

Chinese Performing Arts

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- From Love to Rebellion: The Textual Adaptations of Xu Jin's Yueju *A Dream of Red Mansions*
- The Female "Xiaosheng" of Yueju
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- Chinese Theatre in the First Half of 2021



国际戏剧协会
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A Précis of Yueju

LI SHENGFENG

Yueju, which originated in Zhejiang and flourished in Shanghai, is a young drama form with a history of little over 100 years. Its development and artistic charm make it unique among all kinds of operas in China, where it continues to have a strong audience base.

The Origin and Early Development of Yueju

Yueju originated from farmers' singing in Shengxian County in Zhejiang province. It began as a form of entertainment among farmers, gradually evolving into a folk art consisting of story-telling and singing. The Emperor Xianfeng's rule during the Qing Dynasty brought about a decline of the rural economy, which forced many farmers of Shengxian to go out singing for their living. At first, they went singing from door to door, and were subsequently permitted to give performances in the teahouses of villages and towns. They usually narrated and sang vivid and interesting rural life fragments or folk tales with twists and turns. The form changed from the single person to double or multi-player performance. This artistic form called "Changshu" is the predecessor of Yueju. The singer Jin Qibing, who lived during the period of Emperor Xianfeng is regarded as the founder of "Changshu". This narrating-singing art was very active in rural areas of eastern Zhejiang for more than fifty years, and freely integrated elements from the local opera styles and dominant Quyi type which was pertinent in Zhejiang.

Around the Spring Festival of 1906, the North and South artists of "Changshu" coincidentally gave performances in the form of drama in two villages of Zhejiang province. Although these first attempts were immature and unrefined, they both received a warm welcome from the audience, which encouraged



■ Stage photos of Yueju *Romance of the West Chamber*

a total transformation of “Changshu” to the form of drama. Thus, experts set 1906 as the birth year of Yueju. However the name “Yueju” had not yet appeared—the newly born form of drama was known as “Xiaogeban” at that time.

After the unexpected success of the performances in 1906 the Xiaogeban actors were enthusiastically invited to play in many villages around Shengxian County. The demand of the market drove other singers in Changshu to form theatrical troupes and give stage performances. In addition to this, more farmers joined the ranks of actors to make a living because of the drought of 1907 in Shengxian.

The development of Xiaogeban was rapid, their influence soon extended to the whole Hangzhou-Jiaxing-Huzhou area. During the ten years from 1906 to 1916, the North and South artists of “Changshu” gradually integrated. On the one hand, they reformed the text of “Changshu”, turning the discourse from a third person statement to a first person statement; on the other hand they developed many new plays through transplantation, adaptation and creation.

Having made some achievements in art, Xiaogeban had been trying to break into the cosmopolitan Shanghai theatre scene since 1917, to seek broader space for development. But because Shanghai audiences didn't like the rough



■ Stage photo of Yueju *The Butterfly Lovers*

and rustic performance of “Xiaogeban” at that time all three official attempts failed. They didn’t give up—on the contrary, they tried to draw inspiration and ideas from mature operas such as Jingju (Peking Opera) and Shaoju to refine their skills, whilst improving their repertoire, music, costume and make-up. For the convenience of Shanghai audiences, they also added some Shanghai dialect to the earlier Shengxian dialect lines. These improvements were very effective. In 1920, Xiaogeban gathered its most outstanding artists to play on the stage of Shanghai for the fourth time and finally gained the approval of Shanghai audiences. From then on, Xiaogeban had a foothold in Shanghai. Two of the representative plays of Yueju, *The Emerald Hairpin (Bi Yu Zan)* and *Butterfly Lovers (Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai)* were born in this period.

Having entered Shanghai, Yueju continued to learn from others, in order to survive in the competitive performance market. The focus of its repertoire gradually changed from short drama of rural life to long drama of ancient costume, and its singing and accompaniment music have been both enriched and developed. In the Shanghai of 1920s, actresses on stage were in vogue. The actors of Xiaogeban, who were all males, inspired by this phenomenon, set up the first all-female troupe in 1923. Yueju thus began the transformation from all-male troupes to all-female troupes.



■ Stage photo of Yueju *The Butterfly Lovers*



■ Stage photo of Yueju *The Butterfly Lovers*

Three Important Reforms of Yueju

After the full outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, a large number of people in surrounding areas flocked to Shanghai's concessions for refuge. The rapid increase of population allowed the entertainment industry in Shanghai to prosper. Women's Yueju, which had completely replaced Men's Yueju in Shanghai became the mainstream of Yueju by 1938. Yao Shuijuan, the representative of Women's Yueju of the time, started the reform with the help of her scriptwriter and director Fan Li. They brought a new atmosphere to Yueju with a large number of new plays with props, scenery and lights imitating the "civilized plays" an early form of western plays mainly in China and Japan. The main Yueju troupes in Shanghai immediately followed her example, which not only helped Yueju to form an original repertoire of its own by replacing a large part of traditional repertoire, but also gradually cultivated a group of scriptwriters and directors.

From then on, Yueju began to form a set of creation and performance modes distinct from other traditional operas of China. In this period, the center of Yueju stage was occupied by "Huadan" (young female characters). Their performances gradually reduced the eroticism tendency that was originally intended to please male audiences. When Yueju won over an increasing large audience with this reform, the changes of urban population structure brought about by the influx of refugees into Shanghai changed the gender composition of Yueju's audience as well: From male dominated to gender balanced, and finally to female dominated. During this period, the name of Yueju appeared.

At the end of 1941, the Pacific War broke out. The "Isolated Island" of Shanghai was occupied by the enemy. Economic pressure forced many people within the drama circle to participate in the creation of Yueju to subsidize their lives. During this period, the actress Yuan Xuefen, who was eager to improve the social status of Yueju actresses, successfully launched the second reform of Yueju. The Women's Yueju learned more comprehensively from western dramas and films, which helped Yueju troupes to gradually form their creative teams consisting of scriptwriters, directors, musicians, stage artists and actresses.

From 1942 to 1949, with the active response of the major Yueju troupes in Shanghai, the artistic characteristics of Yueju were strengthened, the artistic level of their performances were further improved. In 1947 or so, "Female Xiaosheng" (young male characters played by actresses) began to rise. They replaced the dominant position of Huadan on the stage of Yueju. The voice and image of actresses playing men on the stage are better than that of real men,



■ Stage photo of Yueju *The Legend of Zhen Huan*

and their performances accord better with the female audience in aesthetic taste, which consolidated the characteristics of Yueju: considering women's point of view and regarding female audiences as their main consumers.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and with the support of the government, the status of Yueju was unprecedentedly improved, and its influence on its audience continued to expand. The state-run East China Yueju Experimental Company, based on the original "Xuesheng", "Dongshan" and other Yueju troupes, gathered many excellent Yueju artists and created a number of fine and detailed dramas. They represented the artistic image of new China in Sino-foreign cultural exchanges. At the same time, private Yueju companies such as "Fanghua", "Hezuo", etc., were very active in their creation. They staged many wonderful plays and entered a peak period of performance. The young Yueju, the official status of which was promoted to the next highest level after Peking Opera, had a more general recognition among the people. The Drama Reform, which was initiated by the government in the 1950s, which had many negative effects on many operas of China, had a relatively small influence on Yueju because of its rich experience in cooperation with film and

western drama directors.

The Development and Change of Yueju since the 1980s

The next major development of Yueju appeared in the late 1970s early 1980s. For a large majority of older Chinese Xiqu (operas), the revival after the Cultural Revolution was marked by the return of many traditional plays that had once disappeared on the stage. But it's not exactly the same for Yueju. In Zhejiang province and Shanghai, the revival of Yueju presented different forms in keeping with these wider developments.

In Shanghai, the important signs of the revival of Yueju consisted of the rehabilitation of “women’s Yueju” and the reaffirmation of “styled Yueju” founded by famous actresses. In 1979, the Shanghai Art Research Institute and the Shanghai Yueju Theatre Company jointly held the “Yin Guifang school of Yueju concert” in Cultural Square. More than 10,000 spectators watched the concert on site, and an audience of several times that watched it on TV or listened to it on the radio. During this period, some of the Yueju troupes which had been cancelled were restored, and many famous Yueju artists returned to the stage. They not only resumed performances of many classical plays of different Yueju schools, but also launched a great deal of high-quality new plays, which brought the Yueju performance of Shanghai back to its boom years.

In Zhejiang, the focus was on the selection and training of young actresses. By creating new plays and developing prospective new stars, the government set off a trend of “small hundred flowers”. *Five Daughters Offering Felicitation (Wu Nü Bai Shou)*, staged in 1982, was one of the representative works of this period. The work extols the valuable goodness of human nature in a complicated social circumstance by distinct contrast, which resonated widely among the audience.

The performances of Yueju in Shanghai and Zhejiang in this period had different characteristics, but they still had something in common, namely: a strong humanistic concern presented in the works. Although most of the plays were still based on ancient stories, they were more than simple ancient narratives. They exuded the spirit of the times and contained the artists’ concern for the present world.

After 1949, as a result of the government’s promotion, the actors began to return to the stage of Yueju. Differing from the early Yueju period, when all roles

were played by men, the new generation of actors take on only the male roles in the play. Although it had taken a long and difficult period for the audience to re-accept Yueju actors, the co-existence of women's Yueju and men-women joint Yueju had become a common situation of stage by the time of the revival in the 1980s. Because of voice and appearance differences, actors are often inferior to actresses in ancient costume plays, so they prefer modern contemporary theme works. It brought some new attempts to the modern drama of Yueju, but also squeezed to a certain degree the development space of women's Yueju in modern plays, in which the latter had gained much successful experiences before 1949. Since the 1990s, the stage of Yueju has been impacted by various forms of new entertainment. Having entered the 20th century, theatre performances are generally affected by all kinds of online entertainment. Yueju, trying to maintain its traditions, made various attempts in the new trend of the times with its consistent innovative spirit.

The Aesthetics of Yueju

Yueju was born in Jiangnan, a region south of the Yangtze River with high levels of education and a relatively high status for women in China. It found a natural home in Shanghai, a cosmopolitan city with western influences which likewise allowed women to have rights of self-determination which were denied to them by traditional society. The prosperity of Yueju was not only completed by actresses, but also benefited from the support of a large number of female audiences. All these have helped to make Yueju a modern Chinese drama with obvious female characteristics. These characteristics include not only women's perspective of the world, women's aesthetic taste on stage, but also the art of male roles played by actresses, which represents women's expectation of men.

The second aesthetic characteristic of Yueju is the life style of its acting and singing. Other Chinese traditional operas such as Jingju are often based on a large number of martial arts skills. Although Yueju occasionally requires some martial arts skills, it does not deliberately pursue the skills themselves. Yueju emphasizes the integration of skills into the daily life of the characters on stage. The aesthetic purpose of Yueju is to show the inner feelings of the characters by using skills selectively and moderately. The core part of Yueju art is singing. In the same way, it pursues not only beautiful tunes, but also natural emotional expression close to life. Yueju actresses have created many singing styles with a strong personality. These styles led to the formation of various schools of



■ Stage photo of Yueju *Xianglin Sao*

Yueju. Accordingly, the makeup of Yueju is generally close to real life, different from the strong and exaggerated effect of Chinese traditional Xiqu makeup.

As Yueju grew up mainly in Shanghai's theatres and the proportion of martial arts has decreased in its performances, the accompaniment music of Yueju is not as noisy as that of other Chinese Xiqu originated from square performances. The music style of Yueju is generally graceful and fine. The close relationship between Yueju and modern theatre has also made it accept stage technology from a relatively early time. Therefore, the lighting, stage art and other relevant departments of Yueju have been well developed, and have a high integration degree with its acting and singing.

All these aesthetic pursuits have made Yueju a comprehensive art of the stage, which is beautiful and natural by integrating tradition and modernity, skill and technology. The female perspective and aesthetics are also unique among other Chinese traditional Xiqu which have a strong patriarchal ideology. This is the reason for Yueju's continued popularity with modern audiences, especially with female audiences.

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From Love to Rebellion: The Textual Adaptations of Xu Jin's Yueju *A Dream of Red Mansions*

FU JIN

Abstract: Based on the novel *A Dream of Red Mansions*, the Yueju adapted by Shanghai Yueju Theatre is one of the most influential adaptations in the history of Chinese contemporary drama, and has remained a part of the repertoire since it was written. Digging into the textual generation of the piece, that is to say by analyzing the writing process of the adaptation, we can see that the play was heavily influenced by the contemporary theatrical and cultural background of its time, the 1950s, as well as the playwright Xu Jin's own political beliefs. What's more, we are able to discover how the important arias of the play appear gradually through the process of revision. Learning about this process can help us understand the rules and patterns in writing Xiqu scripts.

Key words: script writing, Yueju *A Dream of Red Mansions*, Xu Jin

As one of the most famous novels in the history of Chinese literature, *A Dream of Red Mansions* has been adapted into multiple kinds of Chinese drama and has been frequently performed ever since the Qing Dynasty. This Yueju, adapted by Xu Jin, was performed in Shanghai Yueju Theatre for the first time in 1958, and had an initial run of 54 shows that year with a total audience of nearly 90,000. It was popular from the very beginning and naturally became one of the repertoires of Yueju.

Prior stage performances of scripts adapted from *A Dream of Red Mansions* were relatively limited. Although there were many versions of it in Jingju, they contained mainly highlights and vignettes, with no need to consider the overall structure of the whole story or to ponder over the relatively complete emotional relationship between the main characters, and often what a playwright showed was based on personal preference. For example, Lin Daiyu is categorically

the female protagonist in the novel, but she is not always the heroine in the adapted scripts. Even Jia Baoyu, the most important character in the novel, has on occasion suffered a similar fate at the hands of magpie-like adaptations, and ended as a dispensable minor role on the stage.

The key to the success of Xu Jin's Yueju *A Dream of Red Mansions* by contrast is that it focuses on the romantic relationship between Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu as its main plot. The prominence of this focus was due to the new "Redology" research of the 1950s. Different from the previous studies, which focused more on the relationship between the author Cao Xueqin's life and this masterpiece, the new "Redology" research highlighted Jia Baoyu's position and made the readers realize again that the relationship between Baoyu and the women around him was the actual core of the novel. More specifically, the romantic tragedy between Baoyu and Daiyu was gradually showed to have a sociological meaning in the political atmosphere of the 1950s. One of the reasons why Xu Jin's version has a greater social response than the previous ones is that instead of being limited to the interpretation of this classic from the tastes of the general public, it is interpreting the fate of Baoyu and Daiyu from a broader view that goes beyond their love itself. In keeping with this, "the exposition of feudal ethics" through Jia Baoyu's rebellious spirit was one of Xu Jin's most important creative intentions from the very beginning, and what we are left with is a vital interweaving of love and rebellion.

This can be seen in the structure of the adaptation from the very first draft of the adaptation, written in 1955, where the author attempts to depict this delicate balance between the harmony of love and the discord of rebellion scene by scene. Indeed, from the very first scene of the 1955 edition, "Baochai Chases the Butterfly and Baoyu Throws the Jade", and into the second, "Reading *the Romance of West Chamber*" a dichotomy of twin themes is set. The third scene to the fifth scenes focus more heavily on Baoyu's rebellion, but by the sixth the focus returns to Baoyu and Daiyu's love, emphasizing the fact that their sincere love had not been recognized by the feudal family. After "Daiyu's Death" and "Predestined Love Between Jia Baoyu and Xue Baochai", the story ends with a final scene entitled "Baoyu Severs Earthly Ties", which returns once more to rebellion.

The basic structure of *A Dream of Red Mansions* has been basically formed in this first draft. Although it has undergone several modifications since, the general framework has not changed fundamentally. Carefully analyzing the overall structure, it seems that the author wanted the rebellious spirit to be the core of the story, while the love between Baoyu and Daiyu was almost only the



■ Stage photo of Yueju *The Dream of Red Mansion*

medium chosen to illustrate this theme.

Xu Jin's 1956 revision of the script was further evidence of the importance attached to the theme of rebellion. In terms of the arrangement of the scenes, the first scene was swapped for the more rambunctious second, "Reading *The Romance of West Chamber*", so that the theme of rebellion could catch the attention of the audience more forcefully. In comparison, "Baochai Chases a Butterfly and Baoyu Throws the Jade" seems childish in its playfulness. The details of "Baoyu Throws the Jade" certainly have the effect of intensifying the theme of rebellion, but it was only seen from the specific connotation of the action itself, obviously the effect was far from enough. Interestingly, this arrangement didn't weaken the clue of love at all, since reading *The Romance of West Chamber* can better reflect the spiritual and ideological elements in Baoyu and Daiyu's love. Besides, an important plot in which Zijuan persuaded Daiyu to express her feelings to Baoyu was added to the fourth scene of the revised version, making Daiyu's feelings for Baoyu clearer through Zijuan. From the perspective of love, this plot reinforced the tension between Daiyu, a person with a stubborn personality but unable to figure out her emotional belonging,



■ Stage photo of Yueju *The Dream of Red Mansion*

and the environment. This strong contrast was reflected here for the first time, which was also an important stroke for their romantic tragedy. This detail was kept for the 1957 revision, and not deleted until 1958.

Moreover, in order to show the theme of rebellion, the plot “The Death of Jinchuan” in the adaptations had been purposefully emphasized since the 1955 version. As far as the novel was concerned, the suicide of Jinchuan, a very minor character, was an important turning point to the plot’s development, because it had changed the overall atmosphere of the characters, and Xu Jin’s script also made it the most dramatic turning point of the whole play. On the one hand, “The Death of Jinchuan” was the beginning of the crisis of Baoyu’s free life in the Grand View Garden, and because of her unyielding spirit, Jinchuan also became the first to stand out from a collection of characters with rebellious personalities including Baoyu, Daiyu, Zijuán and Qingwen. Her act of throwing herself into the well demonstrated to the audience the fierce conflict between this group of figures and the seemingly prosperous but actually stifling Red Mansions. In terms of embodying the theme of rebellion, the power of this character and plot is beyond doubt.

