

Chinese Performing Arts

No. 5
June 2022

戲中
劇國

- The Cantonese and Their Songs: How Land Cultivates the Performing Arts
- Yam Kim-Fai and the Prosperity of Female Wenwuheng in Cantonese Yueju
- Immersing in Arts, Sublimating Hearts: Ding Fan and His Artistic Achievements
- Epilogue to the Modern Drama Version of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*
- "Purification" of Theatrical "Chineseness": Manifestation and Reception of Cultural Identity in Western Tours of the Mei Lanfang Troupe in Early 20th Century
- Introduction to Classical Plays (V)
- Research on the Performances of Cantonese Yueju in the United States



国际戏剧协会
International Theatre Institute ITI



上海戏剧学院
Shanghai Theater Academy





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CONTENTS

No.5
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INTRODUCTION

- 2 The Cantonese and Their Songs:
How Land Cultivates the Performing Arts
/ LUO Li

STUDIES OF CANTONESE YUEJU

- 8 Yam Kim-Fai and the Prosperity of Female Wenwusheng
in Cantonese Yueju
/ WANG Yong'en
- 16 The Breakthroughs of Traditional Cantonese Yueju:
Taking the Film *White Snake* as an Example
/ REN Tingting
- 24 Research on the Performances of Cantonese Yueju
in the United States
/ MA Hui
- 34 Retrospect and Prospect: The Communication of
Cantonese Yueju in Southeast Asia from the Perspective of
Mutual Learning among Civilizations
/ HUANG Lu & LIU Junling

ROLES, ARTISTS AND THEATRES

- 45 On the Changes of the Types-of-Role in Cantonese Yueju
/ YIN Qinghua
- 55 Immersing in Arts, Sublimating Hearts:
Ding Fan and His Artistic Achievements
/ ZHANG Jinqiong
- 64 Guangdong Cantonese Opera Institute
/ LIU Shiyun

TODAY'S STAGE OF CHINA

- 70 Epilogue to the Modern Drama Version of
The Dream of the Red Chamber
/ YU Rongjun
- 80 Six-hour Version of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*:
Contemporary Aesthetic Reconstruction and Interpretation
/ SUN Yunfeng
- 89 Poetry, Xiqu and Classicism: The Modern Drama Version of
The Dream of the Red Chamber
/ CAI Xingshui

THE SPREAD OF CHINESE THEATRE

- 96 "Purification" of Theatrical "Chineseness":
Manifestation and Reception of Cultural Identity in Western
Tours of the Mei Lanfang Troupe in Early 20th Century
/ GAO Yang

INTRODUCTION OF CLASSICS

- 105 Introduction to Classical Plays (V)
/ LI Ran

OVERVIEW

- 110 Chinese Theatre in the Second Half of 2021
/ AI Shasha

The Cantonese and Their Songs: How Land Cultivates the Performing Arts

LUO Li

In the early 1980s, evening entertainment for people in Guangzhou can only be described as rather dull. Even with televisions and radios present as popular items, Technicolor TV, for most families, remained a luxury. As I recollect, I envision my grandmother taking me to the theater to “watch the grand show” one of my first memories. It was through the repeated listening to young gentlemen and ladies on stage—and hearing the humming from my relatives around me—that I, albeit slowly, but naturally, learned to sing the Hung Sin-Nui¹’s song in *Zhaojun Departs the Frontier* as a child: “I now hold my Pipa, waiting...” However, for those children younger than me who grew up watching much more TV, Cantonese Yueju² may be unfamiliar. Though younger generations may not retain the familiarity with the practice that older generations possess, one finds it difficult to disagree that Cantonese Yueju continues to make up an important aspect of Cantonese culture. The Cantonese people seem to possess a natural affinity for their own songs, and one finds citizens humming the songs during everyday life. The spectrum of moods sung range from heroic to bitter, romantic to devastated. In karaoke shops one often hears those songs most popular: “The flower fills the sky and covers the moonlight. I try to use this cup of wine to remember you on Fengtai...” or “With a light boat passing, people are separated by thousands of mountains...” How strange a situation: while the modern person cannot live without the newfangled phones and iPads, we remain reluctant to relinquish the old pleasures from a far off time. We easily find Cantonese Yueju on social media platforms such as Tik

