

## Cross-Straits Identity Politics: The Centennial of the Republic of China and the Dramatic Works of Taiwan Director Lai Shengchuan

### 台灣導演賴聲川的作品與海峽兩邊的認同

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The postcolonial critic Homi Babha has spoken about the importance of re-membering the past, i.e. reassembling it out of the disjointed fragments of memory, in the formation of a new cultural identity. With his most famous play (1986) and two films *An lian: Tao Hua Yuan* 暗戀：桃花源 (*Secret Love: the Peach Blossom Land*, 1992) which was made based on the play and the feature film *Fei Xia Ah Da* 飛俠阿達 (*The Red Lotus Society*, 1994), playwright / director Lai Shengchuan 賴聲川 (b. 1954) reconstructs a collective past, a past which embodies not his own personal Taiwan nor his own autobiographical experiences, but rather one which speaks for the nation as a whole and situates it squarely within the diaspora, not just as a subset of the Chinese diaspora, but rather as a capsule central to the diasporic experience. In a sense, Lai brings Taiwan back to center stage. As Tu Wei-ming 杜維明 and other articulators of the idea of a “cultural China” might put it, he returns the periphery into the center. Through a mythic re-telling of the exodus to Taiwan, both by mainlanders and by Taiwanese in *The Peach Blossom Land*, and the re-membering of the era of martial law by a generation so young that the importance of the challenge becomes all the more paramount in terms of time in *The Red Lotus Society*, Lai establishes a discourse of the past and the present wholly unique to Taiwan. In that sense, he goes beyond Hou Hsiao-hsien’s 侯孝賢 *Beiqing chengshi* 悲情城市 (*City of Sadness*). Stylistically, he has shown himself to be an avant-garde innovator, and in this aspect his films are more daring than those of mainland directors Zhang Yimou 張藝謀 and Chen Kaige 陳凱歌. Part of what makes Lai’s work significant is the way he positions Taiwan vis-à-vis mainland China and how he has accomplished this during a period of growing intellectual and political opposition to Taiwan’s inclusion in the sphere of Greater China (sometimes also referred to as Cultural China). With his latest stage production, *Mengxiang Jia* 夢想家 (*Dreamers*), he makes a new attempt at repositioning the new democratic Taiwan, but at the same time we see a questioning of the roles of wealth, art and privilege in society that the new economic and political order has brought about.