However, we can see that the structure of the play is somehow deficient. The plot of the first half highlighted the theme of rebellion, while the second half

highlighted the love between Baoyu and Daiyu, which made the play more or less split. Therefore, when it was published in 1959, Xu Jin deleted the plot of “The Death of Jinchuan” and replaced it with a more romantic one. We can also see Xu Jin’s endeavor to pull the theme from rebellion back to love through his several revisions. The revised version in 1957 added the first scene “Daiyu Enters the Rong Mansions”, making Daiyu’s appearance the beginning of the whole play. This adjustment gave the romantic relationship between Daiyu and Baoyu a complete plot and structure. Later, the second scene, “The Intimate Relationship” was arranged after this one, which created layers concerning the gradual development of love between the couple. The new scenes also gave Baochai a more significant role. The second scene of the revised version in April 1957 is “Recognizing the Gold Locks and Scolding Baoyu”. Here, the metaphorical meaning of “Predestined Love Between Jia Baoyu and Xue Baochai” became the foreshadowing of the upcoming story, and meanwhile, the image of Daiyu was manifested in contrast with Baochai. After the sixth scene of “Whipping Baoyu”, the seventh scene “Baochai and Daiyu Visit Baoyu” was added. Through the comparison of these two girls, Daiyu’s image was more vital and complete. The ninth scene, “Daiyu’s Death”, did not go through any major changes, but the title was changed into “Daiyu’s Burning Manuscripts”, which was more elegant. The last major modification was that the finale was changed from the simple, ordinary and hasty ending of “Baoyu Severs Earthly Ties” to the climax of “Baoyu Sheds Tears in the Lodge of His Loved One”. In this important revision, the eleventh scene after the tenth “Predestined Love Between Jia Baoyu and Xue Baochai” was changed into “Baoyu Severs Earthly Ties”, with the content being greatly enriched. In this draft, the aria of “Baoyu Asks Zijuan” was added at the end, and on the basis of this, the revised version in November 1957 was changed into “Baoyu Sheds Tears in the Lodge of His Loved One and Baoyu Severs Earthly Ties”, adding the famous aria “Predestined Love has deceived me”, which was sang by Baoyu when crying in Daiyu’s Xiaoxiang Pavilion. Till this point, it can be said that all the essence of the Yueju *A Dream of Red Mansions* has formed.

Xu Jin revised the opera twice after its initial public performance in 1958. In August 1958, the fourth revision had reduced the number of scenes, and changed the original seventh scene “Baochai and Daiyu Visits Baoyu” into “Closed Doors”, and then directly followed with “Daiyu Buries the Fallen Blossom and Zijuan Tests Baoyu’s Feelings”. So far, the basic structure of the play had been finalized. The sixth and seventh revisions were made in 1959, and the eighth was completed in August 1961. During these two revisions, Xu Jin had also rewritten the literary film script of the play for Haiyan Film Studio. In July 1983, Xu Jin and Xue Yunhuang co-completed the adaptation of its TV

series. And later, the literary film script in turn influenced the continued revisions of the stage scripts. Therefore, except for those sporadic revisions, the Yueju *A Dream of Red Mansions* had gone through more than ten revisions in total before becoming a classic.

As we can see, the romance part was still the most attractive element. Even after such rigorous revision, Xu Jin was not entirely satisfied, as he remarked that his dealing with the more romantic elements of the script “excessively exaggerated the sentimental love between Baoyu and Daiyu” and “failed to reflect the rise and fall of the feudal society more widely and deeply, in order to achieve a higher ideological value”.¹

Besides the development of the themes of the piece, an analysis of Xu Jin’s adaptation process also shows us how the most popular classical arias in the Yueju *A Dream of Red Mansions* came to fruition.

For instance, as we have mentioned above, Xu Jin had added “Baoyu Sheds Tears in Daiyu’s Mourning Hall” in the 1957 revision, resulting in two well-known arias— “Baoyu Asks Zijuan” and “Baoyu Sheds Tears in Daiyu’s Mourning Hall”. In *Legend of A Dream of Red Mansions* written by Chen Zhonglin of the Qing Dynasty, there was an opera highlight of “Crying in Xiaoxiang Pavillion”, where after Daiyu’s death, Baoyu went to Xiaoxiang Pavillion to mourn and lamented that he “couldn’t say goodbye to her for the last time when she was alive, and couldn’t soothe the coffin and cry with an appropriate level of grief after her death”. In addition, there was also an aria of Baoyu’s asking Zijuan where Daiyu’s poetry manuscript was, which can be regarded as the beginning of the Yueju script.² Baoyu’s heartache wailing, “My dear Lin, I’m too late!” was the climax of this scene as well as the whole play.

The worthiest of appreciation is the classic aria “From Heaven Fell an Angle Sister Lin” in the first scene “Daiyu Enters the Mansion of Rong-guo Duke”. Daiyu’s wonderful way of appearance in the novel can certainly be used in the adaptation of Xiqu, just as the 1957 version of the script had already made it the beginning of the whole play. The antiphonal singing we are familiar with now appeared for the first time in the Yueju *A Dream of Red Mansions* officially published by Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House in 1959. The current

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■ Stage photo of Yueju *The Dream of Red Mansion*

performing script follows the same plot as that in the book: Daiyu appears and meets with Jia's mother, and then Baoyu appears. Jia's mother introduces Baoyu to Daiyu, and Baoyu and Daiyu look each other up and down, and then began singing one after the other, which is different from the order in any previous manuscript. In the original script, Daiyu sang four verses first and then Baoyu sang six. Instead, it had been changed into the arrangement that Baoyu and Daiyu take turns to sing two verses each, forming a typical form of dialogue with two sentences vs. two sentences; the duet starts and ends with Baoyu. Looking at the relationship between these two protagonists, this order was obviously more in tune with their gender, identity and personality. As the starting point of the duet, "From Heaven Fell an Angle Sister Lin" brought this scene to a sudden peak which immediately captures the attention of the audience—and its ability to continue to do so explains why this scene has changed so little to this day.

However, there is no evidence that the final version of this aria was written before the publication of any of the existing revisions, which is cause for confusion in many academic circles. What's more interesting is that the copyright page of Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House had listed the date of publication as August 1959, which contained the extra first four

lines of Baoyu and Daiyu's duet compared with the author's revised version in July. These four lines had already existed in the revised version of 1958, but in the revised version of July 1959, when the arias of Baoyu and Daiyu were broken up, these four sentences were deleted. While in the officially published script, they were restored again and the positions had been changed. This should be the most appropriate arrangement and has been the more generally accepted by scholars. However, given the publishing conditions of that time, the time required for a book to be assembled and typeset to be printed should be far more than one month. Why did the book published in August contain more content than the revision published in July? When and where did such a dramatic change happen?

We may never know—but if the sheer amount of textual revisions of theme and aria tell us anything about Xu Jin's *A Dream of Red Mansions*, it is that there is much still to uncover, and future study may unearth something which to us is currently hidden.

The Female “Xiaosheng” of Yueju

ISABELLE LI

The “Role Type” is a unique performance system of Chinese Xiqu. Different role types are similar to different branches of work divided by the performance skills of actors. Since Chinese Xiqu has developed to modern times, the division of role types has become more and more detailed. Although supporting role types such as “Jing” and “Chou” can still span gender and age, the main role types, such as “Sheng” and “Dan”, have gradually developed into age-based branches. Therefore, the role type “Sheng”, which takes on the main male role, began to differentiate into “Laosheng”(aged male roles), “Xiaosheng”(young male roles) and “Wawasheng”(child roles). In most Chinese Xiqu, the role type “Sheng” is played by actors. However, in Yueju, whose period of peak interest was forged by all-female troupes, “Female Xiaosheng”(young male roles played by actresses) always had strong vitality, and constitutes its own distinctive branch.

1.The Genesis and Journey of Yueju’s Female “Xiaosheng”

In the early days, because the social environment did not allow women to perform on stage, Yueju also experienced a stage of all-male troupes. However, after the May 4th movement, it became an inevitable for women to enter the stage. In 1923, the first all-female “Coban” (archaic term for opera school) of Yueju was opened. This year is then regarded as the birth of Women’s Yueju. Among the first actresses trained by this school, there is Tu Xinghua, who was later known as the originator of Yueju’s “Female Xiaosheng”.

The birth and rise of Women’s Yueju was a product of its times. This is not only because the girl-students of the early practitioners of the form were the



■ The Actress, Female Xiaosheng Ma Zhanghua

first generation of girls with natural, unbound, feet after the fall of the Qing Dynasty, but also because the primary motivation of them, and many other poor rural girls after them, to participate in Yueju was to avoid the fate of becoming a child bride.

Having evolved from Quyi (Chinese folk art forms), the performance skills of its actors were rather weak at the beginning. So, when Yueju tried to imitate major Xiqu such as Jingju (Pekin Opera) and Shaoju, it found it difficult to imitate their repertoire of officialdom or war. As a result it took inspiration and grounding from existing “Family Plays”, i.e. pieces which reflected domestic life rather

than conflict, whose costumes and postures were more simple. That’s why the original repertoire of Yueju is mostly composed of “erxiaoxi” and “sanxiaoxi”, which means simple stories between a young woman and a jocular clown, with or without another young man. Over time, and based on the wants of the audiences, these plays came more and more to reflect marriages and romantic storylines. Therefore, the outstanding position of the role type “Xiaosheng” in Yueju may have its historical contingency, but Yueju’s repertoire composition has also laid a solid foundation for its future development.

The success of the first female Coban inspired the emergence of many other Coban in Shengzhou, the hometown of Yueju. Tu Xinghua, the first generation of Yueju’s Female Xiaosheng, experienced the transition from all-male troupe to mixed troupe and then to all-female troupe. She fully absorbed the performance experience of male Xiaosheng for her own use, playing a very good connecting role. The follow-up actresses of Female Xiaosheng, cultivated by different female Coban, also promoted the development of the Female Xiaosheng art with their own innovations. For example, Li Yanfang and Wei Suyun from the second female Coban, enriched the expression of Female Xiaosheng by performing different types of plays; Zhu Su’e from the third female Coban, absorbed many performance skills from Jingju and Shaoju; Ma Zhanghua, a Female Xiaosheng of the second generation, greatly expanded the influence of Yueju for taking the lead in singing on the radio.

In the mid-1940s, the “technical directors” represented by Kunqu actor Zheng Chuanjian began to appear in the creative team of Yueju. They designed various performance movements and postures for Yueju actresses according to the needs of the plays, which not only enriched the performance techniques of Yueju, but also created the conditions for Female Xiaosheng actresses to gradually form their own artistic styles.

With the development of Female Xiaosheng Art the role type Xiaosheng began to surpass Huadan and gradually became the most prominent role type of Yueju. In the first half of the 1940s Ma Zhanghua had already played the leading role in Yueju troupes as a Female Xiaosheng actress. By the second half of the 1940s, with the rise of several Female Xiaosheng schools such as Yin, Xu, Fan and Lu, Female Xiaosheng actresses taking the leading role had become a common phenomenon in Shanghai Yueju troupes. In the following decades, although the status of Female Xiaosheng fluctuated with the changing times, her influence always remained high.

2. Characteristics and Contributions of Yueju’s “Xiaosheng”

2.1 The expansion of the age of traditional “Xiaosheng”

The role type “Sheng” had already existed in the Qing Dynasty, but the refinement of its connotation is more recent. However, even when “Laosheng” and “Xiaosheng” gradually become two branches of the role type “Sheng” divided by age, their specific boundary is still ambiguous to a certain degree. Most of the Chinese traditional theatre researches think that Laosheng play “older” characters, with no indication of the exact age of “older”. Nevertheless, the age of the characters can be roughly reflected by the beard worn by actors and its color.

Jingju Laosheng actors wear three colors of beard: black, white and grey. Among them, white beard and grey beard obviously belong to characters in their 50s and 60s or even older. Xiaosheng actors play boy characters around 16 years old, because they don’t wear beards, and use real voice and false voice at the same time to imitate the voice of boys around the “voice-break period” of adolescence. Thus, actors with black beards, who occupy a large proportion of Laosheng, play, in fact, male characters in their 20s to 40s. It is obvious that in the traditional Chinese Xiqu, the leeway of the role type “Xiaosheng” is very limited.

The prosperity of Yueju's Female Xiaosheng originally may have something to do with the fact that Yueju excelled at playing love dramas, but with the development of Female Xiaosheng, actresses constantly expanded the performing space of this role type, including the age intervals of the characters. It can be seen from a large number of examples that the characters played by Yueju's Female Xiaosheng are in their teens to their twenties, which is obviously beyond the age limit of the traditional "Xiaosheng". It benefits from two aspects. The first is that Yueju develops the informal role type "Wawasheng" (child role) of Jingju into a real branch of "Xiaosheng", such as Jia Baoyu in the first half of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, Wei Ying before Rebellion of the Tang Dynasty in *The awakening of Dandy*, and Xu Yuanzai in the second half of *The Jade Dragonfly*. The other is that Yueju's Female Xiaosheng had incorporated many characters with black beards played by Laosheng in Jingju into its performance scope. They removed beards from those roles who are not really old-aged and strengthened their youthful qualities according to Yueju audiences' preference for a beautiful appearance, such as Han Shizhong in *Story of Two Martyrs*, Cheng Ying in the first half of *Righteous Salvation of the Orphan of Zhao*, and Wei Wuji in *Lord Xinlin*.

Of course, when the character's age span is larger and a beard cannot be avoided, Yueju's Female Xiaosheng may also perform as Laosheng with a beard, such as Cheng Ying in the second half of *Righteous Salvation of the Orphan of Zhao*, Lu You in his old age in *Lu You and Tang Wan*, etc. Leaving aside the real role of the elderly, Yueju's Female Xiaosheng has gained more performance space through the new internal division of the role type Xiaosheng, which greatly enriches the connotation of Xiaosheng on the one hand and makes the hero of the play show more youth and vigor on the other.

2.2 The integration and application of performance techniques of various types of Xiaosheng

Although at the beginning of its development, Yueju mostly studied repertoire from Jingju, Shaoju and Yaoju, it began in the 1940s to absorb more and more performance skills from Kunqu.

The role type composition of Kunqu is different from that of Jingju. Its role type Xiaosheng is more developed. It has many branches such as Jinsheng (young male roles wearing a civilian kerchief), Zhiweisheng (young male roles with pheasant tail on warrior's helmet), Guansheng (young male roles with court robe), Qiongheng (poor young male roles) and Wusheng (martial young male roles), each has its typical performance movements and postures as

support. Although Yueju has learned many skills from different branches of Kunqu's Xiaosheng, it takes a flexible approach to their use. That is, to choose and integrate these performance techniques according to the needs of the characters. This practice not only makes the characters more realistic, but also more three-dimensional and rich in change, compared with those in traditional Xiqu.

For example, in the first half of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, where Daiyu has just entered the Jia family home, Baoyu is still a teenager, so the actress shows his innocence and vivacity with some temperament typical of a Wawasheng in the



■ The Actress, Female Xiaosheng Yin Guifang

performance. In the second half, as they grow older, the actress emphasizes the temperament of Jinsheng in Baoyu's performance, to show the tenderness and elegance of this affectionate gentleman.

Another example is Prince Roland in *Prince of the Desert*. In the first half of the play, the actress employs some movements of Wusheng. Although there is no need to really start fighting, it can well show the heroic spirit of the character in this period. In some paragraphs of the second half, considering that Roland had regained the throne, the actress adopts the posture of Guansheng instead. Although some adjustments should be made according to the blindness of the character, the footwork and posture should still show his spirit of a king.

Yueju gradually reduced the importance of martial arts during its development, opting to make its performance movements and postures more realistic and more natural, according to the characters and situations. Therefore, skill barriers, which were originally used in traditional operas as distinguishing means, had been greatly diluted. This made it possible for different branches of role types to combine and merge spontaneously, and to form the fluent, natural

and colorful artistic style of Yueju's Female Xiaosheng.

3. Breaking the Stereotype of the Traditional “Xiaosheng”

Although the role type of Chinese Xiqu is only a division of work, each type also has some overlapping personality characteristics. The main characteristics of various role types in Chinese traditional Xiqu reflect the stereotypes of different age groups in traditional society. People in rural society respect age and experience. They believe that “Downy lips make thoughtless slips”—that’s why the characters played by Xiaosheng are often immature and unreliable.

However, Yueju's Female Xiaosheng have broken this fixed mode multiple times, to bring a new image of Xiaosheng to the stage. He is not only handsome and graceful, but also mature and stable in many cases. These characters may have the innocence and loveliness of Wawasheng, or humour of Chou, or the steadiness and careful consideration of Laosheng. They are no longer naive and immature, but sincere, unpretentious, steady and reliable.

This is largely due to the fact that over time the age bracket for Xiaosheng players has expanded. But more importantly, it's because both the actors and the audience of Yueju are mainly women. Therefore, when the actresses portray the image of men on the stage, they consciously or unconsciously integrate their female perspective and thinking.

For a long-time, Chinese Xiqu existed in a male centered society, not only was their target audience mainly men, but also the values and aesthetics conveyed by the repertoire and characters were greatly influenced by patriarchy. However, the period when Yueju flourished in Shanghai in the 20th century was also the germination and growth period of female self-consciousness after the May 4th movement. Actresses adjusted some parts of the text and performance that were not fully accepted or recognized by them only by instinct of women, but these adjustments perfectly matched the expectation of the female audience facing the stage.