1 Hung Sin-Nui or Hong Xiannv (红线女). [Translator’s note]

2 Cantonese Yueju (粤剧) is a traditional Chinese opera that originated in southern China’s Cantonese culture, and involves music, singing, martial arts, acrobatics and acting. In order to be accurate, some proper nouns of Chinese traditional opera are transliterated here. [Translator’s note]



■ Hung Sin-Nui (1925-2013)



■ Wang Zhaojun, portrayed by Hung Sin-Nui in *Zhaojun Departs the Frontier*

Tok, for example. Cantonese Yueju lives in the Cantonese body and soul, no matter from what era one finds one's birth. As long as one's native language is Cantonese, there exists an inexplicable affection for Cantonese Yueju; the power of culture and tradition, perhaps.

Cantonese Yueju, known as the “Southern Red Bean” or “The Grand Opera of Guangdong”, remains the best known Xiqu genre in the Cantonese area and finds particular popularity in Guangdong, Hong Kong, Macao, and overseas where Cantonese Chinese emigrated. Cantonese Yueju comprises the integration and enrichment of a variety of other Xiqu genres and Cantonese folk arts. It is, therefore, engraved with the mark of Cantonese culture and history. Cantonese Yueju evolved from other Xiqu¹ genres outside of Guangdong and after being localized by Cantonese folk music, eventually found popularity as an art form. From the Han and Tang Dynasties to the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Guangzhou cemented itself as an important port for both domestic and international trading. The prosperity of the economy and the development of commerce attracted performing artists from both north

1 Xiqu (戏曲), refers to Chinese traditional opera. [Translator's note]



■ Sit Kok-Sin (1904-1956)



■ Ma Sze-Tsang (1900-1964)

and south of Guangdong. Folk songs, folk music, dance, and rap literature were so popular that the saying “Cantonese are good at singing” appeared. The aforementioned prosperity laid a solid foundation for the formation of Cantonese Yueju in the Ming and Qing dynasties. In the mid-17th century, Yiyangqiang and Kunqiang¹ flowed into Lingnan, developing into mature dramatic genres after some conglomeration. In the late 18th century, local artists, drawing on the experiences of other genres of Xiqu, set up local performing groups in an attempt to successfully integrate the music of Bangzi², Pihuang³, and other genres with the Cantonese dialect. Gradually, Cantonese Yueju with a strong regional style formed. During the period of the Republic of China (1912-1949), Cantonese Yueju were performed entirely with the Cantonese dialect. The surge of Cantonese Yueju reflects its inclusive, diverse, and interpersonal characteristics. In the 20th Century, too, Cantonese Yueju used only the Cantonese dialect, eventually being influenced by Jingju and Kunqu⁴, modern drama and films. It reached a fairly mature and developed

1 Yiyangqiang (弋阳腔), a genre of Xiqu that originated in the Ming Dynasty which in Yiyang, Jiangxi Province, and spread to many other places, and which was noteworthy for its use of a chorus as well as of soloists. Kunqiang (昆腔) also known as Kunshanqiang (昆山腔), refers to a genre of Xiqu which originated in Kunshan, Jiangsu Province, in the Ming Dynasty. [Translator’s note]

