

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Churchill wanted to make things happen politically by encouraging a radical change in the society, and she wanted to make things happen on the stage by using theatre in a joyful playful manner to challenge our perception of reality. (Patterson 160)

Caryl Churchill has been well known as a social feminist playwright and she often conveys her close observations and severe criticism about the present society while writing plays. Although many critics take notice of how Churchill makes use of theatrical devices to subvert the prevailing ideas in the society, few of them have paid attentions to those significant social spaces in her works. In *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls*, space is never a neutral void, but a subversive and revolutionary method to protest against the discriminations in society. It is also a potential ground of resistances for those repressed minorities in the patriarch heterosexual society.

The chronotopes in *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls* present the special social and cultural conditions in the 1980s. By constructing the chronotopes in the plays, Churchill demonstrates how time and space interact with people's physical and mental senses. In *Cloud Nine*, the slow seasonal changes in Act One reveal the stasis in the lives of characters while the open space and the fast time shifting in Act Two indicates the subverted gender roles. In *Top Girls*, the chronotopes portray the essential contradictions between women's dual roles as mother and career woman. Moreover,

the temporal and spatial elements of Act Three relate to Churchill's worry about Thatcherism.

Since the 1970s, the social feminists have explored the private-public dichotomy in the patriarchal society. The feminist geographers continuously demonstrate the gendered spatial metaphors and the importance of mobility for women. In this regard, *Cloud Nine* discusses the spatial construction of masculinity and femininity throughout the private and public distinctions. When women are related to those spatial metaphors, such as confined household and family, men are privileged to certain spatial metaphors, such as travel and adventure. The mental construction of traditional gender roles is physically and spatially connected to the private-public dichotomy. In *Top Girls*, Churchill discusses women's impasse between private and public spaces. Act One of *Top Girls* shows that "the price that women throughout history have had to pay for being unique and successful" and indicates that "contemporary women are also paying a price that may not be desirable" (Reinelt, *After Brecht* 89). Among those five guests in the past, although Lady Nijo, Pope Joan and Isabella Bird have transgressed the boundary between the private-public dichotomies, they still have to pay the price to cut off their emotional connection with family and children. For Marlene, a contemporary woman in the 1980s, she is still forced to choose between personal career life and motherhood. In Act Ones of both plays, Churchill indicates that the power hierarchy between men and women represents in the spatial terms, such as spatial experiences, metaphors and imaginations.

Churchill's theatrical spaces are also political because her spatial practices represent how certain social groups occupy some spaces and radically change its original meanings and usages. Through the political appropriation of the physical

spaces, the oppressed attempt to transgress the restrictions between classes and genders. Therefore, these social and theatrical spaces become sites of resistance because they are the ground for those oppressed to fight against the patriarchal heterosexual society. In *Cloud Nine*, the public park becomes a playground where the rigid gender roles are loosened and transgressed. Furthermore, these geographies of resistances are also heterotopias according to Foucault's definition. Like what Patterson comments, "Churchill does not present us with some sort of contemporary utopia" (171). Act Two of *Cloud Nine* is not a perfect utopia because the real purpose of its perfection is to reflect the invisible of those homosexuals in our daily spaces. The female dominated office in Act Two of *Top Girls* is not a utopia, either, because there is no chance for those underprivileged women to work there.

Even though *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls* are written in the 1980s, those issues that Churchill cares about and discusses are still universal in the present state of British and Taiwan. In Act Two of *Cloud Nine*, the up-side-down world does provide more freedom and autonomy for women and homosexual's sexuality. However, after the fixed gender roles are challenged during the 1980s, people begin to feel confused about the new moral system of family value and gender politics in the future. From this regard, Churchill predicts the complicated family forms and the flourishing homosexual right movements in the 21st century. Although there are more and more outstanding career women, it is still difficult to find the balanced point between the dual roles of being a career woman and a responsible mother. Like what happens in *Top Girls*, while many women obtain the high position in the political field or the big enterprises that are originally privileged for men, most of them forget to speak for women's rights. Consequently, Churchill's dramatic devices about time and space are the subversive strategies to conduct her observations and criticisms about the

unfairness in society.