Therefore, in the interaction and agreement between them, Yueju's Female Xiaosheng gradually created a new kind of male image with more positive traits. From this point of view, the significance of this new image of young man to the opera stage lay not only in his external image and internal quality which are better than those of traditional Xiaosheng, but also in the modern consciousness of women's awakening behind this image.

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ISABELLE LI

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Yueju of the Future

MAO WEITAO

On the Performance of Yueju

Yuan Xuefen, master of Yueju, once said that Yueju had two “nannies”: modern drama and Kunqu, which not only indicated the particularity of its formation, but also clearly voiced the embarrassment it faced in the field of performing arts. Yueju is still young in my understanding, especially in the field of performing arts. Its performing aesthetic is still developing with huge space for further exploration and growth. More efforts need to be made to make it possible for Yueju to be independent in performing techniques and to create and complete its own performing arts system.

These are my own personal feelings, and they first started when I was the leading character in *The Romance of West Chamber* adapted by Zhejiang Xiaobaihua Yueju Troupe more than ten years ago.

The rehearsal of this play was my attempt to seek richer techniques for stage. Most of the audience noticed the technique—“tizhezi”, which I borrowed from Chuanju (Sichuan Opera) when playing the part of Zhang Sheng. To actually master this technique required painstaking effort. However, the actual problem for me was how to combine this technique which was originated from Chuanju with the part I played—Zhang Sheng, which was originated from Yueju.

I encountered the same problem in my performance in “Peach Blossom Spring” of *Kong Yiji* years later, where I applied the technique—“staggered steps” and “diepei”, just like Master Zhou Xinfang performed in *Xu Ce Go Admonishing Emperor*, which was commonly seen in Qi School’s performance of *Jingju* (Pekin Opera). Such performing techniques are the most appropriate external expression for the internal feeling of *Kong Yiji* at that specific situation.



■ Mao Weitao performed the technique of “tizhezi” in Yueju *The Romance of West Chamber*



■ Mao Weitao performed the technique of “diepei” in Yueju *Kong Yiji*

What was challenging for me was how to naturally combine these borrowed techniques with the original techniques of Yueju, with a view to seamlessly integrating the two distinct forms. We need to draw from other types of Xiqu. What is equally important, or more important even, is to make these elements part of the performing system of Yueju, through which we can enrich and finalize the development of Yueju.

In my performance in *The Emperor and the Assassin*, the fan in the Xiaosheng's (young male characters) hand was specially handled. The fan is the most essential and common prop for the Shusheng (young male scholar) in traditional Chinese Xiqu, which can almost be seen as the mark of the role. Technically, Jing Ke is a swordsman in *The Emperor and the Assassin* rather than a scholar. However, the reason why he is a significant figure in the history of traditional Chinese culture is that traditional scholars have attached new connotations to his behavior. This particular swordsman has cast the spirit of traditional Chinese scholars through his golden promise and his farewell at Yi River. Therefore, I think he is more of a scholar than a swordsman. Yet, Jing Ke is a swordsman after all, whose external image is marked by his sword. I would



not give up on his sword or the natural connection between the sword and his spiritual pursuit.

As a result, I let Jing Ke carry the fan which represents his scholar spirit all the time but in a different way, giving this particular fan the implication of a sword. I expand the artistic expression of the fan by extending its function and the object it implies. Most importantly, the fan which has a wide extension and expression is still the fan of the Xiaosheng in Yueju.

The special charm of Chinese Xiqu lies in the fact that each of its represented professions has its own complete performing techniques, which is also alive and needs to be handled flexibly. Most of the traditional performing techniques could be applied when I played the Guansheng (young male roles with court robe) like Lu You, or Shusheng like Zhang Sheng and Fan Rong. When playing the part of Kong Yiji, I was faced with a greater challenge. As for the social role and the living state of the character, Kong Yiji can be performed as a Qiongsheng (poor young male roles). However, as a Female Xiaosheng (young male characters played by actresses) in Yueju, I hope the character Kong Yiji I played can take on a better public image, which also caters to the aesthetic demand of the audience. Therefore, I tried to fit several external physical features of Shusheng into this Qiongsheng without changing its original profession, making the character conform to his original assumption and reinforcing the positive aspects of this character in the script at the same time. According to my understanding, the character “Kong Yiji” presented on the stage is not only the widely known figure in Lu Xun’s article but also a character in Yueju. He is not only Kong Yiji in Yueju, but also Kong Yiji as a Female Xiaosheng .

Borrowing performing techniques from other types of Xiqu, deepening the connotation of Yueju’s original performing techniques, and even offering new approaches to hitherto standardized professions, all work to advance the development of Yueju. This is what I have been trying to do, and I believe my peers are all trying like I am. This is the historical responsibility our generation of Yueju actors and actresses should shoulder. We are obliged to make joint efforts with our generation or even the next generations to form the performing aesthetics of Yueju, making the performance of Yueju enjoy the same stage as other venerated types of Xiqu .

- Jing Ke, portrayed by Mao Weitao in Yueju *The Emperor and the Assassin*



■ Liang Shanbo, portrayed by Mao Weitao in Yueju *The Butterfly Lovers*

On the Tunes of Yueju

Tune is an important identifying feature of any opera. Compared with its performing system, the tunes and associated musical schools of Yueju are relatively mature. The fascinating tune of Yueju made me so obsessed with its music from the outset that I decided to make it my career—and I believe it is this same characteristic, which has seen it spread to new audiences. The music in Yueju is varied, with different schools having their own advantages. Yin School's tune, which I studied, is one of the schools that specialize in expressing Shusheng's feeling. My singing style unavoidably inherits the features of Yin School's tune. How to inherit and exert the charm of Yin's singing to the largest extent is one of my main concerns in stage performance.

In the concert for the opening ceremony of the 7th Chinese Art Festival, I sang a classic aria from *Butterfly Lovers*. I tried a new approach this aria based on the original libretto while singing. I just made small adjustments to the melody without changing the libretto or the basic musical direction. Fortunately, the



■ Fan Rong, portrayed by Mao Weitao in *Yueju A Family of Book Collectors*

audience accepted it better than expected. This is an improvement based on the successful singing of the Female Xiaosheng in *Yueju*. I have been hoping to build on this and spread this form of singing further, to new audiences.

I, together with our Xiaobaihua *Yueju* Troupe, have created many new plays over the years. Every time we create something new, some core arias will be specially designed and arranged in each play, which express not only the charm of *Yueju*, but also the inner feelings of the characters, such as “The Song of Qing” in *The Emperor and the Assassin*, “The Song of Hui” in *Kong Yiji*, and “Three Kneeling for Books” in *A Family of Book Collectors* and so on. Whether these arias are successful and whether the audience of *Yueju* like them are the significant symbols for the success of these new plays. Revealing the complicated inner world of the characters and maintaining the style and charm of *Yueju*’s singing are not contradictory in these plays. The expressive ability of *Yueju*’s singing is far from fully presented. There is also much room for improvement in the expressive ability of Yin’s singing in *Yueju*.

My singing of *Yueju* experienced three stages: to study and familiarize when I



■ Stage photo of *Lu You and Tang Wan*, Mao Weitao played Lu You(Left)



■ Stage photo of *Yueju He Wenxiu*, Mao Weitao played He Wenxiu

performed traditional plays like *He Wenxiu* or original plays like *Five Daughters Offering Felicitation* in my early years, conveying feelings and ideas through imitation; Stage two, from the first stage of *Lu You and Tang Wan* and *Romance of the West Chamber*, I started trying to make some adjustments to the melody and singing while maintaining the features of Yin School's singing and conforming to the plot of the play to make it more suitable for my voice and strengths. Stage three, from the singing of *The Emperor and the Assassin* to *Butterfly Lovers* and later to *Story of Chun Qin*, I started looking for the melody and singing with a more powerful expression freely and openly, integrating Yin School's singing and my singing with Yueju's genes in this new singing style.

Above are the three stages of my musical handling of Yueju. The more exquisite handling of traditional Yueju melody and the brand new presentation of characters like Jing Ke, Kong Yiji, Fan Rong and Liang Shanbo are not contradictory but rather complementary and indispensable for each other as for the development of Yueju's music. Frankly speaking, my singing is different from the traditional singing of original Yueju, having some differences from those most representative melodies of Yueju. However, I always believe, since music and tune are identifying features of different types of Xiqu, we should always maintain the basic style of Yueju. In the meantime, when we need to have breakthroughs and to develop its expressive ability from different directions, Yueju and its schools should be seen as types, each presenting its ubiquitous charm, rather than mere basic mode and tune trend. This is why classic episodes like "Rove All over the World" in *Lu You and Tang Wan*, "Serving Soup" in *Five Daughters Offering Felicitation*, and "Dust-free Mansion" in *Romance in West Chamber* can be widely spread among all the new works of Yueju, gaining the love of so many fans.

Apart from singing, the spoken part is also important as for the musical tradition of Yueju. As prestigious artists always say, opera is seven parts speaking and three parts singing, indicating the significance of the spoken parts in the performance of opera. It is acknowledged that singing is thriving on the stage performance of Yueju while the spoken part is its weakness. Therefore, I have made conscious exploration in its spoken part over the years, especially paying attention to highlight its stage effect. It is necessary for Yueju to study and refer to other types of Xiqu like Jingju and modern drama in their stage performance modestly and seriously. Successful spoken parts have their own charm, integrating with the musical melody of the singing part with its rhyme and creating a suitable atmosphere for theatre. The rhythmic and fluctuating spoken parts can have a direct and powerful impact on the emotion of the audience, pushing the play to new heights. I tried to use musical and infectious spoken

parts in my performance of *Kong Yiji* and the *A Family of Book Collectors* to push forward the story and reveal the characters. As for me, it is also an effort to enrich the expressive ability of the language and tune in Yueju.

It is not only for my deep love, but also my respect for the tradition of Yueju, that urges me to improve its singing and speaking techniques. It is also from this respect that I will spare no effort to find a more powerful way to perform.

MAO WEITAO

Famous performing artist of Yueju, representative inheritor of National Intangible Cultural Heritage Project (Yueju), Vice Chairman of the Chinese Theatre Association, and Chairman of the Dramatist Association of Zhejiang Province.

Art Has No End

SHAN YUE

More than half a century ago, through his worldwide tour, the Jingju master Mei Lanfang gave the world a chance to appreciate the charm of the male Dan (also called Qiandan, men disguised as women) for the first time. Inspired by this, Mao Weitao, who was born in 1962 and has been singing, chanting, performing and acting on stage for 42 years becomes one of the most distinctive and hard-to-replicate performing artists in the history of contemporary female Yueju.

Unlike Mr. Mei, who was a Qiandan, Mao was a Kunsheng (women disguised as men) in Yueju. “Qiankun(which means the heaven and the earth)” represents the ancient Chinese way of understanding the world. Therefore, “Qiandan and Kunsheng” can also be regarded as a special benchmark of Chinese classical aesthetics, representing the Chinese people’s artistic understanding of the world and a set of transmission procedures based on it.

Different from Kunqu and Jingju which both have a long history, Yueju was born in the countryside of Shengxian County, Zhejiang Province. It was only in 1936 that the word “Yueju” was officially used for the first time in Shanghai. In the 115 years of formation, development and prosperity, although it has been influenced by various arts at home and abroad, the female playing the male is still the unique aesthetic feature of the Female Yueju as well as the most widely accepted form of performance by the audience.

As a well-known Kunsheng actor in contemporary Female Yueju, Mao Weitao has a miraculous, almost predestined, relationship with this kind of art. Since her mother was an accountant at the Tongxiang Movie Theatre when she was young, she used to sneak in to see movies when she delivered meals to her mother. She was infatuated with the film version of the Yueju *A Dream of Red Mansions* and dreamed of making her appearance on the stage and the screen one day. She was admitted to Tongxiang County Yueju Troupe at the age of 17 and chose to perform as a man because her love for Qiguan (original name Jiang Yuhan, a male character) in *A Dream of Red Mansions*. In September 1983, the 28-member Zhejiang Xiaobaihua Performing Troupe, consisting of Mao Weitao, He Saifei and other girls with an average age of less than 18 years old, went to Hong Kong and performed 15 times in 14 days which included three full-scale dramas such as *Five Daughters Offering Felicitation* and a



■ The photo of Mao Weitao

traditional opera highlight at Hong Kong's Sunbeam Theatre. This group of beautiful girls from the Southern Yangtze of China gained popularity in Hong Kong with their youth and elegance, and Female Yueju thus stepped into its "Xiaobaihua" era.

Mao Weitao was trained under the Yin School of Yueju. The performance and singing of Yin Guifang, the founder of this school, was highly praised by many cultural celebrities such as the deceased famous film artist Zhao Dan. The phenomenon of "Ten Sisters" created by Yin Guifang and her contemporary sisters has not been surpassed so far. It still remains an artistic peak in the history of Female Yueju. In traditional Chinese culture, there is a saying that goes; "Once a teacher, always a father". Mao Weitao has always respected Yin Guifang as "Mr. Tai". For her, teachers were like parents. For some time, she found that she had become "left-handed" on the stage. It turned out that Mr. Tai was paralyzed in his right arm because of his injury in the Cultural Revolution. As a result, she could only use her left arm to demonstrate to Mao. Mao Weitao often went to Mr. Tai's home on Huaihai Road in Shanghai. Every time when she left, Mr. Tai would see her off from on the balcony due to his immobility. Many years ago, Mr. Tai gave her a handwritten gift inscribed with "Art Has No End" on her birthday. Mao Weitao framed it and hung it on the

wall of her office where she could see it just by looking up. From an actor to the director and now the chairman of Baiyue Culture and Creative Co., LTD., her office has changed from one to another, but Mr. Tai's "Art Has No End" is always hanging in the place where she could see when she looks up.

Experts and scholars believe that Mao Weitao's performance style integrates inner experience with stylized expression, which is not only the characteristic of Yueju, but also her own pursuit. Early in her artistic career, Mao had tried to use "kicking the skirt" in Chuanju when playing the role of Zhang Gong in the Story of *The Romance of West Chamber*. The skirt kicked away not only embodied the character's internal urgency, but also perfectly displayed the unique beauty of the traditional Chinese dramatic style. Gradually, the original way of expression can no longer satisfy her "greed" for art, she was eager to explore the deeper beauty of Xiqu. Therefore she began to try break away from her old habits of performing by drawing on elements from Kunqu and even modern dance. Folding fans in the hands of the male characters have taken on more meanings in the figures created by Mao Weitao. In "Hanqing", a work based on *The Emperor and the Assassin*, the folding fan was used as a dagger. While in the new version of *The Butterfly Lovers*, the folding fan technique used by Kunqu male characters was superimposed with the rhythm of modern dance, so that the folding fan became an image of the butterfly, symbolizing soul and romantic love.

Strengthening the styles of both traditional and modern Chinese theatre within the context of a greater world theatre has become Mao Weitao's focus in the latter, or more recent, part of her career. As a Kunsheng of Yueju with endless artistic exploration, she tried to deeply integrate her performance style into the classical works of Western theatre. She played the leading lady Shen Dai and the leading man Sui Da in the Yueju *Good Soul of South Yangtze*, which was adapted from German playwright Brecht's *The Good Person of Szechwan*. Mr. Ackermann, then president of the Goethe-Institute China in Beijing, said after watching the performance, "She is the best actress for Brecht".

In 2016, the year of the 400th anniversary of the death of Tang Xianzu and Shakespeare, she played Coriolanus from Shakespeare and Liu Mengmei from Tang Xianzu in the famous director Guo Xiaonan's *Curran and Du Liniang*. One is an ancient Roman hero created by Shakespeare based on historical sources, and the other one is a Chinese scholar who was inherited from Kunqu with a history of 500 years. This exploration was further expressed in her recent pure drama *The King of Oedipus* (excerpt), based on the ancient Greek tragedy of the same name, which she completed in collaboration with director Li Liuyi. As a Chinese female performing artist, she has realized the harmonious coexistence of Chinese and Western theatrical performing forms.

"Art Has No End"—the calligraphy left by the respected Yin Guifang to Mao Weitao is not only a teacher's expectation and instruction to a disciple, but also the portrayal of the current inheritance of traditional Chinese theatre. Mao



■ The photo of Mao Weitao

Weitao, who is over 50 years old but still plays a handsome Kunsheng on the stage of Female Yueju, has always been practicing this principle and is still moving forward.

Personal profile of Mao Weitao:

Mao Weitao was born in Tongxiang, Zhejiang in 1962. She is a famous performing artist of Yueju, a representative inheritor of National Intangible Cultural Heritage Project (Yueju), vice chairman of the Chinese Theatre Association, and chairman of the Dramatist Association of Zhejiang Province. She has won the “Wenhua Award” of the Ministry of Culture of the People’s Republic of China five times, the “Plum Performance Award” of Chinese Theatre three times, the “Excellent Actor Award” of Chinese Drama Festival three times, the “Magnolia Protagonist Award” of Shanghai two times, and many other accolades besides. Through her superb performances, she has created many characters with different personalities and endowed Kunsheng in Female Yueju with a brand-new humanistic spirit and professional charm. Her main representative works include: *Five Daughters Offering Felicitation*, *Han Palace Resentment*, *Flirting Scholar*, *Lu You and Tang Wan*, *The Romance of West Chamber*, *The Emperor and the Assassin*, *Kong Yiji*, *The Family of Book Collectors*, *the new version of The Butterfly Lovers*, *Good Soul of South Yangtze*, *The Moon Over a Fountain*, *Kou Liulan and Du Liniang*, *The King of Oedipus* (excerpt).

SHAN YUE

Playwright and Deputy Head of the former Zhejiang Xiaobaihua Yueju Troupe.

