The Village* belongs to. However, as highlighted by Marvin, the power relationship of the dominant and the subservient language is often foregrounded in such a mixing of dialects. He mentioned that "in earlier periods, competing dialects were more commonly used as a kind of theatrical shorthand to suggest or reinforce particular character types, usually for comic purposes."

3.2.2 The relationship among dialects in *The Village*

The heteroglossic feature of this play denies the possibility of categorizing it under the first form. Although the Taiwan locals exclude the first-generation villagers and there seems to be a difference between the dialects they spoke, dialects and Taiwan-accented Mandarin, the second generation also got alienated despite speaking the same Taiwan-accented Mandarin. This indicates that the purpose of introducing the dialects is not to show the power relationships between the dialects and standardize the language. Moreover, the heteroglossia of the dialects is even less of a matter of power differences. In Stan Lai's description of the whole village, the regional discrimination caused by dialects is not taken as the main theme in the neighborhood relations of the village. Once again, the use of dialects in the play is just like what John, Diana, and Angela emphasize, focusing on the culture represented by the dialects. Therefore, based

[19] Marvin Carlson, *Speaking in Tongues* (University of Michigan Press, 2010), 63.
[20] Same as 19.
[21] Marvin Carlson, *Speaking in Tongues* (University of Michigan Press, 2010), 64.
[22] Same as 21.

on Marvin's categorization of dialect theatre, this term is also unsuitable for the type of theater I seek to identify.

3.3 Multicultural theatre

I incorporate the discussion of multicultural theatre because of the connotation of "multicultural". Since I emphasize that the type of theatre I'm targeting values cultural expression, *multicultural theatre* seems suitable. However, this term refers to mixing theatrical conventions in one play. Since every culture has its unique way of storytelling and theatrical traditions, these varying practices, with their distinct narrative styles, acting techniques, and production elements, refer to *multicultural theatrical practices*.[23] Being a term of dramaturgy, it deviates from what we're searching for.

3.4 Defining Multidialectal Theatre

After exploring the definition of multilingual and dialect theatre, the problem is clear: none of the defined theatre genres incorporate the type of theatre that uses multiple dialects for cultural and identity expression. Although I could just add this kind of theatre as the fourth explanation of *dialect theatre* based on Marvin's interpretation, I think the heteroglossic feature of this type of theatre is overlooked or weakened in this term. As argued before, I assertively believe that the cultural expression of dialects can only be fully unfolded through heteroglossia.

Hence, I propose to define a new term based on John and Diana's work, *Multidialectal Theatre*, for this special usage of dialects in theatre. *Multidialectal Theatre* refers to the theatre that uses multiple dialects of the same language in the same play to reveal a diverse linguistic and cultural environment of the setting and discuss the topics of identity recognition and cultural expression. It emphasizes how dialects, and languages in general, function as carriers of culture and the influence of dialects and languages in shaping people's identity.

Both multilingual and multidialectal theatre can be categorized under the broader term of *heteroglossic theatre*, sharing the cultural-emphasis characteristic while maintaining an accurate division of language and dialect. Nevertheless, multidialectal theatre cannot be considered a subdivision of multilingual theatre following the explanation that "dialects are subdivisions of languages." Another concern would be the cases that both contain multilingualism and multi-dialectalism. For example, *The Village* uses English for several lines and English songs. Addressing this issue, I would say that multilingualism and multi-dialectalism are not mutually exclusive; they can exist simultaneously. However, defining a play to be multilingual or multidialectal depends on the creator's emphasis. In the case of *The Village*, the use of English is a subtopic and does not function as the core of this play. If the play has a dual emphasis, it could be simply referred to as a heteroglossic theatre.

Then, why introduce multilingual and multidialectal theatre but not merge them into the heteroglossic theatre? Both dialects and languages have profound meaning in cultural expression and significance in daily life. By separating the two terms, I also want to advocate for attention to dialects and the use of dialects in theatre.

4. Analysis of Multidialectal and Cultural Elements in *The Village*

[23] Captitles, "Cross-Cultural Dramaturgy: Multicultural Theatre," www.captitles.com, n.d., https://www.captitles.com/library/cross-cultural-dramaturgy-guide-to-multicultural-theatrical-practices.

The Village is a quintessential example of multidialectal theatre, and analyzing its use of heteroglossic dialects offers a unique opportunity to explore how dialects can convey more nuanced and profound expressions of culture and identity. Through this analysis, I will examine the various ways dialects are employed in the play, focusing on how shifts in dialect within a single character reflect changes in identity or the complexity of multiple identities. Additionally, I will explore how dialect usage differs across the two generations, shedding light on the evolving significance of dialects in shaping both personal and collective identities within the context of Taiwan's military dependents' villages. This analysis aims to demonstrate the powerful role of dialects in multidialectal theatre *The Village* as tools for exploring the intersections of language, culture, and identity.