2 Bangzi (梆子), also known as Hebei Clapper Opera, is the main type of Xiqu in Hebei province. [Translator’s note]

3 Pihuang (皮黄), short for xipi and erhuang, usually refers to Beijing opera. [Translator’s note]

4 Jingju (京剧) and Kunqu (昆曲), refers to Beijing Opera and Kunqu Opera. [Translator’s note]

peak around the 1950s, in a form that remains rather untouched, thus being finalized as an art form and genre of Xiqu. The rise of Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Taiwan in the 1920s and 1930s promoted the popularization of Cantonese Yueju from the countryside to the city, and from open-air to the theater. Over the years, Cantonese Yueju developed from crudeness to exquisiteness, and the scripts in particular have advanced in complexity and fluidity. The most famous Cantonese Yueju actors such as Sit Kok-Sin, Ma Sze-Tsang¹, and the Hung Sin-Nui all gained their popularity in the large cities of Hong Kong and Guangzhou. The aforementioned urban environment and professional theaters played a decisive role in the maturing of the local Xiqu genre.

The flexibility, openness, pragmatism, and innovation of the Cantonese people might still be observed in their thinking and actions. Generally, the culture emphasizes the spirit of exploration along with a broader vision and open mindset. There exists a strong sense in business and value of services. In modern Chinese history, the Cantonese people are often at the forefront of both economic and cultural developments. Cantonese Yueju, similarly, is flexible, inclusive, and open to different cultures and tastes. This characteristic is inseparable from the Cantonese culture of embracing and accepting new things, absorbing foreign cultures, and integrating them with traditional culture. Without Cantonese culture, Cantonese Yueju would never have developed into its special local form. The flexibility and openness of Cantonese culture invited vocal techniques and singing from outside of the region to be localized, and developed local folk songs and martial arts. Pragmatism and innovation resulted in several new shows in the process of localization of Cantonese Yueju. Western musical instruments such as violins and cellos found integration, and the performance practices adopted aspects from straight plays and film acting techniques.

Due to the Cantonese peoples' innate innovative spirit, Cantonese Yueju generally includes bolder characteristics than other types of traditional Chinese Xiqu, particularly in its development and constant innovation. Take two of the masters of Cantonese Yueju, Ma Sze-Tsang, and Sit Kok-Sin, as examples; both of them advocated improving Cantonese Yueju in the 1930s. In the spring of 1931, Ma Sze-Tsang performed in San Francisco, USA. Before leaving, he compiled and printed the book *A Thousand Miles Tour* written while on travel through the US. In this book, he expressed his view and hopes on developing the "new drama". After returning from the United States in 1933, Ma Sze-

1 Sit Kok-Sin or Xue Juexian (薛觉先), Ma Sze-Tsang or Ma Shizeng (马师曾). [Translator's note]

Tsang put forward a clearer view of reforming Cantonese Yueju: “one should learn from the other’s strengths and while also preserving the core of one’s own to better develop a more advanced art form.” In August 1936, Sit Kok-Sin organized the Kok-Sin Touring Theatre Company and spent more than three months touring around Singapore. Before the tour, he wrote *The Collection of Kok-Sin*, also known as *Special Issue of Kok-Sin Touring Theatre Company*. The collection included Sit Kok-Sin’s declaration on reforming Yueju “Thinking During the Journey to the South”, which clearly and vividly expressed his views: Kok-Sin’s ambition was not only to combine the drama of the South with the North, but to integrate Chinese Xiqu with Western dramas. “We will learn their strengths to make up for our shortcomings, remove the dregs and save the essence so that our drama will become the world’s drama, and our arts will become the world’s best kind of arts.”