Yuan Xuefen and “Yuan School” Art

YANG HAORAN

Yueju has a history of more than a hundred years, which has developed from the country folk accompanied by a pair of wooden board and a small drum to now one of the most influential drama in China. Yuan Xuefen, the figure of such a countermarch person, reformer, and evangelist cannot be ignored when talking about the development of Yueju. Born in a rural teacher's family in Zhejiang province in 1922, she studied Yueju at the age of 11 and started to perform in theaters three years later. In 1938, she went to Shanghai and made her mark soon. In 1942, she started the reform of Yueju. She was the founder and practitioner of the “New Yueju”. After the founding of new China, she served as the president of Shanghai Yueju House and devoted herself to the cultivation and pioneering of talents for a long time. She and her “Yuan school” art have made indelible contributions to the development of Yueju.

The Countermarch Person of Time

Unlike most artists in the world, Yuan Xuefen had no choice in life but to dive into theatre related careers. This is a tragedy of a generation, but the fortune of the artistic era.

A troupe came to the village when Yuan was 11 years old. She was so young that she naively thought that performing with them would change her fate; but in reality, the journey was full of hardships. Yuan's father was a local teacher. He taught her to be self-reliant ever since she was a child but he believed that being an actress is a menial job. He claimed to disown Yuan if she went to learn Xiqu, but Yuan went anyway. Since her father could not persuade her, he had to consent and told her, “If you despise yourself, others will despise you as well”. Perhaps it was because of the low status of the Xiqu actors, or



■ Stage Photo of *Xianglin Sao*; Yuan Xuefen as Xianglin Sao

feeling sympathetic about her peers' degrade themselves, she kept her self-respect since she became a minor celebrity. She declined all the banquets on the pretext of being vegetarian. She also declined invitations to perform outside the theater, such as hall performances. She insisted on keeping her respect for the sacred stage and the dignity of being an artist, and thus kept her backstage closed to any type of visitors.

The early repertoires of Yueju were almost entirely about talented men and beautiful ladies, with which Yuan was very displeased. Her ideal was to create works with ideological connotation and high value. At that time, she read Lu Xun's novel *Blessing*. The story took place near her hometown, Shaoxing. It reminded her of the tragic fate of countless women around her, so she dedicated herself in putting it on the stage of Yueju. With the help of Xu Guangping, Lu Xun's widow, and a large number of enthusiasts, *Xianglin Sao* was staged on the tenth anniversary of Lu Xun's death (1946). It aroused great reactions in society along with some opposition. Although she was brutally attacked with feces on the way to a radio broadcast and received threatening letters with bullets in it, she was fearless because she was used to oppositions from her generation.

The Reformer of Yueju

The qualitative change of the old and new Yueju began with the movement of "new Yueju" initiated by Yuan in 1942, which commenced a whole new era for this type of Xiqu. Yuan's reform was mainly reflected in two aspects: the improvement of the tune system along with the innovation of a new style of performing structure.

The original musical form of Yueju was relatively simple. It mainly used the [Sigong tune] produced on the basis of folk tunes. This tune was free, flexible and fast-paced, but the performance was too simple to portray complex emotions. However, Yueju artists at that time had long been accustomed to it. In 1943, Yuan founded "Chi tune" along with the accompanist Zhou

Baocai, when rehearsing the play *Xiang Fei*. The appearance of this style of singing made Yueju a popular genre. After the founding of new China, Yuan successively created some new tunes based on the needs of the performing script. At the same time, she actively absorbed the outstanding tunes of other types of Xiqu, which greatly enriched the expressiveness of Yueju, and established and improved the musical system of it.

Yuan's reforming ideas were more thorough in the form of performance organization. She has hired full-time directors, screenwriters, and stage artists to set up a stage management department since 1942, and replaced the traditional impromptu performance with a complete script rehearsal. She then gradually established a modern art management mechanism by using three-dimensional scenery, stage lighting, music and sound facilities. This was not only an innovation of Yueju, but also an innovation in the field of Xiqu.

The Preacher of Art

Yuan Xuefen began early on to thinking and recognizing the importance of cultivating Yueju artists. In 1947, she launched a joint charity performance in order to make sure that Yueju had its own theater for professional performances and school for training talents. Ten famous actresses including Yin Guifang, Xiao Dangui and Zhu shuizhao responded to it actively. This is the famous charity performance *In Love with Mountains and Rivers*, performed by "ten sisters", in the history of Yueju. After the founding of New China, the inheritance of the art of Yueju and the cultivation of talents proceeded like a raging fire under her leadership.



■ "Ten Sisters" of Yueju



■ "Ten Sisters" of Yueju on stage



■ Stage Photo of *Madam Yu Ching*,
Fang Yafen as Yu Ching

In the old days, there was an unwritten rule in the operatic circle that the relationship between teachers and apprentices was like that between father and son (mother and daughter); the title is most important in this relationship. Once such a relationship was built, students had to learn their master's theatrical style strictly. The successfulness in such learning became the criteria for judging their proficiency. Certainly, it had the advantage of better inheriting a style, but it also made it difficult or in other words not allowed for students to surpass their masters. She said, "when a young actor

learns from his teacher's singing, as long as the timbre and the imitation is similar, he or she will be labeled a disciple of a certain school, or an heir of a certain school, and so on. It gives people the impression that singing is the hallmark of a genre, which I think is biased". In the inheritance of Yueju art, Yuan had always practiced her innovative spirit and opposed the idea of "one thousand singing with one voice, ten thousand voices with the same form". Therefore, she has not formally accepted apprentices in her whole life, but her "Yuan school" art becomes more brilliant and dazzling.

Artists who have learned from "Yuan school" art can be said to be all over the country. Among the students of "Yuan school", the distinct charm of "Yuan school" is obvious in the singing, but each singer is different to another when observed in detail.

The classic film *Stage Sisters* directed by Xie Jin was released in the 1960s, in which the prototype of Zhu Chunhua was created based on Yuan Xuefen's deeds at her early age. One of the classic lines that have been passed down to this day is Yuan's creed of life and also a true portrayal of her life, that is, "be pure in mind and body, and sing with sincerity".

Shanghai Yueju House The Root and Growing Branch of Chinese Yueju

WU BO

There is a schism at the heart of Yueju; on one side there is the all-female edition, where only women play all the characters: On the other, there is the coed style, where men play the male characters and women play the female characters. Thus, the make-up of the theatre type is said to resemble a twin lotus on the same stalk, combining the two distinct forms. Shanghai Yueju House is seen as the cradle to breed and foster this “twin lotus”.

Established in 1955, Shanghai Yueju House is regarded as a monumental base for the inheritance and development of the art of Yueju. Its rich history boasts alumni including the founders of the Yueju style such as Yuan Xuefen, Xu Yulan, and Wang Wenjuan, as well as well-accomplished artists such as Zhou Baoshan, Zhang Guohua, and Shi Jihua.

Nowadays, Shanghai Yueju House includes three troupes the coed troupe of Yueju which is played by both actors and actresses that promotes an artistic style combining both masculinity and femininity. A second troupe, characterized by “female Yueju”(also known as the ‘Red Mansion Group’), inherits and upholds the beauty and elegance of traditional “female Yueju”, and is renowned for the tenderness of its performances. Then, there is the third troupe (also known as the ‘Youth Group’), which is made up of young people who will preserve and innovate the theatre form in future. The opera house can be seen as the hub of this intangible cultural heritage, boasting among its ranks the key contemporary progenitors of the form, Qian Huili, Shan Yangping, Zhang Ruihong and many more besides.

In order to understand the art of Chinese Yueju, one must start with the “four classics” from the repertoire of the Shanghai Yueju House, which are *The*

Butterfly Lovers, *A Dream of Red Mansions*, *The Romance of West Chamber*, and *Xianglin Sao*. These plays are the most representative exemplars of Yue theatre, and enjoy a status as favourite among audiences. In particular, the new version of *A Dream of Red Mansions* produced by Shanghai Yueju House and Shanghai Grand Theatre is regarded as a “masterpiece that marks the glamour of Shanghai culture”.

Shanghai Yueju House actively explores innovation by incorporating the arts of film and television to enhance its promotion. *The Butterfly Lovers*, known as the Chinese *Romeo and Juliet*, has been staged many times during the reception of foreign delegations, heads of states, and leaders of government. It was adapted for the screen in 1953, becoming the first film of Chinese Xiqu to be shot in technicolor. It also received the musical film award in the 8th International Film Festival held in Czechoslovakia. Shot in 1962, the film of Yueju *A Dream of Red Mansions* stunned the world even more by setting a then box-office record of more than 100 million yuan. Its main aria “From heaven fell an angle sister Lin” swiftly spread all over the country off the back of this cinematic success, cementing the play’s place as a widely known classic. The 3D Yueju film *The Romance of West Chamber* shot in 2019 was awarded the Best Artistic Contribution Award at the 32nd Tokyo International Film Festival. Moreover, *The Story of Western Garden*, *Breaking the Red Lantern*, and *Moments in Qinhuai* were also gradually adapted as Chinese Xiqu television programs.

Shanghai Opera House continues to uphold its policy of “walking on two legs”, attaching importance to both all-female Yueju and co-ed Yueju. Its performances are mainly based in Shanghai and the surrounding Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, but growth to a sustained national level—and even overseas expansion are planned. In order to do this with success, Shanghai Yueju House will continue with its mixed repertoire of Classics and innovative modern pieces, so as to sustain its growth and attract an ever-expanding audience.

In the Shadow of a Madman: Lu Xun's Relevance to Drama in Shaoxing and Beyond

ZHANG JINHUA

There is a window in the corner of the room, through which the moonlight pours in, and the narrator is reading the diaries of a madman in the moonlight:

Tonight the moon is very bright.

I have not seen it for over thirty years, so today when I saw it evoked in me unusually high spirits. I begin to realize that during the past thirty-odd years I have been in the dark; but now I must be extremely careful. Otherwise why should that dog at the Chao house have looked at me twice?

I have reasons for my fear.

This is the *Diary of a Madman*

—written by Lupa.

The story of Lu Xun's *Diary of a Madman* begins when its narrator returns to his hometown and finds that his old acquaintance is ill. When trying to pay a courtesy visit to his ailing friend, the narrator is stopped by the sick friend's elder brother and sister-in-law. They say that the narrator can learn all he needs to know of his friend's condition by reading two volumes of his diary which he has kept during his illness.

Our narrator reads the diary, which turns out to be the torrid tabula of his old friend's disturbed state: he has become infatuated with what he believes to be a cannibalistic cult at the heart of his village—the 'Wolf Club'. The diary is made up of his confused rantings and ravings about this macabre conspiracy; through these absurd and fantastical, observations Lu Xun labors to reveal the truth about society.

Polish director Krystian Lupa reintroduced this classic Chinese work to the stage, resulting in much public attention. It was widely well received, with most noting that Lupa's adaptation may not have been perfect, but it was a personal exploration and approach to Lu Xun's spiritual world. Highest praise was reserved for its aesthetic pursuit of performance, which melded Chinese drama with elements distinctly modern.

Lupa is a master director in Poland and winner of the European Theatre Award. His "Persona. Marilyn", "Woodcutters" and "Heldenplatz" have been performed in China and received enthusiastic response from the audience. From *The Alcoholic Murphy* adapted from Shi Tiesheng's work, to the *Diary of a Madman* adapted from Lu Xun's namesake novel, it can be said that Lupa has conducted a cross-cultural theatric experiment, which is worthy of study.

It is important to note that Lupa's *Diary of a Madman* was not the only rendition of Lu Xun's work to have undergone new updates and innovations in recent years. Lu Xun has not only seen theatrical adaptations take place in his home country of China, but also in Japan (where he studied) and all over the globe.

The reason for the uptake in interest of Lu Xun adaptations is that 2021 marked the 140th Anniversary since Lu Xun's birth. This was felt most keenly in Shaoxing—his hometown—where several events to mark the occasion took place. This interest in his hometown can be seen to have resonated throughout the wider world, inspiring events and retrospectives in other regions.

Hu Zhiyi, professor of the College of Media and International Culture of Zhejiang University, arranged for a grand memorial meeting to take place in Shaoxing on September 25, Lu Xun's birthday. At the same time, the seminar on theatric performances commemorating the 140th anniversary of Lu Xun's birth would also be held in Shaoxing. This would be the first time for Shaoxing to hold such a seminar, organized as it was by the inaugural collaboration between Shaoxing, the Institute of Theatre of the Chinese National Academy of Arts, and The Chinese Society of Theatric Theory and History.



■ The photo of Lu Xun

This performance of the *Diary of a Madman* is the first time that this novel of



■ Stage Photo of *Diary of a Madman*

Lu Xun, which is a short story made up of only 12 diary entries and little more than 4,000 words, has been recomposed for the stage (despite the brevity of the source material it is worth noting that Lupa's work has a run-time of over 5 hours).

Interpretations of Lupa's reimagining of the story were as varied and imaginative as those that met Lu Xun's original tale. It provoked myriad questions—not least about the identity and meaning of the diary writer and its contents: Was this “old friend” a newly awakened person? A like-minded revolutionary? Why do people think he's mad? Is there any kind of conspiracy in this? Did the doctor misdiagnose it?

The adaptation, coming as it did from a non-native Chinese, opened new avenues of inquiry into the story, presenting much of it in new ways. Lupa managed to present his own ideal of the “Chinese dream” with a bold and pioneering adaptation.

Naturally, people questioned how the 78 year old Polish Lupa and 140 year old Chinese Lu Xun could sympathize with one another from across time and space. How did Lupa reach Lu Xun's spiritual world so accurately?

With the drama version of the *Diary of a Madman*, Lupa completed a dialogue with Lu Xun across time and space. They “consulted” the feudal society together, trying to find out what on earth happened to the world and humanity.

In the novel *Diary of a Madman*, Lu Xun put the evil side of human nature in an evil social environment. When Lupa was rehearsing the play in Beijing, he



■ Stage Photo of *Diary of a Madman*



■ Stage Photo of *Diary of a Madman*

told the actors that in order to show the evil side of the role, they should not only play the “evil” side of the role superficially, but portray the hidden evil and hide it well at the same time, so as to perform a real “villain”. In this way, the characters in Lu Xun’s works can become fuller and truer to life.

It is said that Lupa has his own set of procedures in rehearsal: everyone introduces themselves first, and then talks about Lu Xun and their impressions of *Diary of a Madman*, and finally about the characters.

In order to know more about Lu Xun, Lupa also spent much time in Shaoxing. Qian Cheng, the artistic director of Drive Media, which produced this drama, accompanied Lupa several times to visit Lu Xun’s hometown. As a foreigner,

Lupa has studied the *Diary of a Madman* for four years, as along with Lu Xun's other novels. In rehearsals, he requires the actors to read the *Kites*, *Brothers*, *The True Story of Ah Q*, *An Incident*, *My Old Home*, *Xianglin Sao*, *Wild Grass* and other works written by Lu Xun. Each member of the crew were trying to understand Lu Xun's intentions in exposing the nature of the "man-eating" feudal society from his works, and to dig deeply into human nature between the lines.

In the final analysis it would appear in Lupa's work that the madman was not crazy at all. Instead, he had a sense of hesitation and fear as if everyone around was drunk and he alone was sober. He was apparently nervous but resistant to the rules of that time in essence. The madman actually wanted to be a person with independent thoughts, but the world encircled and suppressed his "madness" which seemed out of tune with that era. The more figurative madman in Lupa's drama is a tall and thin middle-aged man, who is very similar to the image of Lu Xun himself, and also very similar to the image of the crumbling China in that old era.

As Hu Zhiyi said, "the term 'cannibalism' implies not only to the actual behavior of 'man-eating', but the cruelty hidden in human subconscious, a spiritual or psychological possibility... Culture and humanitarianism have never succeeded in eradicating this evil side of humanity. This is Lupa's interpretation of the 'cannibalism' in Lu Xun's *Diary of a Madman*."



■ Lupa instructing his cast

A host of new dramas and classic plays including *Diary of a Madman*, *Xianglin Sao*, *The True Story of Ah Q* and many others besides, were put on in Shaxing to commemorate the birth anniversary of Lu Xun. These were supported by cultural seminars and heightened media attention on the area. Other than *Diary of a Madman*, perhaps the most anticipated was Lu Xun's other most famous story, *The True Story of Ah Q*.

After Lu Xun's classic work *The True Story of Ah Q* was published, it was adapted into drama for the stage. Scholars have discussed the adaptation process, performance and differences in adaptation strategies of the three

main versions: *Ah Q Script* adapted by Chen Shaomeng before liberation, *The True Story of Ah Q* adapted by Xu Xingzhi, and the five-act version by Tian Han.

Among them, Xu Xingzhi's was the most successful. First, it highlighted the historical background of the Revolution of 1911; Secondly, it presented in depth the tragic side of AH Q that deserved much sympathy. Thirdly, it was not limited to the novel itself, but added characters from Lu Xun's other short stories, which enriched the connotation of the script. But relatively speaking, Tian Han's and Chen Baichen's adaptations were more faithful to the original context that the novella was written in.

Zhu Shoutong, a professor in the Chinese Department of the University of Macao, put forward the discussion on the significance of the literary history of Lu Xun's works which were written in the form of drama. He said that many of Lu Xun's works were presented in the form of quasi-dramatic style, which was an important contribution to the construction of modern drama. In the initial stage of new literature, experimental explorations were needed to find out what kind of style was suitable for our literature. Lu Xun was most likely one of the earliest great explorers who had carried out stylistic practice. He didn't like to be seen as a stylist, but in fact, he had made great contributions to the construction of the new literary style.

Some researchers also believed that among Lu Xun's works that were written in the form of drama, *Passers-by* was the most typical, successful, and reflecting of the typical characteristics of drama style. The ideological nature of it and the sense of loneliness expressed in the drama, as well as the significance of literary history of it have not been paid enough attention. *Passers-by* has become an important motif in Chinese modern and contemporary literary creation, and even the prototype of Chinese modern culture. It is a typical situational tragedy without a trace of comedy.