4.1 The shift in dialect within a single character: the complexity of cultural identity

Behind the dialects lies nostalgia, and *The Village* authentically recreates the multidialectal characteristics of the military dependents' villages. The play features over eleven distinct dialects, making it a quintessential example of multidialectal theatre. This heteroglossic approach not only establishes the authenticity of the military dependents' village but also vividly depicts the complex cultural identities of its inhabitants.

The first act portrays 1949-1950 when the first generation of villagers arrived in Taiwan from mainland China. In this act, a variety of dialects emerge onstage. For example, Mr. and Mrs. Zhao speak standardized Beijing Mandarin, Mr. Zhu speaks Shandong dialect, Mrs. Zhu speaks Minnan dialect, Ning Zhou has a Shanghai accent, and Grandma Qian speaks Tianjin dialect. In the second act, the second generation is born and raised with accents differing from their parents. As people from different linguistic backgrounds form relationships with one another, their accents and their emotional connection to this land gradually change with the passing of time and cultural integration.

4.1.1 Character development through linguistic changes and multidialectal dialogues

A key character who illustrates the evolving role of dialect in shaping identity is Mrs. Zhu. Initially, she is the only Taiwanese villager speaking the Minnan dialect, which creates an immediate barrier between her and the other mainland Chinese villagers who predominantly speak Mandarin. Mrs. Zhu's linguistic journey mirrors her own process of cultural adaptation and identity transformation.

Early in the play, she speaks in the Minnan dialect, and her emotional connection to her homeland is clear in her expression of nostalgia. Married to a Shandong man and getting pregnant, she must accommodate and integrate into the mainland culture and lifestyle. In the first act, although *The Village* is in Taiwan, it is occupied by people from the mainland. In contrast, Mrs. Zhu, a Taiwanese, has become an outsider in this "outsider" community in her local hometown. In a poignant moment during a New Year's Eve dinner, she exclaims, "(Minnan dialect) Both my parents are here, but I was thrown out of my home… It's all because of him! (Points at Mr. Zhu and beat him),"[24] Speaking the Minnan dialect and expressing her longing for her family reflects that she is gradually distancing herself from the Taiwanese community as she adapts to her new identity and struggles to find a place in the mainland-dominated community.

As the narrative unfolds, Mrs. Zhu's dialect evolves in tandem with her integration into the village. Initially, she only uses the Minnan dialect and does not understand Mandarin. Over time,

[24] 赖声川, *宝岛一村(The Village)* (中信出版集团股份有限公司, 2019), 20.

she mixes Minnan with accented Mandarin, then gradually primarily uses Mandarin with Minnan for seldom assistance. Finally, by the beginning of the second act, she communicates entirely in Mandarin with a Taiwanese accent. Mrs. Zhu's linguistic evolution embodies her gradual shift from being on the periphery to an integral member of the village. This is also revealed in the way she speaks—when she speaks the Minnan dialect and can't break the linguistic barrier with the community, her acting looks constrained. Her tone becomes more confident and comfortable when she learns Mandarin. The linguistic shift also reflects the social dynamics at play, where language acts as both a barrier and a bridge to belonging.

A powerful moment in Mrs. Zhu's character development occurs in Act 1, Scene 6, during her interaction with Grandma Qian, who speaks the Tianjin dialect. In this scene, Grandma Qian explains that the ingredients for making steamed buns must be adjusted according to the season. Because the two characters can't understand each other, the pacing of the dialogue slows down. Juxtaposing two distinct languages on the stage without real communication through the conversation, the scene creates a sense of discontinuity in the dialogue. However, they try to overcome the language barrier through exaggerated body language, using physical gestures to convey abstract concepts such as seasons. Despite their efforts, this non-verbal communication also fails to bridge the gap. When Mrs. Zhu uses the Minnan dialect to confirm whether Grandma Qian refers to the ratio of ingredients changing with the seasons, Grandma Qian mistakenly thinks that Mrs. Zhu doesn't understand her and decides to abandon verbal communication by demonstrating directly.

However, when Grandma Qian loudly expresses her sorrow for not returning to Tianjin, pointing to the sky and lamenting her homesickness, Mrs. Zhu—who has never understood the Tianjin dialect—senses her deep sadness. In her eagerness, Mrs. Zhu tries to mimic Grandma Qian's Tianjin dialect pronunciation, saying "Tianjin buns" to relieve the sorrow and show her empathy and accompaniment. Yet this linguistic shift by Mrs. Zhu breaks through the semantic barrier of language, creating an emotional connection. When their languages lose the ability to communicate on a textual level, nostalgia—a universal human emotion—bridges the gap between two people from entirely different cultural backgrounds. When Grandma Qian passes away, Mrs. Zhu tearfully tells the spirit altar in Minnan dialect that she has mastered how to make Tianjin buns, and finally, she breaks down and says the words "Tianjin buns" in Tianjin accent. The use of heteroglossia at the end of the first act, focusing again on Mrs. Zhu, a character who used to be the outsider of this community, highlights the breakdown of distinct cultural divisions within the village through the conflict between her linguistic evolution and her original cultural identity. After this, Mrs. Zhu makes a living selling Tianjin buns and always uses a Tianjin accent when pronouncing "Tianjin buns." This character development continues the emotional bond between the two women and the two cultures.