My focus on the study of Cantonese Yueju films began ten years ago. There exists particular interest in studying Cantonese Yueju from the perspective of media and technological developments. A benefit from studying Cantonese Yueju from this point of view is the highlighting of the flexibility and sensitivity to technology of Yueju and the Cantonese people. Cantonese Yueju has always innovated with its integration with media. It stemmed from purely live performance on stage to a more integrated form involving recording, radio, film, television, audio and video products, and the Internet in the early 20th century. This turned the limited one-time live viewing experience into a repeatable performance, allowing the impact of Cantonese Yueju to become deeper, wider and more lasting. The “saving” and “developing” of Cantonese Yueju on different media is actually an extension of the existence of it through the development of media. Cantonese Yueju is not only sold as scripts, publications, and records, but also as movie theater experiences in different private viewing facilities. The development of film hugely impacted the promotional model and perceptual approaches of Cantonese Yueju. The screen allows the audience to return from private viewings to a public space, opening the possibility of enjoying such a visual and aural experience with others. Although the experience is no longer a live stage experience, but in the collective chamber of the theater, the Cantonese Yueju viewing experience seems to have resurrected in new form. One recording of a performance can be shown over and over again in different scenarios and even in different countries. Audiences in different places and at different times can enjoy the same performance, which drastically changes the original limited spacial structure of drama. Geography no longer poses a difficulty in viewing. In this sense, Cantonese Yueju is no longer a subject of urbanization, but aids the nostalgia for their home experiences that emigrated Cantonese people long for.

What's more interesting is that with the development of VOD (view on demand) service, Cantonese Yueju movies have once again returned to private family owned viewing sessions. Cantonese Yueju exists now in a plethora of ways, and certainly has not dissipated.

For the Cantonese ethnic group, Cantonese Yueju is not only a form of entertainment and art, but more importantly, an aesthetic activity and cultural memory that embodies the cultural identity of the ethnic group and contains the deepest passions and emotions for the motherland. Absorbing artistic styles from the outside, Cantonese Yueju traveled from the South and developed into a local form of art with its own performing groups. By improving itself and entering into urban theaters, it clearly conveyed the acceptance of Cantonese culture. Times changed and Cantonese Yueju developed its own artistic style and performing traditions. From the ritual plays to specific repertoire, from New Year's repertoire to immortal plays, it is evident that Cantonese Yueju still plays an important role in Cantonese folk culture. Tracing the spread of Cantonese Yueju in Guangdong, Guangxi, Hong Kong, and Macao to its trajectory in the old Shanghai and its origin in Southeast Asia, North America, and other Cantonese immigrant populated areas, we can clearly see that despite geographic difficulties, Cantonese Yueju still closely connects the Cantonese people with their local accent, culture, and emotions. When analyzing the singing technique of Cantonese Yueju's integration with the local folk arts, one realizes what an ever-changing and non-static form of music the genre pervades. While studying the interrelationship between Cantonese Yueju music accompaniment and Guangdong music instrumental performance, between the southern style of Wuji martial arts and Wushu martial arts, and even the accent of Cantonese language, one finds constant reinforcement of the ever evolving Cantonese Yueju as a folk-art form.

Cantonese people retain a natural affinity for singing their own music. Sometimes, however, it is hard to determine whether it is the culture of the land that cultivated Cantonese Yueju, or the art itself that nourished generations of Cantonese people.

LUO LI

Vice president of Guangzhou Institute of Literary and Artistic Creation.

Yam Kim-Fai¹ and the Prosperity of Female Wenwusheng² in Cantonese Yueju

WANG Yong'en

Cantonese Yueju, recognized as a topic within the World Intangible Cultural Heritage list is an important sub-genre of Chinese Xiqu. Primarily popular in Guangdong, Guangxi, Hong Kong and other China regions, Cantonese Yueju has also spread overseas, growing into one of the most influential types of theater. Cantonese Yueju troupes began as completely consisting of men, though eventually completely female troupes appeared. For a considerable period of time, the all-male and all-female troupes coexisted in separate spaces, before finally combining and sharing the stage. Following this merge, two new kinds of role emerged; namely, the Male Dan (Dan referring to the female role) wherein a man disguises as woman, and the Female Wenwusheng. Later, the former gradually disappeared, while the latter exists and retains its popularity even today. It must be said that the famous Female Wenwusheng, Yam Kim-Fai, deserves much credit in solidifying the role.