■ The poster of *Xianglin Sao*

Lu Xun's dramatic writing inspired modern Chinese writers such as Shen Congwen to create in the style of "quasi-drama", forming a special style of new literature. And the strength in numbers of adaptations to this day, not only of *Diary of a Madman* and *The True Story of Ah Q* but also pieces such as *Devil-Female Ghost*, *Regret for the Past*, *The Lonely Man*, *On the Restaurant*, and *The Story of Hair* show his continued relevance to this day. Indeed it is worth noting that some performances from the 140th anniversary celebrations in Shaoxing were taken from previous anniversary events, such as the 100th anniversary celebrations of him studying in Sendai, Japan.

In this way, Lu Xun kept on living as well as being interpreted and performed in different forms in his hometown Shaoxing, in China, in Japan where he had studied abroad, and in the broader world.

Avant-garde Realism and Its Application in the Theatre — Review on *Diary of a Madman* by Krystian Lupa

GAO ZIWEN

Even though it was just a version for trial performance, the *Diary of a Madman* directed by Krystian Lupa drew wide attention in the circle of theatre. Many people attribute such attention to Lu Xun, or at least to the way the famous contemporary western directors interpret him. Of course we should focus on Lu Xun, whose criticism of the traditional feudal ethics in his novel *Diary of a Madman* is of special significance even in today's society where narrow nationalism is rampant. However, it is possible for us to overlook the importance form and style in Lupa's theatre. People tend to say, "well, you see, this is the style of Lupa." Indeed, after viewing *Woodcutters*, *Heldenplatz*¹, and *The Alcoholic Murphy*, we seemed to have become accustomed to his style. But what exactly is Lupa's style? And in particular, it should be noted that whether such a unique style of him is only subordinated to form and aesthetics or does it imply a more profound worldview. This deserves deeper investigation.

1. The End of Classical Realism

In any case, adapting a novel of more than 4,000 words into a performance of nearly five hours, Lupa's *Diary of a Madman* can hardly be regarded as

1 German, which means Heroes' Square in English.

a traditionally realistic play. From the point of view of playwriting methods, realistic plays have mostly borrowed the techniques of French classical theatres, arranging plot clues and characters' actions according to the principle of rationality. Since there is rationality running through, all the passages are comprehensible and interpretable. From the point of view of the directors and the actors, their purpose is also to achieve this clarity of expression in the play and to precisely present this interpretation on the stage. However, in Lupa's artistic conception, there is no such a theatre model for Classical Realism, and there is no so-called typical or correct interpretation of the characters and the environment. On the contrary, he has tried to present a kind of realistic uncertainty, which is embodied not only in the events and plots, but also in the relationship of the characters, and even more in the mentality of the protagonists.

The images of the Madman, the elder brother, and the narrator (Mr. Zhou) are no longer as clear and complete as those of the typical characters. Each of them all bear too many secrets, and as the retrospect unfolds, these secrets have not become clear, but seem to be increasingly ambiguous. When we finish watching the first act, we don't know exactly what happened between Mr. Zhou and the younger brother. We also don't know where the Madman had gone or whether he was actually eaten by his brother. The characters' lines seem to become messages that we receive in the real world, which could either be true or false and full of ambiguity. In the scene between the mother and the Madman, the Madman was so close to telling his mother about his past of "eating his sister". This past was way too important. One can say that it constituted the spiritual foundation of the Madman, but it was forcibly held back by him. Lupa hid the the most intense spiritual confrontation in the shadows, while what wa presented on stage was a madman who was fetching oranges and a mother who was sitting at the table as calm as usual.

It is precisely because of this that Lupa's plays seem to be extremely slow. Since the progress of our real world is indeed much slower than those plays on the traditional stage. It can be said that classical realist theatre is an acceleration of the real world. For example, it often presents a stylized, abstract, and rapid birth or death. Because these are just some symbols for the completion of the final illustration of the play and are not consistent with the real reality. Lupa, however, did not use such a system of symbols at all in *Diary of a Madman*. Instead, he arranged for the narrator to read the diary carefully and repeatedly for nearly half an hour. And then he spent another hour, in the form of the Madman's monologue, depicting how the Madman wrote these diaries. Thus, instead of running through the logical chain of the plot, the time on

stage seemed to stop, allowing the audience to enter a certain segment of the characters' daily life. Therefore, the audience no longer had to wait anxiously for the occurrence of events, the release of suspense, or the fulfillment of the purposes of the characters. Instead, they fell into a carefully woven net of the characters' minds and experienced the depth and breadth of the characters' minds at that particular moment in time.

This is a brand new kind of realism. We can call it avant-garde realism, which represents a new way of aesthetic appreciation and worldview. It no longer confidently summarizes a certain reality, but explores the possibilities of a certain reality. In reality, this kind of creation is very difficult. We are experiencing the real reality every moment, so why should we watch it being performed on stage? It requires a greater talent on the part of the creator to extract and describe a specific moment in reality to impassion the audience, and to encourage them to replenish the fragmented world presented on stage in their minds and to imagine more possibilities of development. For Lupa, Classical Realism is over. He will no longer attempt to shape a typical character in a typical setting, to restore a certain sense of history, or to satisfied with discussing a social topic of historical significance. Therefore, if we go to see his plays with the demands of Classical Realism, we are bound to be disappointed and discover that he has misread Lu Xun.

2. An Enlightener as a Conspirator

For Lupa, what attracted him more than anything else was the fact that the novel had more room for interpretation compared to Lu Xun's works from the middle and late period. In Lu Xun's writing, the Madman was not a single individual. He was a typical example of someone who is being persecuted by feudal ethics, representing quite a large group of people. We can regard the Madman's madness only as the result of the persecution of ethics, but this madness also helped the protagonist understand the "cannibalistic" nature of the feudal ethics society. In such a crazy society, only madness can hold on to normalcy. From this point of view, the text of Lu Xun's novel itself provided the possibility of interpretation beyond realism. If we make a horizontal comparison, the unstable mind of the Madman has a lot in common with the characters in the early 20th century European expressionist dramas. To comprehend Lupa's *Diary of a Madman* from the perspective of expressionism, we can undoubtedly gain a lot of inspirations. The images of Zhao Guiweng and the dog can be naturally understood as the hallucinations of the Madman, so that the director



■ Stage Photo of *Diary of a Madman*

can avoid a sociological abstract interpretation of the historical reality.

The way Classical Realism deals with characters is actually an abstraction based on sociology. This kind of abstraction is probably based on generalization, with a certain authenticity. But when it comes to specific people, such sociology-based generalization will undoubtedly ignore other specific and minority people. The landlord class in China at the beginning of the 20th century may indeed have been, overall, a kind of archaic and authoritarian force like Zhao Guiweng and the lord Lu Si described by Lu Xun. However, judging from historical facts, there were indeed plenty of enlightened people. And just as Lu Xun's own experience and as he had described in many works, it was the descendants of the landlord class that became the first generation to awaken. Artistic creation should not only take the majority into consideration and should not distort the minority in order to get a so-called historical summary. In Lupa's theatre, there were two different Zhao Guiweng. One was standing in the corner with an unclear attitude, looking at other characters silently. This was Zhao Guiweng in the realistic world, and it was impossible for us to know whether he was a good or bad man. While the other was illusory. Dressed in the court robe of an official of the Qing Dynasty, he sat on the fauteuil and became the incarnation of authority.

In terms of the treatment of Zhao Guiweng's role, Lupa's rewriting of the



■ Stage photo of *Diary of a Madman*

narrator can better illustrate his intention of dismantling Classical Realism. At the beginning of the novel *Diary of a Madman*, there was a rational narrator who objectively and dispassionately recounted the fact of obtaining the diary. This was not necessarily Lu Xun himself, but it had Lu Xun's strong autobiographical color, which is an image of an awakened intellectual. In the first act, Lupa named the narrator Mr. Zhou. The title "Mr. Zhou" reminded the audience of the real Lu Xun better than the titles "I" or "brother Zhou". Lupa believed that this Mr. Zhou should not be detached. The whole play opened with Mr. Zhou's visit to a friend. However, he was blocked at the door by that old friend's elder brother and got two volumes of diaries. So, he went back to the hotel to read. When Mr. Zhou started his act with the word "moonlight," we know that he was referring to the moonlight he saw pouring through the window. But the audience would be reminded that the beginning of the novel *Diary of a Madman* is indeed "Tonight the moon is very bright."¹ At this moment, we realized that the role of Madman and Mr. Zhou were integrated together. Under the moonlight, Mr. Zhou was reading the Madman's description of the moonlight. And we couldn't even tell who was the madman and who was the narrator.

1 The English translation version by Yang Xianyi and Dai Naidi



■ Stage photo of
Diary of a Madman

Through the diary, the audience followed Mr. Zhou to explore the past of the Madman. At the same time, we were actually exploring the past of Mr. Zhou. In this scene, Mr. Zhou failed to stay out of the matter because the content of the Madman's diary made him very confused and gave him a huge emotional blow. On the one hand, we could feel that he was repressing himself. While on the other hand, we were seeing him gradually became crazy. When Mr. Zhou came to the part of the diary where it says, "then all those green-faced, long-toothed people began to laugh derisively"¹, the women's laughters happened to be heard outside the room. Such laughters were so unreal that they might have entirely been oozed from the depths of Mr. Zhou's heart, which was on the verge of madness. It seemed that the world of Mr. Zhou and the Madman had become the same one, and the two men had become the mirrored images of each other.

3. The Disappearance of the Typical Environment and the Emergence of an Accidental World

The world constructed by classical realist theatre follows the basic requirements of reason. However, in Lupa's *Diary of a Madman*, we couldn't see such a logical world, but only certain moments that touched us in the accidental world, and the relationships between different minds. As far as the audience is concerned, only by discarding the expectations of plot and feeling the current psychological state of the characters with a peaceful and open mind, can they truly enter Lupa's theatre.

If we say that the first act focused on depicting the Madman in the eyes of the narrator and the elder brother and showing their inner being, then the second act should be directly showing the inner world of the Madman. The external logic of plot in traditional theatre was reflected in the internal psychological changes of the protagonists. The opening of this scene, in which Lupa depicted the moment of the epiphany of a thinker, was particularly impressive. We saw the Madman running up to the roof in delight, and the whole space (the iron house) had at this moment became transparent and glorious. In the twilight, the audience joined him in feeling the rebirth brought to him by the moon: "Moon, you are here, and I am here. I am human and I am going to create the

1 The English translation version by Yang Xianyi and Dai Naidi

world.” Lupa has set the whole stage as both an objective environment and a projection of the subjective world, thus forming a wonderful fusion between the subjective and the objective.

After breaking away from the plot framework and character paradigm of Classical Realism, Lupa’s stage is essentially no longer a place where real events take place, but a symbolic and expressive space for the characters’ minds. This feature was clearly manifested in the scene where Zhao Guiweng questioned the Madman. Dressed in the official robes of Qing Dynasty, Zhao Guiweng appeared in the smoke as a centralized power and sternly promoted an unassailable value to the Madman: “To disrespect the elders and those of higher rank is sin and evil, and evil is to be eaten up by morality. Serving the classical scriptures is the highest obligation.” Here, Lupa collaged the image of Jesus’ Crucifixion, projecting the shape of the cross with the madman bound to it. Zhao Guiweng questioned, “Is this a human being?” All of a sudden, the image of this “human being” was transformed into a pair of sheep’s ribs. In this way, Lupa juxtaposed the Madman’s suffering with Jesus’ Crucifixion in the way of intertextuality. Therefore, Lupa’s manner of expressing meaning had leapt from the individual and concrete contingency to the abstract conceptual world.

Through the reconstruction of time and space, Lupa incorporated the future world into the imagination of the Madman, responding to and testing the validity of Lu Xun’s expectation for Enlightenment of “Saving the Children”. Is there still a phenomenon of “cannibalism” in today’s society? Lupa’s answer is yes, but the way of such act is more obscure, and the people who are eaten are not even aware of it. In Lupa’s view, parents will eat their sons at any time for fear of being removed from their power. This is not a tragedy of a certain era, but a tragedy of all eras. Each of us is a son, but each of us will also become a father. Superficially, this seems to be a negative worldview. Especially when Lucan didn’t even provide a definite answer when they discussed “whether the world will ever be a better place. Much of the world described in the cultural realistic works bears the mark of Cultural Evolutionism. It is obvious that Lupa doesn’t share the worldview of Cultural Evolutionism. In his eyes, the world is accidental, unreal, and even unobjective. Things are flying by like the scenery outside a train, which are merely the externalization of a certain thought in mind. While these thoughts, though equally accidental, fragmented, hesitant, and even painful, have the possibility of attaining stillness and eternity.

GAO ZIWEN

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Whose *Forging the Swords* Do We See At The Theatre? — Polish director Jarzyna's retelling of Lu Xun's "Old Tales Retold"

ZHANG LI

The play *Two Swords*, an adaptation of the novel *Forging the Swords* from Lu Xun's collection *Old Tales Retold*, was the grand finale of the 2017 Lin Zhaohua Theatre Invitational Exhibition. It was directed by the renowned Polish theatre director Grzegorz Jarzyna, with a cast from China, Poland and the United States. Unlike his previous critically acclaimed plays to be shown in China, *Martyrs* and *4.48 Psychosis*, the cross-cultural adaptation of Lu Xun's work caused quite a sensation in Beijing and Shanghai. This was largely due to the text of Lu Xun's novel being dearly loved in China - but it was also related to Jarzyna's new interpretation and performance of the piece.

Among the various critiques of the stage rendition of *Two Swords*, the leading viewpoints fell into three main categories: the "Self-and-Others Theory", "The Slave-to-Technology Theory", and the "Significance-of-Exploration Theory".

"Self-and-Others Theory" viewed the play from the perspective of cross-cultural creation, arguing that "if Jarzyna's Chinese text based projection and observation of the present were only based on the simple mechanism of self-projection, with the stereotypical 'otherness' of the self as a foundation for the work of projecting one's own misrecognition, then it will most likely serve only to facilitate convenient appropriation for other uses."¹ In other words, subscribers

1 王音洁:《被投射的“他者”——关于〈铸剑〉与跨文化交流问题》,《上海戏剧》,2018年第2期。[Wang Yinjie, Review on *Two Swords* Directed by Grzegorz Jarzyna, Shanghai Theatre, No. 1, 2018.]

to this particular interpretation of the play believed the self-actualization displayed in the piece was facile and shallow.

Others argued that this play had become a “Slave to Technology”, and that the Polish director Jarzyna did not know much about Lu Xun and the Chinese literary concept of revenge. This play’s “multi-artists’ collaboration and use of expensive stage technology, including holographic projection, did little to quell the doubts and anxieties of the audience. The technological nature of the piece obstructed the true meaning of Lu Xun’s work—or at least distracted audiences from interpretation, and as such something essential to Lu Xun’s work was lost. Indeed, it was as a direct result of the technological carbuncle that audiences were said to feel endless emptiness”¹.

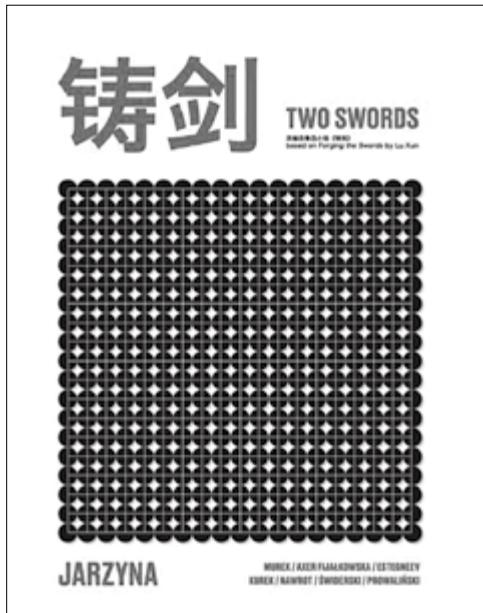
Proponents of the “Significance-of-Exploration Theory” were mainly researchers such as Bei Xiaojing, who argued that “*Two Swords*, directed by Jarzyna, was a rare artistic attempt of cross-cultural creation which had a positive effect for Chinese theatre because it was full of courage in the face of the unknown... Jarzyna may have ‘misread’ the Chinese symbols and deviated from the aesthetic habits that the audience appealed to”.² This view of the play as a new and exciting form of cross-cultural theatre was echoed by Yue Li, who posited in his article that in reality the technological aids in the play augmented its brilliance: “*Two Swords* set off yet another upsurge of postmodern creation... The interactive experience of multimedia, the montage-style stage presentation, and the interweaving of multi-symbol languages have reconstructed the ‘non-narrative’ ideographic paradigm, conveyed the non-concretized space-time theatric vocabulary, expressed the emotional will of the characters, explored the belief, freedom, and prediction of humanity’s future, and illustrated the Chinese philosophy of the material and the individual are interdependent”...³

In any case, the divergence of critical opinion around the play tells us one thing

1 今叶:《〈铸剑〉是技术的奴隶——波兰导演对鲁迅与中国式复仇太隔膜》,《北青艺评》微信公号 2018 年 1 月 21 日。[Jin Ye, *Two Swords* Was a Slave to Technology--the Polish Director Didn't Know Much about Lu Xun and Chinese Revenge, Beijing Youth Daily Literature and Arts Review, WeChat Public Account, January 21, 2018.]

2 北小京:《艺术探索的意义——看波兰戏剧导演格热戈日·亚日那作品〈铸剑〉》,“北小京看话剧”微信公号,2018 年 1 月 22 日。[Bei Xiaojing, The Significance of Artistic Exploration: Viewing *Two Swords* by Polish Theatre Director Grzegorz Jarzyn, Bei Xiaojing Viewing the Dramas, WeChat Public Account, January 22, 2018.]