The Village transcends regional languages by introducing dramatic conflict through language barriers and then breaking these barriers through continued dialogue and plot development. It emphasizes the universal language of human emotions. This connection is the core of what shapes the village's collective identity. The dialects, initially markers of cultural division, ultimately become symbols of unity, connecting the disparate cultural identities within the village and highlighting the shared human experiences of nostalgia and belonging.

4.1.2 Code-switching and identity recognition

In addition to shifts in dialect within a single character, *The Village* also explores the concept of code-switching, a form of heteroglossia that reflects the fluid nature of identity.[25] Code-switching stems from a significant linguistic phenomenon known as "diglossia," the situation in which "two or more varieties of the same language are employed by some speakers in different contexts."[26] A typical example of this is when individuals in a community use a local dialect at home or with friends while employing a "standard" dialect when interacting with speakers from different dialect backgrounds or in public settings.[27] This phenomenon is central to the development of Xiao Mao, a second-generation villager who, like many of his peers, is caught between multiple cultural identities. His use of dialects—switching between Taiwanese, Beijing Mandarin, and the Minnan dialect—becomes a marker of his shifting sense of self.

For example, when Xiao Mao goes back to Beijing to visit his grandma for the first time, he says, "奶奶，您的孙子来看您了! (Grandma, your grandson is here to see you!)" in Beijing dialect instead of a Taiwanese accent. Code-switching can be considered as an expression of "multiple and shifting identities."[28] Xiao Mao's seamless transition to the Beijing dialect signifies a search for connection to his family's origin, signaling his attempt to reconcile his dual identities as both a "Beijinger" and a "Taiwanese." His comment about the roads in Beijing being "so strange but so familiar"[29] further underscores this duality in his identity, suggesting that while he has adapted to his current environment, he also feels a deep-seated connection to his origins. On the one hand, he feels a sense of foreignness in Beijing, but on the other, he is deeply tied to his ancestral homeland. This switch in dialect shortens the distance between Grandma and him as speaking the Beijing dialect signifies that they share the same culture and identity recognition. This reveals how language plays a crucial role in shaping and expressing identity.

Similarly, Mr. Zhou switches from a Shanghainese-accented Mandarin to the original Shanghai dialect when he returns to Shanghai to visit his sister. He usually speaks Mandarin in the village to better communicate within that community. As someone raised in Shanghai, I know that the Shanghainese usually consider the Shanghai dialect as their first language. Therefore, this code-switching represents a return to his cultural roots, as the use of the Shanghai dialect allows him to express emotions and identity in a more authentic, unfiltered way.

Another code-switching scene occurs when Xiao Mao returns to the village to ask Mr. Huang to build a coffin for the deceased Mr. Zhao. At this moment, Mr. Huang, who traditionally speaks the Minnan dialect, blends both Minnan and Mandarin in their conversation while Xiao Mao greets him in the Minnan dialect. Xiao Mao's switch to the Minnan dialect reflects his language acquisition of this local dialect, influenced by his upbringing in the Taiwan region. It reveals his respect and attempt to connect with the Taiwanese community, reflecting his dual identity.

This use of code-switching shows how a switching in dialects becomes a tool for navigating these complex identity negotiations. Growing up in Taiwan, the second generation has never gone to the mainland, their actual hometown. Their only imagination of the mainland comes from their parents' description, leaving them a weak identity recognition of their origin. However, they also feel alienated in Taiwan, culturally and politically, since they are culturally Taiwanese

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[25] Kira Hall and Chad Nilep, "Code-Switching, Identity, and Globalization" in *the Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 599.
[26] Marvin Carlson, *Speaking in Tongues* (University of Michigan Press, 2010), 96.
[27] 47. Stephen P. Breslow, "Trinidadian Heteroglossia: A Bakhtinian View of Derek Walcott's Play A Branch of the Blue Nile," in Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott, ed. Robert D. Hamner (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1997), 390.
[28] Kira Hall and Chad Nilep, "Code-Switching, Identity, and Globalization" in *the Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 608.
[29] 赖声川, *宝岛一村(the Village)* (中信出版集团股份有限公司, 2019), 156.

but are still often perceived as "Mainlanders" by the local population. Instead of growing up in Taiwan, it's more accurate to say that the second generation grew up in “the villages.” Weizhen Su, a real-life second-generation villager, describes this sense of liminality:

> *“There is a group of people who have almost no relatives, but many neighbors. Their sense of family starts with their neighbors. During the festivals, every household performs ancestral rites, yet they have no graves to visit. Their parents speak with a strong hometown accent, and behind closed doors, they converse with their parents in their native dialect. When they step outside, they speak various local dialects with the neighboring children in the alleys and at school. Once they leave the village, they speak Mandarin, Hakka, or Taiwanese. From a young age, it's as if they live in a foreign country. The place of origin on their ID cards maps out a miniature version of China—Guangdong, Fujian, Jiangsu, Anhui, Shandong, Sichuan, Xinjiang, Henan, Rehe, Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing... Yet they were clearly born and raised in Taiwan (some are even called "Tai-sheng," meaning born in Taiwan, without ever having left the country)……These individuals are collectively known as the second generation of the mainlanders.”*[30]

Xiao Mao, formally named Tai-sheng, represents the whole second generation. The second-generation villagers, like Xiao Mao, are defined by a multiplicity of dialects and identities—never fully Taiwanese, yet never fully mainland Chinese either. Through code-switching, the characters in *The Village* express this complex and fragmented sense of belonging, revealing how language, as a form of heteroglossia, shapes their identities in multifaceted ways.

“The second-generation descendants, both in the past and now, are misfits among misfits. It's a tragic awareness of belonging to a marginalized group that doesn't fully belong anywhere—seen as ‘waisheng (provincial) pigs; in Taiwan, ‘dumb compatriots’ in Mainland China, and ‘foreigners’ in America.”[31] As mentioned in the quote, many second-generation villagers yearn to leave the village, which I’ll discuss in the following section, and the United States is one of the most common destinies.

4.2 Generational Differences in Cultural Identity through Multidialectalism

4.2.1 Dialect Usage as Cultural Adaptation and Resistance

The Village portrays two generations living in Taiwan’s military dependents’ villages: the first generation of mainland immigrants and the second generation born and raised in Taiwan. These two groups, despite living closely together, demonstrate stark differences in their relationship to Taiwanese culture and the mainland, particularly through their use of dialects. The generational divide in dialect reflects their distinct cultural identities and attitudes toward the shifting socio-political landscape.

The first generation continues to speak their native mainland dialects—Beijing Mandarin, Shandong, Shanghai, and others—even after living in Taiwan for 40 years, demonstrating a deep attachment to their regional roots. Their dialects symbolize resistance to full assimilation into Taiwanese society, keeping their cultural identity tied to the homeland they left behind. In contrast, the second generation has largely adopted Taiwanese Mandarin, characterized by distinctive Taiwanese phrases and modal particles like “了啦” and “逊.”

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[30] 苏伟贞, *台湾眷村小说选* (台北二鱼文化出版社, 2004), 7–8.

[31] 张错, “凡人的异类 离散的尽头——台湾“眷村文学”两代人的叙述.” *Comparative Literature in China* 2006, no. 4 (2006): 49–62.

When the second generation takes the narrator role, they use standard Mandarin, separating the narration from their characters. This emphasizes their Taiwanese accent when they return to the storytelling and act in their characters. The unifying Taiwanese accent among the second generation sharply contrasts with the diverse dialects of the older generation, especially during dialogues between the two generations on stage. For the older generation, each individual recalls their unique hometown from various regions of mainland China. In contrast, the second generation's unified Taiwanese accent reflects their collective Taiwanese identity and a blurred notion of their "homeland" in mainland China. This auditory contrast underscores differing perceptions of cultural belonging between the two generations.

The contrast between the two generations' language use highlights their differing levels of attachment to their cultural origins and how the environment has shaped a different cultural identity of the two generations. Born and raised in Taiwan, the second generation lacks the same yearning for "home" as the first generation. Their Taiwanese accent symbolizes their adaptation to Taiwanese culture, diminishing their identity as mainlanders. Engaging with local schools and peers and learning Taiwanese Mandarin helps the second generation assimilate and cultivate a sense of belonging. Conversely, the first generation's adherence to their original dialects can be seen as resistance to the new environment and Taiwanese culture, preserving their cultural identity. They do not identify as part of Taiwan; their strong ties to their original hometown persist, fueling their desire to return. This longing is evident throughout the play.

In one key scene, the first-generation characters search the sky for signs of home during the Lunar New Year, speaking in their regional dialects. The scene where several characters speak different dialects while searching for home creates a powerful impact, highlighting their diverse regional cultures but pointing to the same place—mainland China. The recurring scene where the men discuss political events under the big tree also reflects their hopes of returning to the mainland. Their conversation about returning to the mainland underscores their deep sense of nostalgia and unresolved attachment to the homeland. By the end of the play, despite having lived in Taiwan for 40 years, the first generation clings to the idea of going back. For example, Mrs. Zhao, in her later years, loses her sanity and recalls her memories of her hometown of Beijing, revealing an unconscious longing for her past: "The ice in Beihai melted; it only slipped away once last year... Arriving at Jinyu Hutong, I look up to see three big characters: De Fu Xuan!"[32] Speaking in madness reveals that in her unconsciousness, there is a deep sense of homesickness and yearning to return home. The contrast between these two generations in terms of multidialectal language use reinforces their differing emotional ties to the past and their varying belonging to mainland China and Taiwan.