The most successful and influential Female Wenwusheng in the history of Cantonese Yueju, Yam Kim-Fai (1913-1989), from Guangzhou, was fond of Yueju even as a child. At the age of 13, she studied with her aunt, the Cantonese Yueju Female Wusheng Xiao Jiaotian, and later under Huang Luxia. In addition, Yam Kim-Fai secretly learned from Kwai Ming-Yang³, an actress of particular fame, known as a "Gold-Medal Wusheng", or, an actor with a dashing stage style, handsome appearance, unique singing, and a mastery of both literary and martial arts plays. The "Gui School" he founded

1 Yam Kim-Fai or Ren Jianhui (任剑辉). [Translator's note]

2 Wenwusheng(文武生) is a type of role unique in Cantonese Yueju. "Sheng" (生) are the leading male actors in Xiqu.

3 Kwai Ming-Yang or Gui Mingyang (桂名扬). [Translator's note]



■ Yam Kim-Fai (1913-1989)



■ From left to right: Yam Kim-Fai, Pak Sheut-Sin and Tang Ti-Sheng

made up one of the five major schools of Cantonese Yueju and influenced the whole field. Yam Kim-Fai, entranced by Kwai Ming-Yang's presentation, often attended his performances and attempted to imitate his style. Her postures and gaits obviously influenced by Kwai Ming-Yang prompted her labeling as the "Female version of Kwai Ming-Yang". After honing her stage performances, she emerged as the most important Xiaosheng in the Tiantai Troupe and found particular fame due to her part in the play *Waiting for the Moon in the West Chamber*. From 1935 to 1945, she performed in Macao and grew in popularity. In 1943, she founded the New Sound Troupe with Au-Yeung Kim and invited Pak Sheut-Sin and Chan Yim-Lung¹ to join, the former of whom eventually became her lifelong partner. During the ten years in Macao, her performing skills matured as she gradually developed her own style and moved past Kwai Ming-Yang's techniques of singing and acting. After the victory of the Anti-Japanese War, the New Sound Troupe moved to Hong Kong under her leadership where she actively performed. Her collaborations included many famous Cantonese Yueju actors, and she invited the famous playwright Tang Ti-Sheng to write plays for her. She also established an influential Xianfengming Troupe with Pak Sheut-Sin. In the following years, she cooperated with Pak Sheut-Sin to perform a number of plays, such as *The Imperial Flower*, *The Peony Pavilion: An Enchanting Dream*, and *The New Legend of the White Snake*, all of which established a great reputation for the genre in both Hong Kong and Macao. At the same time, Yam Kim-Fai actively participated in filming. From 1951 to 1964,

1 Au-Yeung Kim or Ou Yangjian (欧阳俭), Pak Sheut-Sin or Bai Xuexian (白雪仙), Chan Yim-Lung or Chen Yannong (陈艳依). [Translator's note] .



■ Stage photo of *Waiting for the Moon in the West Chamber*



■ Stage photo of *The Legend of Purple Hairpin*

she participated in more than 300 films, most of which were Cantonese Yueju films. Films such as *The Nymph of the River Luo*, *The Legend of Purple Hairpin*, and *The Imperial Flower* received enthusiastic responses and after reaching the peak of artistic accolades and influence, she finally announced her retirement in 1972.

Of the roles Yam Kim-Fai played, many were troubled scholars whose talents were unrestrained by feudal ethics. Examples of such characters are Zhou Shixian in *The Imperial Flower*, Li Yi in *The Legend of Purple Hairpin*, and Cao Zhi in *The Nymph of the River Luo*, etc. The male protagonists she played shared intelligence, handsome appearances, unrestrained demeanor, and a bit of innocence, simplicity and honesty. Such charismatic characters were consistently popular with the audience.