3 岳李:《后现代语境下中国剧场艺术新象研究》,《艺术百家》,2020 年第 6 期。[Yue Li, A Study on the New Image of Chinese Theater Art in the Context of Postmodernism, Hundred Schools in Arts, No.6, 2020.]



■ Poster of *Two Swords* directed by Jarzyna

for sure: Jarzyna has done something bold, something significant, with Lu Xun's original work.

The novel *Forging the Swords* was adapted from the compendium *Anecdotes About Spirits and Immortals* (C.336BC), and was completed by Lu Xun in October 1926. It shares its fantastical imaginings and florid language with its companion pieces in *Old Tales Retold*, but it has arguably the most concise storyline of any story within the collection. As such it has gained the reputation of being a favourite Lu Xun tale.

As a modern “new adaptation” of the historical legend, Lu Xun's story shifted the focus of the revenge narrative arc, giving more space to ruminate on Meijianchi's character and experiences as a sword forger. In order to capture this in the play, Jarzyna depicts the growth of Meijianchi in four stages, played by four different Chinese actors, with the last one being female. Over these four distinct phases the character arc travels from rebellion to freedom. While unorthodox, this section of the piece can be seen as a sincere tribute to Lu Xun, and a genuine attempt by the director to depict key elements of the story, rather than a misinterpretation of him and his novel.

It is no doubt that Jarzyna's handling of the poetry inherent to a Lu Xun work was done with the approach of a Western artist. His cultural orientation, mode of thinking and specific stage strategies were all westernized, or rather, non-Chinese. From his perspective, the story of the *Forging the Swords* was more the story of humanity as a whole. Indeed, Jarzyna repeatedly confessed to the media that, in fact, it is not the *Forging the Swords* itself that he fell madly in love with, but its profound musings on the human experience, or more specifically, human struggle.

As a piece of theatre -in the truest sense of the word—it is hard not to be

charmed by Jarzyna's fresh interpretation of Lu Xun's original work. It would be impossible for even the most ardent detractor to deny that the body language, polyphonic lines, and performances on the stage of the *Two Swords* are all very brilliant. But still doubts linger over the application of technology in the piece.



■ Jarzyna instructing his cast

Undoubtedly, technology must be more than a means to manipulate for Jarzyna, it is also an artistic skill, inspired by aesthetic aspirations. Technology is form but not purely about form. It is even more about content, and more importantly, these applications of technologies are in line with the creative spirit and artistic style of the *Two Swords*. Like many other works of Lu Xun, it is an allegorical text of extreme romanticism, full of passion, boldness, and defiance. It could therefore be argued that the heavy usage of technology is an artistic necessity then—a surefire means to bring the otherworldly magic of the original text to life. In this interpretation, technology is essential to the deepening of human self-consciousness and the leap of mankind from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom. This is also in keeping with how Western artists have traditionally understood Lu Xun's works.

With all this in mind, it is easy to see why many people have labeled the play as a postmodern work. Going beyond the stage presentation and many other appearances and probing the codes that Jarzyna has buried in the play, we have to admit that the very different cultural philosophies and aesthetic perceptions of China and the West are so well integrated in the stage play that a sort of 'Meta-meaning' forms—after all, Lu Xun himself was concerned with the melding of Eastern and Western arts. Indeed, one could go so far as to say that to an extent Lu Xun and Jarzyna almost mirror each other in their spiritual appreciation of art.

However, the reality is that few theatregoers will be inclined to take this meta-approach, and due to cultural barriers and the undeniably 'Western' elements of the stage adaptation, most will misinterpret or fail to see the value of the piece. It is just too hard for a Chinese audience to drop their hero worship of

Lu Xun and view his works from a fresh perspective. They will unconsciously or consciously criticize, belittle, or ignore the brand new textual interpretation and strong stage creativity of artists from foreign cultures.

Faced with the stage presentation of such a specific classic text, we have to ask a common-sense yet utterly essential question: In the theatre, whose *Forging the Swords* do we look upon? Lu Xun's? Or Jarzyna's?

The process of adapting classics is not to reproduce the original work, but to make innovative creations and stage them. There must be respect for the original work, but the extent to which this pervades the new is at the discretion of the director. Where this particular adaptation of Lu Xun's *Forging the Swords* is concerned, Jarzyna's adaptation must be seen as a work in its own right. The subtitle he selected, *Old Tales Retold*, taken tongue-in-cheek from the Lu Xun original, tells us this much; it is re-telling, not regurgitation. Jarzyna is undoubtedly a poet-philosopher, who writes a new poetry of life for Meijianchi within Lu Xun's literary framework. As such, we must say that it is Jarzynas Forging The Sword we see in the theatres.

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“Chinese Theme” Dramas on the German Stage in the 17th-18th Centuries

WEI MEI

The new Eurasian sea route, “from west to east”, which was opened up in the Age of Exploration, not only offered facilities for the goods exchanges between China and Europe, but also provided conditions for the rise of cross-cultural dramas, “from east to west”, in the German speaking area in the 17th-18th centuries. Looking back on the drama “exchange” history between China and Germany in this period, we can find the “Chinese theme” drama craze on the Jesuit stage and in the court theatre, and both have showed the prosperity of the Chinese culture on the stage of the late Locke’s German speaking area.

The detailed record of the exact time when the Chinese-German drama exchanges began has not been found yet. However, Professor Ruprecht Wimmer of German Catholic University, in his article “Japan and China on the Jesuits Stage of the German Speaking Area”, has pointed out that since the second half of the 17th century, dramatic performances with “Chinese theme” had already appeared on the Jesuits stage, and once widely spread in the German speaking area. During the same period, the “Chinoiserie”, which was spreading from the French court and its upper class to the German court, also filled many court plays with various “Chinese elements”, not only in forms (gorgeous “Chinese style” costumes), but also in contents. For example, Chinese characters were often added into the Vienna court opera shows and French-style ballet performances. Therefore, since the 18th century, “Chinese theme” drama fever had also been sought after on the German court stage. Why was so? The exploration of this problem needs to start with the “religious reform” which spread from Germany to the whole of Europe in the early 16th century.

The Protestant Movement led by Martin Luther pushed the religious reform,

which made the Catholic Church lose more than half of its European territory. In the middle of the 16th century, Protestantism was gradually accepted in most parts of Germany, and the Catholic Church lost its former dominance. In order to oppose the religious reform movement and recover the ever-lost believers, the Catholic Church carried out a series of remedial measures and tried to reconquer the German area on the cultural level, especially in the aspect of the popularization of Latin in Germany. As a new missionary group and backbone of the Catholic Church, the Jesuits were established in this context.

In order to bring back the believers in the German speaking area, the Jesuits made various attempts, for example, setting up Jesuits colleges (Jesuitenkollegien) and developing the Jesuits theatre art and school drama. The former were educational institutions that dedicated to the cultivation of the backbone of the Catholic Church. According to statistics, the number of the Jesuits colleges in Europe had even increased more than three times within a hundred years, that is, from 245 in 1600 to 770 in 1710. In these Jesuits colleges, there were a large number of intellectual elites, such as Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1592-1666), Martino Martini (1614-

1661), and Joseph de Premare (1666-1736), to whom we were familiar with. They were of great significance to the spreading of “the Chinese culture to the west” and “the Western culture to China”. The latter undertook the function of educating the people. Especially in the aspect of winning over and attracting the ever-lost believers in the German speaking area, the Jesuits, with the help of drama, took Latin as the official language of the Jesuits drama performances, and tried to implement its plan of popularizing Latin by performing drama in it. At the same time, with the help of drama, a lively and interesting classroom, instead of boring moral preaching, the German people were educated and the stage became an artistic



■ The portrait of Johann Adam Schall von Bell

platform. After 1560, the Jesuits College not only set up specialized student troupes, but also incorporated drama performance into their teaching planning. From 1555 to 1773, there were 7650 theatrical performances on the Jesuits stage in the German speaking area of Europe. In a manner, the Jesuits drama not only played a positive role in the internal missionary work and the cultivation of reserve missionary forces, but also promoted the development of drama in Europe, including Germany, to a certain extent.

The earliest “Chinese theme” plays on the stage in the German speaking area can be traced back to 1667 when Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679), a Dutch playwright born in Cologne, wrote the tragedy *Downfall of Emperor Chongzhen's Regime* (Zunchin of Ondergang der Sineesche heerschappije), to mourn Johann Adam Schall von Bell, the Cologne missionary who preached in China for 47 years (1644-1661). Vondel created it according to *Tatar War* (1658) written by missionary Martino Martini and Johann Adam Schall von Bell's biographical memoir. From the perspective of Johann Adam Schall von Bell, the play described the change of the Chinese dynasties and regimes during his tenure as a court official in astronomy in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, especially how Chongzhen, the last emperor of the Ming Dynasty, was overthrown. It is worth noting that Vondel was the first and only world-class poet who has wrote about Johann Adam Schall von Bell's life in a drama, and many of his plays had a great influence on German Baroque drama.

In order to attract the audience and better adapt to the aesthetic tastes of ordinary German people, not only Jesuits drama playwrights canceled the strict restrictions of classicism in the drama creation style, but also its performers studied the stage art presentation, plots and action designs, expressions and body languages. For example, they strengthened the expressions and body languages of performers to provide another way to interpret the performance content for the audience who did not understand Latin. When performing in different areas, they carried out corresponding artistic treatments in combination with the audience aesthetic tastes: for the southern German people who were greatly influenced by Italian opera, singing was integrated into the tragic performance, or some comic interludes were added, or music were added when important roles were taking an appearance on stage or doing performance; when performing in France, ballet was their preference.

The themes and contents of the Jesuits drama have begun to change since the 17th century. They were no longer limited to the Bible and the stories of European Catholic saints, or the western ancient legends. Instead, according to the letters and travel notes sent back by the missionaries from the Far East,

which described the exotic Oriental culture and society, they turned to “Chinese theme” drama. The German theologian and sinologist Claudia von Collani’s research “Influence of Far East Missionary Literature on Germany Jesuits Drama” showed that there were 30 “Chinese theme” plays among the extant Jesuits drama scripts, which mainly were tragedies and took the real Chinese historical events as the background and the fate of Emperors and Generals, including the last emperor Chongzhen of the Ming Dynasty, four emperors of the Qing Dynasty (Shunzhi, Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong), historical hero Chaocungus and the Catholic Surniama family, as the drama core. The sources or patterns of scripts can be divided into three main types:

- ★ The chaos of the late Ming Dynasty and the change of the Ming and Qing Dynasties;
- ★ The story of the Christian martyr Surniama family;
- ★ Examples of hero stories in ancient Chinese history.

According to Wimmer’s statistics, the most frequently staged “Chinese theme” plays were *Surniama Tragödie* and *Chaocungus Tragödie*. They premiered in 1723 and 1736, respectively. The former was based on the real historical events, mentioned in the Jesuits’ letters which were sent back to Europe from 1723 to 1745. It was about the persecution of the *Surniama* family in the Qing Dynasty, for their believing in Catholicism. The latter was adapted from a story of *Ancient Chinese History* published by Martino Martini, the Austrian missionary, in 1658 in Munich. It was about the Western Zhou statesman Chaocungus (Zhao Mu Gong) who, in order to protect Prince Jing from the retaliatory killing of the people who were dissatisfied with the tyrant, sacrificed his son. The story content of the latter was easy to associate with the Chinese drama *Orphan of Zhao* which, selected and translated by



■ French version of *The Orphan of Zhao* translated by Joseph de Prémare in the 18th century

Joseph de Prémare (1666-1735), was also a story about saving the Lord's kid by sacrificing his own, while the former mainly described the tragic fate of the Catholic Surniama family from the perspective of Christian martyrs.

Why did Europeans have a preference for the theme of sacrificing one's own life to save others? Perhaps, just as what was mentioned by the translator of *Orphan of Zhao*, Joseph de Prémare, in his letter to his friend, they hoped to arouse European's moral consciousness and concept by "the beauty and great emotion in this work". As will be readily seen that this preference seemed to be due to the missionary status and responsibility. And, the opera *Chinese Hero* was based on Jean Baptiste du Halde (1674-1743)'s *A Description of the Empire of China and Chinese-Tartary, together with the Kingdoms of Korea and Tibet* and the French version "*Orphan of Zhao*" and adapted by the Viennese court opera writer Pietro Metastasio (1698 -1782) in 1752, which made people realize that in the same period, different audiences of the same nation might have different perspectives on the same thing.

As a court opera writer in Vienna, Metastasio, in order to cater to the taste of the aristocrats, weakened the revenge main line of the characters in *Orphan of Zhao* and changed it into a Shakespeare style love story *Chinese Hero*. On the evening of May 13, 1752, it was acted by the daughters of Queen Maria Theresia and some friends (noble young ladies and Knights) and accompanied by the Baroque music composed by Austrian composer Giuseppe Bonno (1711-1788), on the stage of the Garden Theatre in Vienna's Schloss Schönbrunn. The stage was setting as a room in the Chinese palace where the Tatar princess was imprisoned. The room was hung with Baroque oil paintings and equipped with a lot of furniture, painted wallpaper and other Chinese decorations. Performers were dressed in gorgeous "Chinese" court clothes, and immediately brought the audience into the Baroque drama. Its main roles and relationship settings were:

Leango: The Regent of China;

Siveno: The "son" of Regent Leango. The role of King Xuan of Zhou (the eleventh king of the Chinese Zhou Dynasty);

Lisinga: The imprisoned Tatar Princess, in love with Siveno;

Ulania: The Tatar Princess's sister, in love with Siveno's friend Minteo;

Minteo: A Chinese officer, a friend of Siveno, in love with Ulania.

It has been difficult to find the prototype of *Orphan of Zhao*. In other words, except for the name of the play and its characters, which were based on the Chinese history, the rest can no longer be related to Chinese drama.

We can conclude that the “Chinese theme” plays, which were active on the German stage during this period, seemed to be popular in Europe, but in fact, both the Jesuits drama and the court drama presented China and its history and human stories on their stages in order to meet their own needs. Therefore, from the perspective of Chinese-German drama exchanges, they had obvious limitations.

Chen Yifan and the Chinese Theater in England

PAN ZHENGZHENG

In 1949, London Dennis Dobson Ltd. published an English book *The Chinese Theatre*, written by Jack Chen. This Jack Chen's Chinese name was Chen Yifan¹, who devoted his whole life in spreading awareness of Chinese culture, and in this book he introduced China to Britain and every English speaking country by presenting to them Chinese theater.

Chen Yifan (1908-1995) was born in Port-of-Spain, capital of Trinidad, in the Caribbean Sea in 1908. His father, Chen Youren² (Eugene Chen, 1878-1944) was the former Minister of foreign affairs of the Republic of China (1912-1949). In 1912, Chen



■ Photo of Mr. Chen Yifan³

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- 1 Good at caricature and art review, Chen Yifan was the consultant of Foreign Language Press and People's China, after the establishment of the People's Republic of China. From 1937 to 1938, the 28-year-old Chen Yifan organized some worldwide exhibitions of paintings, works of the Chinese painters (including himself) in big cities in China, Europe and the United States. Those works were all about fighting against the Japanese aggression. That was the first time the Chinese revolutionary art was ever introduced to the world, and it also exposed the conspiracy of Japanese aggressors to the world and inspired international allies to come to China's aid.
 - 2 Patriotic diplomatist. His ancestral home was Shunde, Guangdong. His parents were Hakka. He was born in 1878 in Trinidad, a British colony in the Caribbean. His father had joined the Taiping army. After the failure of the Taiping uprising, he was forced to leave China. He fled from Hong Kong to the French West Indies, thousands of miles away, ran a retail store there and had small savings.
 - 3 Photo source: Li Hua, editor in chief: "Memory of the War Against Japan: Collection of Pictures from Taiwan 1931-1945 (2)", Chongqing: Chongqing Press, 2016, p43.

Youren returned to China from London in order to support the 1911 Revolution and became a close comrade of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, first president of the Republic of China. In 1927, 19-year-old Chen Yifan moved from London to Wuhan and became his father's private secretary. He also worked as a full-time caricaturist for the English newspaper *People's Forum* which was the Wuhan revolutionary government newspaper. In the same year, Chen Yifan escorted **Михайл Маркович Бородин** (1884-1951), the delegation of the Soviet International Communist Party's minister to China, from Wuhan to Moscow via the Gobi Desert in Xinjiang. Since then, Chen began studying painting and journalism at the Moscow Institute of Advanced Technology.¹ After 1935, he started to work as a journalist for *Asia Magazine* and *Raynold's News*.

After the victory of the worldwide Anti-fascist War in 1947, Chen Yifan visited Yan'an, China as a journalist of London's *Raynolds News*, in which to introduce the situation of democratic movement and progressive movement in European countries to the leaders of the Communist Party of China, and gave lectures to the students of Lu Xun Art Academy. He decided to stay there to portray China's revolution with his own creation. However, Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai suggested that he should go to Britain to set up a London Office for Xinhua News Agency, so that the world can learn about the real China. Therefore, in 1948, with the mission of "promoting real China", Chen Yifan clubbed together a sum of money by mortgaging his own house and life insurance, and set up the first branch of Xinhua News Agency—New China News Agency London Office --- in Fleet Street, London.²

During his stay in the UK, Chen spared no efforts in promoting the Chinese culture and "facilitating the local's understanding of Chinese culture so that cultural exchanges can occur more often"³. In the eyes of the world, Chen Yifan was a painter and journalist. In recent years, some files about Mr. Chen's legendary experience have been discovered one after another. His experiences during the Anti-Japanese War and after his return to China in 1950 have attracted the attention of the scholar world, especially the art circle. However, not only is this overseas Chinese deeply concerned about China, he also

1 "This school was the first work-study institute in the world and was founded according to Lenin's thought. Besides painting, students also learned woodcarving, etching, lithography, photography, lithography, etc; A special course was added to train revolutionary artists to print leaflets or newspapers without a printing press." See Chen Yuanzhen: *Chen Yifan: A British Gentlemen Met by Mao Zedong in Yan'an*, *Century*, No. 1, 2011, p. 55.