4.2.2 Generational differences in the meaning of the village

The generational divide in dialect also extends to the characters' attitudes toward the village itself, which serves as a symbol of both a sanctuary and a limited area. For the second generation, the village becomes a symbol of limitation and stagnation. The younger characters, such as Er Mao and Da Mao, express a strong desire to leave the village and explore the world beyond, whether it's Taipei or America. This aspiration first manifests when Er Mao wishes to meet celebrities in Taipei, symbolizing their curiosity about life beyond the village and their yearning for larger cities. When Da Che leaves the village to participate in a television competition in Taipei and loses, Xiao Mao cries heavily because he can't go to Taipei then. His

[32] De Fu Xuan is the Beijing restaurant where Mrs. Zhao's mother worked at. 赖声川, *宝岛一村(the Village)* (中信出版集团股份有限公司), 166-167.

desperate actions and uncontrollable outbursts reveal the deep sadness stemming from lost opportunities, emphasizing the allure of the outside world to the younger generation. Moreover, Da Mao and Da Niu contemplate eloping to America as an escape from the village, which they view as a trap. Da Mao accepts working in a bar rather than returning to the isolated village. Ultimately, all second-generation characters, except Da Che, leave the village to pursue lives elsewhere. This collective yearning for movement and growth is a natural consequence of their exposure to a broader Taiwanese society, which holds more opportunities than the isolated military village. The second generation is not burdened by the same nostalgia for the mainland that defines the older generation. For them, the village is a place to escape, not to preserve the past.

For the first generation, the village is a space that preserves their nostalgic connection to their homeland. "From missing their home to longing to go home to this is home."[33] This description of the first generation in the play captures the essence of their experience. The new generation mirrors societal progression, eager for advancement and the unknown future. However, the life of the older generation feels as though their lives were halted by war and their immigration to Taiwan. They are left in the past, with their hearts lingering on the mainland of 40 years ago, and the meaning of their pursuit remains in "returning to the mainland." Although they eventually adapt to life in the village and develop the thoughts of “this is home,” their relationship with the village is more of a habitual lifestyle than a deep-rooted attachment, reflecting a complex dependence on a place that safeguards their purest memories of the mainland.

In their self-perception, they will always see themselves as "mainlanders" and view the village as the last place where they can hold onto their memories of home. As an isolated special post-war community, the village enables them to preserve their fantasies of returning and their connection to their homeland. Unlike the second generation, who seek to move forward, the ones who couldn't leave the village were the first generation. If they were to break the village's boundaries and enter Taiwanese society, they would confront the cultural differences and the reality of their separation from their hometown, making it impossible to retain their pure longing for home. Even after the connection between Taiwan and the Chinese mainland, they can’t go back to their longing hometown to live the rest of their life but only remain in the village, as they have been away for too long to readapt to their rapidly evolving mainland home. For the older generation, the longing for their hometown persists, yet returning is impossible. They have become villagers—members of a unique third-culture community.

The two generations' different responses to their multifaceted cultural identities and resistances manifest in their attitudes toward the village: the older generation clings to this space that sustains their aspirations and connections to home, while the younger generation, free from such emotional connection to the mainland, seeks new life opportunities. Consequently, the first generation shows minimal assimilation into Taiwanese culture, as they continue to speak their dialects until the end, representing both a form of resistance and the tragedy of their era.

In *The Village*, dialect serves as a lens through which the complex cultural identities of its characters are explored. The multidialectalism within individual characters reveals their character development in terms of evolving sense of belonging to different communities and

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[33] 赖声川, *宝岛一村(the Village)* (中信出版集团股份有限公司, 2019), 52.

their struggling dual identity. The distinct linguistic choice of the two generations also reflects the generational conflicts and highlights the social forces that shape their identities.

Although the villagers had lived in Taiwan for decades, they hadn't integrated into the Taiwanese community. "For the mainlanders, they are Taiwanese; For Taiwanese, they are foreigners from other provinces. Many of them feel alienated from both the Taiwanese locals and the mainland Chinese, and they feel that they are orphans of and have been abandoned by the era."[34] The quote above is the actual dilemma and situation of the villagers. Due to the lack of communication between the residents of the villagers and those in other areas of Taipei, coupled with the deep longing for their families and homeland in mainland China, the village residents—particularly the first generation—naturally developed a sense of being "Mainlanders (*waishengren*)," leading to a mindset where, no matter how long they had lived there, they felt they could never fully integrate into Taiwanese society. This idea, along with other factors, caused the military dependents' villages to become isolated, further influencing the second generation who were born and raised within these villages.