Yam Kim-Fai's masterpiece, *The Imperial Flower*, narrates the at-once joyful and sorrowful story between Princess Changping, the daughter of Emperor Chongzhen of the Ming Dynasty, and Zhou Shixian, the husband of the princess. After the fall of the Ming Dynasty, Changping lives in seclusion at a nunnery. To bury her father Emperor Chongzhen and save her brother the crown prince, she pretends to surrender to the Qing dynasty, and after everything is settled, she and Zhou Shixian take poison and die on their wedding night. Shrouded in a sense of desolation and pathos, the play created a great sensation after the performance. The male and female protagonists

played by Yam Kim-Fai and Pak Sheut-Sin achieved immediate and widespread popularity, much due to the sincerity and persistence of Zhou Shixian portrayal by Yam. “Meeting at the Nunnery”, a scene in which Changping and Zhou Shixian reach their most intense emotional collision, fully manifested Yam Kim-Fai's acting skills. Changping hides herself in a nunnery following her guilt after disobeying her father's order to be a martyr for her country. When Zhou Shixian finds her, she pretends not to recognize him. Increasingly angered with her feigned ignorance, Zhou finally threatens her with death to force her admission of knowing him. Zhou Shixian finally confirms the nun in front of him is indeed Changping. Understanding the difficulty in letting go of her father's disappointment, he attempts to comfort her again and again, but Changping insists on ignoring him. Powerless, Shixian complains about the Bodhisattva in the nunnery, which proved useless. Desperate, Shixian debates suicide due to the meaninglessness of life. Within the long arias, Yam Kim-Fai soundly and accurately expressed Zhou Shixian's complex emotions and his repeatedly changing mood through her masterful expressions and tone. In the most iconic scene of “The Death of the Princess”, Changping and Shixian stumble and stagger, supporting each other, and die clinging to each other after consuming arsenic wine. When the two faced each other in tears, understanding their final moments together, Yam Kim-Fai embodied Zhou Shixian's reluctance, helplessness, and love in her rich expressions and meticulous movements, which touched and left deep impressions on the audience.

Yam Kim-Fai's charisma and attractiveness were particularly highlighted when playing the role of a scholar. With a strong foundation in performance,



■ CD cover of *The Imperial Flower*



■ CD cover of *The Nymph of the River Luo*



■ CD cover of *The Legend of Purple Hairpin*

her acting convincingly captured the appearance of a martial arts specialist, resulting in heroic and vigorous performances. She often starred in plays involving talented men and beautiful girls. When acting out the emotional communication between men and women, she combined hardness and softness in tone of voice, but never exaggerated her affectations, resulting in realistic performances both generous and gentle in manner. The numerous images of scholars she created were quite in line with her own temperament and fully demonstrated women's advantages in playing male roles, which ultimately developed into the unique charm of Female Wenwusheng.

With her powerful and gentle vocal prowess, Yam Kim-Fai formed her own unique singing style, characterized by fluency, naturalness, freshness, and clarity. Never surpassed by other contemporary Female Wenwusheng, her style paved the way for future singers, as well. A prime example of her individual talents was, of course, her portrayal of Zhou Shixian's depression. Her vocal timbre, softer than a man's, allowed for more consistency with Zhou's mood. She often incorporated her unique timbre while singing, leaving deep impressions on the audience. She sang one of the lines in *The Imperial Flower* two octaves higher in order to enhance the strength and power of the vocal timbre. Additionally, she paid great attention to the voice's involvement in portraying a character's image. All the scholars she played attached great importance to both emotional intelligence and righteousness. Accompanied by the lucid and lively style of "Ren's Singing", the characters' images mutually accomplish each other, adding much charm to the characters.

Yam Kim-Fai's iconic status among the Female Wenwusheng resulted from her personal talents, exquisite acting skills, and the emerging popularity of this type of role. In the past, only those actresses involved in all-female troupes played male characters. Following the co-education of male and females in the same class, this phenomenon diminished. However, Yam Kim-Fai's popularity and status remained invincible. Not only the most popular female Wenwusheng of the time, she was never considered inferior to the male Wenwusheng; her performances pushed beyond the stage of imitating male Wenwusheng and established a distinctive acting style that belonged exclusively to females. Her revolutionary approach to acting thus enabled the art of Female Wenwusheng to develop independently and contributed to the prosperity and development of this business.