2 According to Chen Yiwen's oral account, Qian Yijiao's contribution: *Chen Yifan: An International Person Who Belongs to China*, *Journal of International Communication*, 2007, No. 7

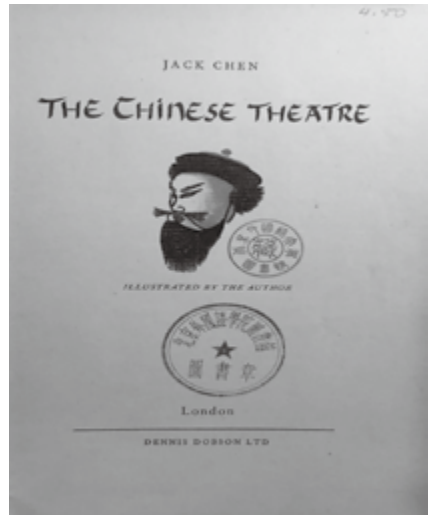
3 Chen Yifan: *Sun Yat-sen's Ideal and Today's China*, see He Bingdi, et al: *Chinese Americans Revisiting China*, *Hong Kong: 1970s Magazine Club*, 1974, p.187.

dedicated his life in promoting Chinese Xiqu. It was in the year 1949 when New China News Agency London Office was set up that Chen Yifan wrote *The Chinese Theater* and published it in London.

The book was bound with yellow cloth. On the lower right corner of the cover, there was a portrait of female acrobatic fighting role of the Chinese Xiqu, drawn in red lines. The title of the book, the author's name and the publishing house were printed on the spine of the book. There was a color portrait of "an evil and stupid official with a beard"¹ on the title page, and a quote on the blank page saying, "To the memory of Lu Xun" on the blank page. It was a small book with a total of 63 pages and was divided into three chapters: the traditional Chinese Xiqu, Western-style Drama, and Yangko Drama. In order to help the English speaking readers better understand Chinese theater art, Mr. Chen introduced the three main forms and their development at that time. In the first part of the



■ The cover of *The Chinese Theater*³



■ The title page of *The Chinese Theater*⁴

book, Chen presented the tradition and evolution of the Chinese Xiqu, from the origin of the Chinese Xiqu to the stage layout, costumes, theaters, artist status, role, make-up and posture, etc., with illustrations and excellent writing, and then explained the value of the traditional opera in contemporary China. He believed that "art comes from the people".² Only by reforming the contents and forms, like the new Yangko drama movement in Northern Shaanxi led by the Communist Party of China, could the traditional operas be revitalized in the

1 See Jack Chen. *The Chinese Theatre*, London: Dennis Dobson 1949. p. 33.

2 *IBID.*, p. 46

3 Photo source: The author took the photo in the library of Beijing Foreign Language University.

4 Source: The author took the photo in the library of Beijing Foreign Language University.



■ Yangko dancers²

new era.

In the second part of this book, Chen Yifan paid attention to the reformation of the traditional Chinese Xiqu in the 20th century, including the influence of Japanese “new school drama” on the development of the early Chinese theater art. In order to make foreign readers better understand Chinese theater art, Mr. Chen also compared it with the

western drama from time to time. He noticed the Chinese historical tradition—“the function of literature is to convey the *Tao*”, and was fully awake to the fact that drama was not only for entertainment, but even more for education. Therefore, in his writing, the realistic western-style drama became a powerful and mystical key to resist the old society and welcome the new society in the new China, where people were led by the working class.

It is worth mentioning that, different from the normal history books about Chinese theater, the third part of this book referred to the Yangko Drama in the Anti-Japanese base areas. This was closely related to Chen Yifan’s in depth research in Mainland China and his understanding of Chinese customs in the context of the Anti-Japanese war. The stage of drama is a response to the social reality, and thus, in order to break away from the suppression of the Kuomintang and encourage the people to actively resist the Japanese aggression, the Yangko Drama, improved by the people in Northern Shaanxi and the guerrillas of Eighth Route Army, was reflecting a reality of Japanese invasion in the Anti-Japanese bay area. It had brought Chen great enthusiasm and encouragement. He believed that “if the traditional opera is called the product of the farming feudal society, then the Yangko drama symbolizes the combination of modern industrial society and the democratic society”.¹ It is a product created by the cooperation between contemporary intellectuals and farmers during the revolution. It was also a revolutionary reform and revival of the traditional Chinese theater in a special historical period.

To write this book, Chen Yifan had referred to the major publications about the Chinese theater art in the English speaking world before 1949, including *The*

1 Jack Chen. *The Chinese Theatre*, London: Dennis Dobson 1949. p. 45.

2 source: Jack Chen. *The Chinese Theatre*. P.56

Chinese Drama (published by Kelly and Walsh in 1921) written by R F. Johnson (1874-1938) and *The Chinese Theater* (published in London in 1925) written by American dramatic historian A. E. Zuker (1890-1971), etc.. However, different from the contemporary and later Chinese theater history books, this book was more like a brief history of the Chinese theater art, written for the new China. The interviews and life experience in China made Chen Yifan clearly see that China's future would be born in the caves in Northern Shaanxi. This was just like the new Yangko drama and its future described in the book. It represented the improvement of the Chinese Xiqu and a new era in which the people would be the master of the country. From 1949 when the first edition published in London to 1959, the book had been printed in 21 editions. According to incomplete statistics, there are 448 libraries that stored it in their collection¹, which shows its wide range of influence.

The book was filled with expectations for a new era, and its publication has made the world understand the changes in China through the development of the Chinese theater art. At that time, the people of the world won the Anti-Fascism War, and peace was being maintained all over the world. In the Post-war Western drama circle, there was an upsurge of learning Oriental drama, especially Chinese Xiqu. And Mr. Mei Lanfang's attempts and success to visit the United States and the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s had made the Chinese Xiqu be recognized and respected by the westerners. However, there were still very limited opportunities for foreign audiences to study and really understand Chinese theatre art. They still had a certain sense of distance and strangeness to it. As far as the domestic situation was concerned, the People's Republic of China had just been established, and all that was left undone was being undertaken. China was eager for and was actively creating opportunities to establish ties with the outside world. Under such national and foreign situation, China's "ice breaking" depended on the extensive cultural exchanges between China and other countries. Therefore, it was urgent to launch a popular book on the Chinese culture. Although there has been no physical evidence to clarify the motivation of Chen Yifan's writing of *The Chinese Theater*, the new Yangko drama in Northern Shaanxi and Chen's teaching experience in Lu Xun Art Academy undoubtedly provided materials for his creation. According to Chen Yifan himself, "it is very meaningful to introduce

¹ According to WorldCat data, see <http://worldcat.org/identities/lccn-n50047933/>, October 10, 2020. <http://worldcat.org/identities/lccn-n50047933/%E9%94%9B?020%E9%AA%9E%3F0%E9%8F%88%3F0>.



■ A play of student life produced by Lu Xun Art Academy in Yenan, 1941, in the modern “Western style”³

what is happening in China to people all over the world.”¹ In fact, this book not only introduced the Chinese theater art to the English speaking world, but also informed and presented the changes in China in the first half of the 20th century to the readers of the world. Thanks to Mr. Chen’s experience in painting and photography in his early years, there were more than ten vivid line drawing illustrations about the Chinese Xiqu knowledge and four

historical photos in this book, which also added a lot of artistic interest and historical value to the book. What’s more, Chen himself was also a character who wandered between “the other” and “the subject”, thus his perspective had two sides. On the one hand, as an English and Russian speaking foreigner, with dark skin, curly hair, and a towering nose, he explained this unfamiliar cultural form in his own way; On the other hand, as a third generation overseas Chinese and the youngest son of a revolutionary of the Republic of China, Chen Yifan saw spreading Chinese culture as his family mission, which was a kind of “calling”² for him. Although the road of establishing diplomatic relations between China and Britain had been rough and long at that time, this little book, which was earlier than the diplomatic relations between the two countries, laid a cultural foundation for the Chinese National Peking Opera Troupe’s visit to Britain at the invitation of the British-Chinese’s Association for Friendship in 1955.

Chen Yifan devoted his whole life to the promoting of Chinese culture. After he migrated to the United States in the 1970s, he began to pay attention to the Chinese Americans. He believed that he should focus on the Chinese theater art in the United States in order to study the Chinese American history and culture, “because it has played a special and important role in the historical

1 Chen Yifan: Sun Yat-sen’s Ideal and Today’s China, P. 175.

2 Chen Yifan himself said: “China is calling”, a letter from Chen Yifan to Chen Xilan, August 28, 1937, quoted from Huang Yuan: Chen Yifan and the International Tour of Modern Chinese Art (1937-39) (I), Theory and Criticism of Literature and Art, No.1, 2020, No.142. The original text was translated from Paul Bevan. A Modern Miscellany. Shanghai Cartoon Artists, Shao Xunmei’s Circle and the Travels of Jack Chen. 1926-1938. Leiden: Brill, 2016. p. 202.

3 Source: Jack Chen. The Chinese Theatre. p.49.

development, and has become the gathering center and special education mode of the majority of Chinese, regardless of their hometown, sects and political views. ”¹ From 1982 to 1992, Chen Yifan focused on the study of the Chinese theater art in the United States, and established “Chinese Xiqu in the West: Opera Performing Art Center of Chinese American” and undertook the position of the president, dedicating to the revival of the traditional Chinese theater art and success of the Chinese American performing arts. In 1987, accompanied by his wife, Chen Yuanzhen, he “made a special trip to China and presented the copies of the full set of photos, paintings and materials of the exhibition *The Chinese Theater Art in the US: 1850-1986* to the Chinese Theater Association, and arranged exhibitions around the country. ”² In short, from 1937 to 1938, Chen Yifan brought the Chinese modern art to the West in the form of world touring art exhibitions, and then to his death in 1995, the year when Mr. Chen died, he spend half a century to bringing the Chinese traditional art and the Chinese theater art to the English speaking world.

Now the People’s Republic of China is 71 years old, and Mr. Chen has passed away for 25 years. This little English book, as well as the name of Chen Yifan, has gradually faded out of the public view. It is true that the promotion of Chinese theater art have been increasing daily, but these early scholars, who devoted themselves to the promotion of traditional Chinese Xiqu culture, and their writings, which they left behind, are still inspiring us. Their spirit still exists today. *The Chinese Theater* published in London had helped people in Britain and other English speaking countries to understand China at that time and opened up the cultural exchanges and interaction between China and Britain, especially in the field of drama. Although this book is small, it is of great significance for us who study this cultural topic today, and it is also an important topic that cannot be bypassed in the transmission of traditional Chinese culture.

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1 Zhang Yan: Chen Yifan’s Legendary Life, International Communication, 1995, No. 6, P. 25.

2 IBID.

Introduction to Classical Plays (IV)

LIRAN

Deep in *Dragon Beard Ditch*



■ The photo of Lao She

The play *Dragon Beard Ditch* was adapted from the works of well-known Chinese novelist and playwright Lao She. It was first published in September 1950. Back in October 1949, Lao She returned to Beijing after furthering his writing career in America for three and a half years. After returning, Lao She was welcomed warmly by the government and

was invited by them to write about the new China. Touched by how quickly the new country was built, he was inspired to write about the 'New China'.

Dragon Beard Ditch took its name from a notoriously stinking ditch in Beijing. In 1950, Beijing municipal government granted funding to renovate the ditch and the surrounding area, despite facing fiscal difficulties. Lao She once said that the writing of the story was a great challenge, not only because he was not familiar with the ditch, but because he was more used to write satire stories, not celebratory stories. However, he could not control his eagerness in writing about the changes he saw with his own eyes around Dragon Beard Ditch, and their representative value as a symbol of the New China.

On a hot day in 1950, Lao She, who had to walk with a stick due to illness and



■ Stage photo of *The Dragon Beard Ditch* on the stage of the Beijing People's Art Theater, 2009

injury in old age, went to Dragon Beard Ditch to talk with the local people. Within a month, Lao She finished writing the first draft of *Dragon Beard Ditch*. It was published in the journal "Beijing Arts" in September.

Dragon Beard Ditch has three scenes. It follows Crazy Cheng, the leading role's life, turning from an artist to a lunatic in the old China, and turning back from a lunatic to an artist in the New China. The story reveals the difficult life of the lower class in

the old society, and their determination to transcend their lot. Without traditional dramatic plots, the story was filled with daily life. Scene by scene, the seemingly loose, unconnected, stories recreate the life of the people living around Dragon Beard Ditch. Lao She successfully used the rebuilding of Dragon Beard Ditch to tell the story of a healing of a community. By showing the change of the ditch, the story was able to show how ordinary people's lives improved along with the society in an artistic way.

The success of *Dragon Beard Ditch* was also thanks to the contribution of the director Jiao Juyin and the leading actor Yu Shizhi. As the leading director of Beijing People's Art Theatre, director Jiao Juyin made some adaptations after



■ The portrait of Lao She



■ The old scene of the Dragon Beard Ditch

getting the draft, using his expertise to make it more of a stage spectacle. He also took the actors to Dragon Beard Ditch. By living there, the actors got to feel what their characters felt. Yu Shizhi, the actor who played “Crazy Cheng” gained the most from the experience.

Crazy Cheng was once an accomplished artist. He ended up in Dragon Beard Ditch due to the pressures from a gang with roots in the old feudalism. When entering into the new age, Crazy Cheng initially holds on to the crazed delusions he has developed in the old world. He sees himself as privileged, but in truth, he lives in poverty. Fortunately, the new world gives him the chance to re-find his art and his life, and more importantly, his value in living. The “craziness” is replaced by positiveness. Yu’s depiction of this was legendary for its tenderness, and it gained the reputation of being a tear-jerker.

In February 1951, *Dragon Beard Ditch* was performed in Beijing People’s Art Theatre and was a huge success. In March, the production went to Zhong Nan Hai, and performed to president Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and other leaders of China. It was again warmly welcomed. In December 1951, Lao She was conferred the title of “Artist of the People” by Beijing.

A Sentinel under the Neon Light: An Overview

The 1962 play, written by Shen Ximeng, Mo Yan, and Lu Xingchen, received critical acclaim after its initial release, and maintains its influence to this day.



■ Poster of the film *A Sentinel under the Neon Light*

“The Eighth Unit on Nanjing Road”, as it’s colloquially known, is the 8th unit of a battalion in the Shanghai Garrison of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army. After the liberation of the city of Shanghai on May 27, 1949, the 8th unit played a central role in guarding, patrolling and keeping morale up on the busiest street in China at the time—Nanjing Road. In doing so, the company earned the praise of national leaders Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Deng Xiaoping, and soon after “The Eighth Unit on Nanjing Road” became a household name throughout China.

A Sentinel Under the Neon Light was a play based on their story. In each of its 9 scenes, it depicts the unit’s fight against the remaining agents of the Nationalist Party, known as the Rogue K, to protect the city of Shanghai.

The play’s major theme is proper public service, as the narrative explores how a public body, and the individuals who count themselves as members, can avoid temptation and corruption. The play follows the fortunes of the men who manned the Eighth Unit, and its story runs as follows;

To celebrate the liberation of Shanghai, the government holds a huge gala celebration. New recruit to the Eighth Unit, Tong Anan, is ordered to keep guard during the festivities and look out for anyone suspicious. However, he asks his Platoon Leader, Chen Xi, for leave to go out and eat with a female classmate of his, Lin Yuanyuan. Obviously, the top brass of the unit do not take kindly to

such a suggestion, and when he is criticized for not being a responsible soldier, Tong Anan takes off his military uniform out of shame, and leaves.

Next, the story focuses on the Platoon Leader himself, Chen Xi—once a down-to-earth soldier with perseverance, who has since become jaded by the gaudy lights of Shanghai and his rise through the ranks. He is shown to throw away socks knitted by his stay-at-home wife in the countryside, Chun Ni, and replace them with new, colorful socks as an unsubtle symbol of his newfound decadence.

When Chun Ni travels miles and miles to visit him in the city, he complains about her out-of-style rustic look. He speaks to her with cruelty, forbidding her from going outside through fear she'll embarrass him before Shanghai's beau monde. This harshness towards his wife is shown to stem from the fact that Chen Xi has fallen in love with another woman—Qu Manli—whom he has failed to realize is an enemy spy in his pigheaded infatuation.

As a counterpoint to Tong Anan and Chen Xi comes Zhao Dada—a brave upstanding soldier who feels lost in the bewildering Shanghai cityscape. Out of anger at what his comrades Tong and Chen have done, he applies to go to the frontline to continue the fight for liberation beyond Shanghai.

Zhao's determination to continue the fight acts as a catalyst to set off a series of unrelated events which ultimately save the Unit and its members from ruin. First, spies kidnap the sister of Tong Anan, and when their plans to use her as a pawn are thwarted by Squadron Instructor Lu Hua's timely intervention, Tong Anan decides to return the favor in kind by saving Chen Li from the plotting Qu Manli - who he had known to be a spy. Soon after this, all the enemy agents are caught. Through growth and understanding, by the end of the play all of the Unit members determine to be more like the model soldier Zhao Dada, and they vow to keep fighting for liberation without complacency or corruption.

There were a lot of ups and downs throughout the creation of the play. The playwright Shen Ximeng experienced living and training with the soldiers from the Eighth Unit, which inspired him to write some lively scenes for the play. But when the script was first handed in, it was harshly criticized, mostly for including too many dark and negative stories. Due to that, the play was postponed until it was green-lighted by prime minister Zhou Enlai. Afterward, leaders including prime minister Zhou Enlai, vice prime minister Chen Yi, and famous artists such as Cao Yu and Lao She all went to see the play and gave affirmative reviews.