This generational and linguistic divide in *The Village* exemplifies the play's broader exploration of cultural identity, belonging, and the complexities of migration. By incorporating multiple dialects, Stan Lai not only portrays the lively scene in the villages and the villagers' inner conflicts but also underscores the social and political tensions of Taiwan's post-war era. The play's multidialectal framework becomes a powerful metaphor for the fragmented identities of the characters, capturing their struggles with assimilation, memory, and the negotiation of cultural heritage. In this way, the varied dialects are not just markers of language, power dynamics, or humor but also key elements in the play's larger commentary on the social realities of Taiwan, highlighting the difficulties of belonging in this unique post-war community.

5. Challenges and Opportunities for Audience Reception and Interpretation in Multidialectal Theatre ----In the context of *The Village*

Heteroglossic theatre, like *The Village*, presents both technical challenges and thematic opportunities in how it engages with diverse linguistic and cultural elements. The complexity of incorporating multiple dialects into a single production requires a nuanced approach, both from a casting perspective and in terms of audience comprehension.

One of the key challenges in such productions is the casting of actors to speak multiple dialects authentically. There are two ways to deal with the casting, one is to have native speakers for each language used in the play; the other is to have trained actors mimicking the pronunciation and tones. Both happen in *The Village*, such as the actor of Mrs. Zhu, who is Taiwanese with the Minnan dialect as her mother tongue, and Ning Zhou, who is a Taiwanese actor who speaks Shanghainese. When the actors are not native speakers, they might create a sense of dissonance when the accents are not perfectly accurate.

This did happen when I watched *The Village*. For example, I found the Shanghainese accent of Ning Zhou somewhat "pidgin" during a pivotal moment in the play (Act 3, Scene 4), where his return to Shanghai after forty years is marked by a reunion with his sister. For native speakers, such inaccuracies can detract from the emotional impact of the scene and hinder immersion in

[34] 李沛亮, "从眷村探寻台湾特殊群体的历史," *Historical Monthly* 2012, no. 7 (2013).

the performance. The inaccurate accents might also lead to humor effects which alienate the audiences who are familiar with the language and weaken the effect of dialect for its cultural expression.

Moreover, there are ethical concerns tied to the appropriation of dialects. For the actors who present other languages on stage, it's crucial to consider the appropriation of mimicking the musicality of languages they don't speak and presenting other cultures.[35] To present vivid regional images of the characters who speak dialects, actors usually need to draw on the audience's impression and stereotype to some extent. It can be problematic if the cultural nuances are not explored deeply. A prominent example in *The Village* is the portrayal of Ning Zhou. It's noticeable that his sitting posture is always crossed-legged with his hands on the knees. It contrasts sharply with other characters from the Northern region, such as Zhao and Baoquan Zhu, who open their legs more seriously. (See Fig. 1) According to my interview with a Shanghainese, with the picture and asked him to guess which was Shanghainese, he gave the correct answer. He explained that the elder Shanghainese usually have this cross-legged posture and a confident look because they have the perception of being knowledgeable and modern. While this helps to shape the character's image, it also risks perpetuating over-simplified or inaccurate portrayals if not handled sensitively. "Some stereotypes are unsupported by facts; others develop from a sharpening and over-generalization of facts."[36] If some untenable stereotype is used to highlight the regional identity of the characters but conveys the wrong cultural information, the play may become a booster of regional cultural prejudice and misunderstanding and may also offend viewers from the region. Therefore, applying heteroglossia in theatre presents a technical challenge for the actors and a significant concern regarding cultural appropriation for the creators.

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Fig. 1 Stage Photo of *The Village* (The second on the left is Zhou)

[35] Margherita Laera, "Performing Multilingualism for Monolingual Audiences | Creative Multilingualism," Creative Multilingualism, February 10, 2020, https://www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk/blog/exploring-multilingualism/performing-multilingualism-monolingual-audiences/index.html.
[36] Joseph Boskin and Joseph Dorinson, "Ethnic Humor: Subversion and Survival," *American Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (1985): 81–97, https://doi.org/10.2307/2712764.
[37] Sohu, "宗俊涛话剧《宝岛一村》饰演周宁 精彩演绎乡愁故事_眷村," Sohu.com, December 3, 2020, https://www.sohu.com/na/436035434_120108597.

On the audience side, dialects can create both barriers and opportunities for connection. The most crucial challenge and opportunity for thematic expression in heteroglossic theatre is the intelligibility of different languages for unknown audiences.

Theatre has, in all times and places, been strongly aware of its responsibility to relate to a particular audience.[38] Considering the offline performance I watched in Shanghai, its target audience is mainly the mainlanders who are unfamiliar with the Minnan dialect. For example, I can hardly understand the Minnan dialect spoken by Mrs. Zhu without looking at the English subtitles. Although there is no precise data or evidence to support this, it can be inferred that most of the audience was likely to be regular Shanghai residents unfamiliar with the Minnan dialect. Similarly, while most mainland Chinese audiences are familiar with various regional accents, these accents might be unfamiliar to particular audiences, such as the Taiwanese. Therefore, while Mrs. Zhu's use of the Minnan dialect might not pose an understanding barrier for Taiwanese audiences, other dialects could cause some comprehension difficulty. In some contexts, this barrier can impair message delivery since the audience might miss some important messages or have an overall incomprehension for a large portion of the play that is acted in a language they don’t know.

Nevertheless, the lack of intelligibility for audiences in multidialectal theatre can be intentionally applied by the creator, enhancing the thematic information or building a relationship with the audience with certain characters. In *The Village*, the character Jiguai leverages the concept of linguistic unintelligibility, whose speech is deliberately incomprehensible to both the other characters and the audience. As the play’s script notes, Jiguai speaks with an accent that “no one understands,”[39] and the audience is positioned in the same linguistic limbo. This is particularly striking when the English subtitles display nonsensical symbols for Jiguai’s speech in the offline show. In the original script, all of Jiguai's lines were also presented as gibberish, with the general meaning provided as footnotes at the end of the script. When the audience expects to gain more information from the subtitles than the actors on stage, we are dismayed to find ourselves, like the characters in the village, deprived of any godlike privilege of understanding. The audience, like the characters, becomes immersed in the experience of communication breakdowns, which enhances the play’s themes of isolation and miscommunication. The audience must also rely on Jiguai's tone and actions to guess the meaning. This amplifies the comedic effect when the other characters respond to Jiguai's statements with confused expressions and hasty, inaccurate replies. This is because the audience knows that no one understands Jiguai. The unintelligibility of Jiguai's language serves as a crucial motif in the play, symbolizing the linguistic diversity within the village and repeatedly creating gaps in understanding. As the other characters gradually stop showing confusion after Jiguai speaks and start interacting with him naturally, the audience, who has never understood Jiguai, can more profoundly sense the emotional connections that transcend language among the characters. The audience also seemed to stop pondering the content of Jiguai's speech and naturally joined the conversation as participants pretending to understand. This is reflected in the diminishing laughter from the audience as listening to Jiguai's incomprehensible speech becomes a natural behavior. When Zhou finally reveals the truth with the line, "Understand what? Do you even know what he's saying? We've never understood him in all these years!",[40] it

[38] Marvin Carlson, *Speaking in Tongues* (University of Michigan Press, 2010), 3.
[39] 赖声川, *宝岛一村(The Village)* (中信出版集团股份有限公司, 2019), p2.
[40] 赖声川, *宝岛一村(the Village)* (中信出版集团股份有限公司, 2019), p164.

brings a sudden realization to the audience that the characters were in the same position as us all along, unable to understand the language. This moment of intense connection with the characters created by the designed unintelligibility is accompanied by a retrospective awareness—that the recurring scene "Under the Tree" is not only a symbol of their forty years together but also a microcosm of the era of the village.

As mentioned in the earlier paragraphs, we can see that the design of subtitles is crucial in determining how multidialectal theatre creators connect with their audience. Decisions such as whether to include subtitles, what language to present and how to translate significantly impact audience understanding and pose great challenges.

From the perspective of the target audience, *The Village*'s choice to provide English subtitles instead of Chinese ones suggests that the creators assumed most mainland Chinese viewers would understand the dialects used in the play. Although the performance was subtitled in English, and many Shanghai audience members are bilingual, the English subtitles were likely intended for international audiences who would not understand the content in Chinese. This choice reflects the creator's intent for mainland Chinese audiences to experience the play without the crutch of subtitles. This approach also enhances the authenticity of the viewing experience. As John mentioned, "If people miss words here and there, it is all the more natural, since people in multilingual Taiwan are accustomed to hearing things they do not understand."[41] When mainland Chinese viewers encounter dialects like Minnan, they are, in a sense, living the same experience of linguistic disconnection as the characters in the village. In this sense, the use of subtitles in *The Village* is not simply a tool for translation but a strategy that reflects the multilingual and multicultural reality of Taiwan.

The use of nonsensical, "gibberish" subtitles for Jiguai's lines intentionally obscures meaning for all viewers. This not only creates humor but, as Stan Lai points out, "How do you convey language that no one understands?"[42] The deliberate ambiguity invites the audience to engage with the performance on a deeper level—empathizing with the characters who are disconnected by language, while also experiencing the dramatic tension of not fully understanding Jiguai's speech.

Turning to the use of English subtitles, *The Village* only provides English subtitles, which could lead to comprehension issues for non-English-speaking audience members who also struggle with certain dialects. For instance, in the scene where Mr. Zhu and Mrs. Zhu argue using idioms in their respective dialects (Shandong and Minnan), I, as a Shanghai native with a basic understanding of the Shandong dialect, found it challenging to grasp the fast-paced dialect idioms fully. Moreover, because the English subtitles scrolled too quickly, I couldn't fully comprehend their conversation, which left me feeling somewhat regretful that I missed the full nuance of that dialogue. For native English speakers, the subtitles only label Minnan dialect lines with the notation "(Minnan dialect)" leaving open the question of whether non-Chinese speakers can distinguish other dialects and accents without annotations. Recognizing the existence of dialects in this play is a crucial aspect of understanding the emotions between the characters.