In the same year, the company performed it for president Mao Zedong at the hall of Huai Ren in Zhong Nanhai. The president complimented the performance multiple times and said that more people should see it. In 1964, *A Sentinel Under the Neon Light* was made into a film and released all around the country. It was later adapted into a TV series, Yueju, and Shanghai Opera and remains a popular part of the repertoire to this day.

LIRAN

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Chinese Theatre in the First Half of 2021

MA HUI

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, the Chinese Performing Arts industry has undergone challenges from suspension to recovery. Many troupes and companies have chosen to stream their performances online. These Online script readings and performances have been warmly welcomed by audiences, bringing great changes to the theatre industry. In the second half of 2020, as the pandemic was brought under control, theatres in many places resumed receiving guests, and major theatre festivals and art festivals were held once again.

However, in January 2021, the pandemic reappeared in parts of China, and the recovering industry was faced with several new challenges. Nearly 1,000 performances in professional theatres nationwide were canceled or postponed in January. Fortunately, the industry was well prepared, and domestic vaccine research and inoculation was carried out actively and effectively. In the face of the recurrent pandemic, the industry also made timely adjustments, and finally in mid-March the authorities lifted the 75% attendance limit on theatres and other performance venues, and large-scale performances were held one after the other.

Overall, in the first half of 2021, the theatre industry has adapted to a combination of offline and online events. Under such extreme conditions, the creativity and enthusiasm of theatre practitioners were stimulated and a number of influential new theatres were produced. Meanwhile, 2021 witnessed the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China, and a batch of socialist realist theatre retrospectives have been released, bringing a new atmosphere to the industry.

Part One: Drama

Adapted from the work of the fifth Mao Dun Literature Prize, *Red Poppies*



■ Poster of *Red Poppies*

premiered in Beijing Tianqiao Performing Arts Centre in March and has since been performed in six cities including Shanghai. Finally, it successfully ended its tour as the opening performance of the first Suzhou Bay Theatre Festival in May.

This play tells the story of a “fool” being born into a failing, soon to be obsolete, Tibetan royal family. From Beijing to Hangzhou, the show had gradually gained a positive reputation, with the media calling it “a Tibetan version of *A Dream of Red Mansions*”. Ah Lai, the author of the original novel, believed that this was a most faithful adaptation of the original novel, truly capturing the core essence of the story.

In order to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China, the first Suzhou Bay Theatre Festival 2021 kicked off in April, with performances running through August. The festival performed throughout both the spring and summer seasons, bringing together a number of outstanding works with novel themes and profound meanings. In addition to *Red Poppies*, there were “red dramas” such as *Outpost* and excellent plays adapted from the well-known classics such as *Everlasting Sorrow*, *Diary of a Madman*, and *White Deer Plain*, as well as new works such as *The Face of Chiang Kai-shek*. Besides, Lv Xiaoping’s brand new work *Hometown* and Meng Jinghui’s *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe* were also introduced to the audience.

The large-scale original drama *Outpost* was about revolution and youth. There have been many productions of this type of subject matter, but few of them could be considered classics. The drama used an ingenious structural method

to connect the 1930s when the story took place, the 1990s when the script was created, and the present day when the performance was in progress. In other words, it traveled through time.

Adapted from Wang Anyi's namesake novel and produced by the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center, the drama *Everlasting Sorrow* was restarting a new run after 18 years. It created a sensation from the time it was brought to the stage in 2003 and became a cultural must-see at the time. It brought back to the stage the forty years of love and affections of a Shanghai woman, performing three eras in three hours which presented a picture of Shanghai customs from the last century.

Diary of a Madman was an adaptation of Lu Xun's novel of the same name, directed by the Polish theatre master Krystian Lupa. Due to the pandemic, this play, which was supposed to premiere last year, was not unveiled in multiple theatres and theatre festivals until this year. The year 2021 just so happens to coincide with the 100th anniversary of Lu Xun's birth, which ensured extensive attention was drawn to this play. Lupa has transformed a novel of just over 4,000 words into a five-hour long play that not only interpreted the *Diary of a Madman*, but also added elements from Lu Xun's other works to create a "Lu Xun world".

Based on the history of Nanjing University, *The Face of Chiang Kai-shek* vividly revealed the complex mentality of intellectuals in the face of power through the representation of the real-life historical event where Chiang Kai-shek invited three professors of the Chinese department to dinner when he was the president of Nanjing University in 1943. *Hometown* was a new rural-themed play released this year by director Lv Xiaoping, focusing on the collision of modern and traditional civilization.

The first Aranya Theatre Festival was also held in the first half of 2021, just a month after the Suzhou Bay Theatre Festival, in the Aranya town of Qinhuangdao, a seaside city in Hebei. The two festivals, one in the south and the other in the north, had overlapping repertoires while maintaining their own characteristics, bringing audiences from the north and the south one audio-visual feast after the other. Under the theme of "The Other Side and Temptation", the Aranya Theatre Festival featured 11 days of diverse theatrical performances in 12 local theatres of various shapes and sizes. In the theatre arts section, there were 26 plays with a total of 68 performances, with *Diary of a Madman*, *White Deer Plain*, and *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe* as the first major productions.

The Ballad of the Sad Cafe was adapted from the book of the same name written by the esteemed American writer McCullers, and it was also the first time for her work to appear on the Chinese stage. On June 11, director Meng



■ Poster and Stage photos of *The Ballad of the Sad cafe*



■ Online performance poster for *Waiting For Godot*

Jinghui gave it its global debut at the Aranya Drama Festival, and it was presented again at the Suzhou Bay theatre Festival in August. On the basis of the original novel, the play *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe* incorporated the spiritual elements of writers such as Hemingway and Faulkner to tell the story of a secretive and absurd love affair between three lonely people. Meng Jinghui staged it in China's largest seaside Amphitheatre, with the nearby library as the backdrop and sea breeze and sunsets as the setting, thus creating an immersive visual and auditory experience for the audience.

White Deer Plain by Shaanxi People's Art Theatre is the stage adaptation its author, Chen Zhongshi, was most satisfied with during his lifetime. It was performed in authentic Shaanxi dialect, with soundtrack blended into the quint and desolate Qinqiang and Huayin Laoqiang, realistically reproducing the half-

century-long national secret history of the Kuan-chung Plain in Shaanxi.

In addition, 2021 Shanghai - Jing'an Modern Theatre Valley was held from April 23 to May 10 as scheduled. After the pandemic, every theatre has a new way of thinking about "theatre". The theme of this year was "Gathering", with 20 repertoires staged including the "red drama" *Fu Dri, Heaven Sent* based on Lao She's novel of the same name, the classic rehearsal of *Waiting for Godot*, and the pandemic-themed *The Taste of Hot and Dry Noodles*.

In the wake of the outbreak of the pandemic, many theatre practitioners starting from last year have begun their exploration of online drama. In this exhibition, the first online drama *Waiting for Godot* directed by Wang Chong attracted widespread attention including 180, 000 live online viewers. The Taste of Hot and Dry Noodles was the first production rehearsed by the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre since it resumed work since the outbreak of COVID-19. It

was presented to the audience on Bilibili live broadcast room in July last year. In tandem with this, some viewers went outside to watch the show live on a large screen. Due to the lockdown being lifted, it had been performed twice offline.

Breaking the traditional performance space of theatre, “cloud theatre” was widely praised by judges. Some scholars believe that the essence of theatre is to enter the theatre house and communicate with the creators’ face to face. The innovative approach of “cloud theatre” was really a last resort during the pandemic, but this new, diversified and cross-border creation mode has brought new enlightenment to the theatre world.

Part Two: Xiqu

After the pandemic, the forms of theatre performances have also tended to be diversified. Taking into account the need for regular pandemic prevention and control, many theatres have adopted a combination of offline performances and online live broadcasts.

During the Spring Festival of 2021, due to the needs for COVID-19 prevention and control, Shenzhen launched the Futian “Spring Festival Art Festival” for the first time, providing a cultural feast for the citizens who stayed in Shenzhen during Chinese New Year. From February 17 to 24, the Shenzhen Grand Theatre has arranged a total of nine traditional Chinese Xiqu, including: the famous aria *Cheng Ying Rescues the Orphan* brought by Li Shujian, the founder of the Li School of Yuju; the repertoire of Jingju which included both the traditional famous aria such as *The Drunken Concubine* and the classic aria of the red revolution like *Shajiabang*; Huangmei Xi *The Female Prince Consort (Emperor’s Female Son-in-Law)* brought by the well-known Huangmei Xi artist Han Zaifen; the modern Cantonese opera *Return on a Snowy Night* and the ancient one *Emperor Tang Xuanzong and His Concubine Yang Guifei*.

Among these, *Cheng Ying Rescues the Orphan* based on *The Orphan of Zhao* written by Ji Junxiang, a playwright of the Yuan Dynasty, was a highlight. The starring Li Shujian’s bleak, solemn and stirring Yuxi tune brought the audience to tears, as it led them into the blood-soaked, twisted, and eventful story from thousands of years ago. These performances were also streamed live online, and the entire festival attracted a total of 390,000 online viewers.

On March 21, the “2021 Kunqu and Qinjiang Exchange Performance”, jointly organized by the Shaanxi Opera Research Institute and the Kun Theatre of Jiangsu Performing Arts Group, was presented at the theatre of the Shaanxi



■ Stage photo of Wanwanqiang *Yang Guifei* · *The Drunken Beauty*

and meticulous performance, Kong Aiping has incisively and vividly expressed nun Chen Miaochang's passionate yearning for love along with her fear and shyness.

Originating in Shaanxi Province, Wanwanqiang got its name because the rhyme of it came from beating small copper bowls. Different from the generous and unrestrained Qinqiang, the music of Wanwanqiang is elegant and tactful, and is known as "court music". *Yang Guifei*, a large-scale newly-written historical drama from the 1980s, was revived in 2018 starring Li Mei, director of the Shaanxi Opera Research Institute, as Yang Guifei. In this rehearsal, Li Mei especially dedicated the play as an educational repertoire for the Wanwanqiang training of young talents. She taught the young actors face to face while rehearsing the performance, paying great attention to the inheritance. The excerpt of *The Drunken Beauty* combined the classic moves of Mei School Jingju *The Drunken Concubine*, with the unique performing characteristics of

Opera Research Institute and its official platform online. The repertoires performed included Kunqu *The Jade Hairpin* · *Qin Tiao*, *The Oil Seller and the Song Girl* · *Lake Tower*; Wanwanqiang *Yang Guifei* · *The Drunken Beauty* and Qinqiang *Dazhentai*, each with its own characteristics.

The Jade Hairpin·*Qin Tiao* was a famous excerpt from Kunqu, which described the story of a scholar and a nun who admired each other, broke through layers of resistance, and finally united as one. The performance was jointly presented by the famous Kunqu actors Kong Aiping and Shi Mingxia. With her exquisite singing

Wanwanqiang.

Dazhentai was an old Qinqiang that placed great emphasis on both the performance and singing skills of Xusheng (Laosheng), and it told the story of Wang Zhen, a Ming Dynasty official who punished the evil and promoted the good. It has been performed for many years and is still very popular with audiences. There are a lot of actions involving ornate hats and beards, which require great levels of skill from the actors, and thus, it is often regarded as an important repertoire to measure the performance of Laosheng.

In addition, to celebrate the centennial anniversary of the founding of the CPC, various theatres held activities including national tours, special performances of red-themed repertoires and so on.

With the theme of “2021 Zhejiang Yueju Tour in China”, Zhejiang Xiaobaihua Yueju Theatre officially launched its national tour in Shanghai on May 13, which was not only a tribute to the centenary of the founding of the CPC, but also a celebration of the 115th anniversary of the birth of Yueju. Following the classic *The Emerald Hairpin*, the inherited version *Gentleman in Flowers* and *Xianglin Sao* were sung again in Shanghai, the birthplace of Yueju.

The Emerald Hairpin is a new version created by Zhejiang Xiaobaihua Yueju Troupe in 2018, all performed by young actors. This love story of the Ming Dynasty has been widely circulated and written into many types of theatre, among which the Yueju version was the most classic. *Gentleman in flowers* was also a classic rehearsal repertoire. It was a modern presentation in the spirit of free performances and emotional expression based on the 1983 version performed by Lv Ruiying, the famous master of the Lv School of Yueju. Adapted from Lu Xun’s novel *Blessing*, *Xianglin Sao* was starred by Yuan Xuefen in 1946 and hailed as a milestone in the reform of Yueju in the 1940s. The script embodied the spirit of Lu Xun’s original work and successfully shaped the typical artistic image of Xianglin Sao. The 2021 version was starred by three generations of actors from the young, mid-aged to the old on the



■ Stage photo of *Zhong Kui Marries off His Sister*

same stage and was led by the descendants of Yuan School, aiming to inherit and pay tribute to the classics.

While Yueju started its national tour, Guangzhou Cantonese Opera Institute also launched the 2021 Youth Performance Competition on May 12. It is worth mentioning that the players in this competition were younger and had all achieved good results. In the performance section, outstanding young and middle-aged actors from Guangzhou Cantonese Opera Institute respectively performed the highlight of *Zhong Kui Marries off His Sister* and others. It originated from a long-standing Chinese folklore story and was well-loved by the Chinese, with famous excerpts from Jingju, Chuanju, and Kunqu. This version of Cantonese Opera, performed by the young actor Guo Hongjie, was an outstanding repertoire of the competition.

Part Three: Academic Trends

On April 2, 2021, a seminar on *Diary of a Madman* directed by Polish director Lupa was held in Shanghai. From the perspective of actor Xi Meijuan, chairman of the Shanghai Federation of Literary and Art, Lupa's stage performance was. Professor Gong Baorong of Shanghai Theatre Academy believed that Lupa has led us to a large extent in approaching and becoming familiar with the frontier changes in international theatre. Professor Yang Yang of Shanghai Theatre Academy finally concluded that Lu Xun was the most powerful cultural symbol in Chinese literature in the 20th century, and Lupa's *Diary of a Madman* has transformed literary symbols into stage art, allowing people to reconsider the relationship between literature and theatre.

On April 14, a seminar on *Red Poppies* was held at the Shanghai Theatre Academy. Professor Gao Ziwen of Nanjing University believed that as a play adapted from a novel, this work reflected efficiently the alienation of power relations and interpersonal relationships. Professor Hu Xuehua of Shanghai Jiao Tong University believed that the use of specialized singers and dance groups enhanced the atmosphere of life and humanistic temperament. While Ding Luonan, a professor of Shanghai Theatre Academy, thought that in terms of directing, this theatre was not consistent enough with the original temperament and thus was slightly weak. According to Professor Yang Yang of Shanghai Theatre Academy, the plays *Diary of a Madman* and *Red Poppies*, both adapted from novels, have received different reactions this year, which was worthy of further consideration by the scholarly world.

On May 15, the Symposium on the Origin and Development of Contemporary European and American Drama (Focusing on Britain and America) was held at

Sichuan International Studies University. The conference was presided over by Professor Gong Baorong, along with many experts and scholars who made speeches. Professor Yang Yang of Shanghai Theatre Academy pointed out that the study of theatre should not be limited to the professional theatre institutions only. Associate Professor Han Xi from Peking University elaborated on the role and significance of homosexual themes in the development of American theatre. Professor Jiang Mengmeng from Sichuan International Studies University analyzed the male characters and the three ways of character construction in Sam Shepard's works. Professor Wang Lan from Shanghai International Studies University shared an overview of British theatre in the last decade. In his conclusion, Prof. Gong Baorong said that the on topic speeches comprehensively introduced the development of British and American theatre from the 1950s to the present.

On May 18, an academic seminar with the theme of "Inheritance and Innovation of Excellent Traditional Culture in the New Era" was held at the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts. At the meeting, experts and scholars jointly discussed the path of creative development of traditional arts. Fu Jin, the vice chairman of the Chinese Literature and Art Critics Association, pointed out that the essence of inheritance and innovation of excellent traditional culture is to think about how traditional art can adapt to the needs of the new era. In practice, it is necessary to properly handle the three pairs of relationships which are inheritance and development, popularization and improvement, creation and performance respectively.

On May 19, a seminar on the teaching and creation of the Xiqu version of *Secret Love in Peach Blossom Land* was held at the Shanghai Theatre Academy. This version has comprehensively used Jingju, Yueju, Kunqu, and drama to express the corresponding theatre content. Lai Shengchuan, the director of the drama version, believes that such an adaptation is very original in spirit.

On May 21, the 24th Cao Yu Script Award and the 30th Plum Performance Award for Chinese Theatre were presented at the same venue in Nanjing. A total of 13 Xiqu performers, one drama performer and one opera performer were awarded the Plum Performance Award. While the Cao Yu Script Award went to five works which were the drama *Sanwan*, *That Night*, Hunan Flower Drum Song *Cai Kunshan Ploughing the Land*, the drama *Family Guest*, Kunqu *Mei Lanfang·Mei Lang of That Year*, and the opera *Red Poppies* respectively.

On May 27th, a symposium on "Qinqiang and Modern Chinese Xiqu" was held in Xi'an. This symposium invited more than 30 top experts in the field of Xiqu in Beijing and the five northwestern provinces to discuss the status quo and problems faced by Qinqiang and modern Chinese Xiqu. Zhou Yude, the former president of the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts, discussed how

the art of Xiqu can pay attention to reality while maintaining its uniqueness in terms of the stage and actors. Liu Wenfeng, former deputy director of the Institute of Xiqu Studies of the Chinese National Academy of Arts, elaborated on how to deal with the relationship between the needs of the audience, the characteristics of different genres, and the commonality of Xiqu in the modernized creation of Qinqiang. Yu Tao, vice chairman of the Gansu Literature and Art Critics Association, started with an analysis of the outstanding works of modern Qinqiang Xiqu from the last decade, and judged their overall level and quality.

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