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[41] John B. Weinstein, "Multilingual Theatre in Contemporary Taiwan," *Asian Theatre Journal* 17, no. 2 (2000): 269–70, https://doi.org/10.1353/atj.2000.0026.
[42] 赖声川, Weibo.com, 2024, https://weibo.com/2034325732/Kf9G6j7LJ.

In summary, the multidialectal nature of *The Village* presents both challenges and opportunities, revealing the complexities that creators must navigate when balancing linguistic authenticity with audience accessibility. Utilizing the intelligibility of heteroglossia is an integral element that amplifies the emotional and cultural stakes of the characters' stories. The play's decision to include dialects—sometimes unintelligible—forces the audience to confront the very barriers the characters face.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I reviewed the studies of the use of dialects in theatre, addressing the problem of the lack of attention to its effect on cultural expression and the vacancy of an appropriate term addressing this specific kind of theatre. Interestingly, Microsoft Word and Grammarly continuously remind me of the grammar error of the word “multi-dialectalism,” saying “unknown vocabulary.” But words come after real life and phenomena, and that’s our responsibility to define what we find as “new” and “not defined.” Maybe *multidialectal theatre* won’t be known and recognized immediately, but I believe this is the start of this type of theatre.

The power of dialects in discussing identity issues is explicitly revealed through the close analysis of *The Village*, a classic and featured multidialectal theatre. Accompanied by the character’s development in acquiring different dialects, their change in identity recognition and sense of belonging is reflected; within the code-switching of the characters lie the switching identities of the third-culture kids, feeling the rich texture when hearing the heteroglossia between each character connect the audience to the vibrant and diverse culture of the setting; comparing the perseverance in speaking the mother tongue (dialect) and the language of the living environment between different generations points out the different identity recognition between the two…… This play shows how dialects have such a precious artistic effect more than being only stereotypical and iconic.

Not only does dialect matter to theatrical creation from an aesthetic perspective, but it also fosters the theatre artists to explore cultural themes in their production. After watching this play, I was touched by a quote I read in the catalog I bought after watching the play. It says, “There’s no more military dependents’ village, but there is still *The Village*.” I was so inspired and moved by this quote to see how theatre artists can use this art form, lively art on stage, to preserve the fading culture and memories. Histories will be the past, but theater can prolong their lives. In Stan Lai’s interview, he expressed a genuine appreciation of his culture, Taiwan’s diverse culture in the villages：

> “I firmly believe that the spirit of Taiwan over the past few decades has stemmed from "diversity." This is rarely seen in Chinese history. Suddenly, in a chaotic era, people from all different provinces gathered together and intermarried among those from different provinces or between locals and non-locals, creating vibrant present-day Taiwan. This diversity makes Taiwan more fascinating than other parts of the Chinese-speaking world.
>
> History is very fragile—this is what *That Night, We Said Crosstalk* is about. If Wang Weizhong hadn’t brought up the topic of military dependents' villages, perhaps no one would care. Even if many people did care, they might not be able to write about it or know how to express it, and these things would vanish. Speaking of ethnic groups, I think many problems arise from a lack of understanding. After watching *The Village*, you understand military dependents' villages and develop an emotional connection, and then many problems cease

> to be problems. I firmly believe that Taiwan never really had ethnic group issues. Whether locals, non-locals, Hakka, or Indigenous people, Taiwanese inherently have a unique kindness. This quality is strong enough to ensure no issues between ethnic groups."[43]

Embracing the cultural meaning behind dialects means recognizing our cultures. Back to the discussion of Chinese theatre in the introduction section, I hope multidialectal theatre can motivate more creation in diverse identity-related topics in China. This might be too vague and abstract, so I'll list a couple of thoughts. For instance, let's talk about urbanization in Shanghai, in which lots of residents in Shanghai are not local citizens and have dialects other than Shanghainese. Are they experiencing alienation from the Shanghainese community when they do not speak Shanghainese? And what will the situation change if they learn how to speak Shanghainese? If so, how do they deal with the relationship of speaking Mandarin, their dialects, Shanghainese, and even English? Code-switching is such a common socio-linguistic phenomenon that it deserves more attention and has a vast potential in theatre as a topic.

Embarking on the journey of exploring dialects in theatre, there is a vast space waiting for the Chinese artists. Let's bring multidialectalism to theatre, and let's celebrate our diverse culture.

[43] 朱安如，和廖俊逞, "台湾眷村的光阴故事——访话剧《宝岛一村》编剧王伟忠和导演赖声川." n.d., accessed October 11, 2024.

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