Yam Kim-Fai bid farewell to the stage in 1969, and her direct disciple Lung Kim-Sang (Sabrina)¹ became a popular Female Wenwusheng in the early

1 Lung Kim-Sang (Sabrina) or Long Jiansheng (龙剑笙). [Translator's note]



■ Stage photo of *Pretty Pan An*, Lung Kim-Sang as Pan An



■ Lung Kim-Sang (1944-)



■ Koi Ming-Fai (1967-)

1970s before retiring in 1992. While inheriting Yam Kim-Fai's repertoires and acting style, Lung also actively sought social and professional breakthroughs. For example, the newly-adapted repertoire *Pretty Pan An*--performed in 1983--presented considerable challenge. In this play, Pan An becomes a chivalrous woman disguised as a man, with a Female Wenwusheng playing the Huadan¹ in the last scene. The play seems almost specifically written for Lung Kim-Sang, showcasing her multifaceted acting by switching between two different styles of character: the valiant and heroic Female Wenwusheng, and the delicate and shy Huadan. The contrasting personalities added to the charm of the characters and the difficulty of shaping them, but it also highlighted the advantages of the Female Wenwusheng, further exerting great influence on its later development.

1 Huadan (花旦), the role of pretty young woman or female of the coquettish type in the Chinese traditional Xiqu. [Translator's note]

After inheriting the title from her master Yam Kim-Fai, Lung Kim-Sang became the leading figure of the Female Wenwusheng and continued to progress the genre. Under the influence of the two generations of Yam and Lung, the team of Cantonese Yueju Female Wenwusheng maintains a good momentum of development and holds a seemingly promising future. After them, though with different successions of teachers, the Female Wenwusheng more or less bore the traces of their influence.

After Lung Kim-Sang withdrew from the stage, Koi Ming-Fai (Joyce)¹ emerged as the leading figure of the Female Wenwusheng. Finding fame in the early 1990s, she took on the responsibility of establishing a troupe of her own and ushered in the third generation of the "Yam School". Most of her plays were classics performed by Yam Kim-Fai and Lung Kim-Sang. With her handsome appearance and powerful vocal timbre, she excelled at performing the elegant scholars, the roles of the infatuated, and the masculine martial artists. She played both Sheng and Dan as well as Lung Kim-Sang in many works such as *Pretty Pan An* and *Mistake at the Flower Festival (Huatian Baxi)*. Having inherited Yam and Lung's legacies, Koi Ming-Fai pushed for bold innovations and often presented amazing performances. When performing "The Death of the Princess", she integrated Latin dance into it, injecting fresh vitality into the Cantonese Yueju culture. She also held several solo concerts, demonstrating her extraordinary ability and great artistic potential. Her various explorations and innovations in the field of Cantonese Yueju provided more possibilities and room for the development of Female Wenwusheng.

The popularity and influence of Female Wenwusheng such as Yam Kim-Fai, Lung Kim-Sang, and Koi Ming-Fai certainly derives, at least partly, to their individual abilities and the unique charm of this genre, but it also required the love and support of an audience.

Women predominantly made up the audience for Female Wenwusheng. In the era of Yam Kim-Fai, for example, most of her fans comprised wives and ladies of wealthy families; women remained unmarried for life, and even nuns. For rich women with both money and free time, watching Cantonese Yueju became one of the best forms of entertainment. Yam Kim-Fai received much support and adoration from wealthy female audience members due to her performance style, which, due to its gentleness laced with little virility, appealed to their aesthetic taste. The nuns and unmarried women made up

1 Koi Ming-Fai (Joyce) or Gai Minghui (盖鸣晖). [Translator's note]

their own special category since they were quite excluded from normal life and felt deep emotional loneliness. They found respite in Yam's performances as their normal lives remained emotionally lonely. They were deeply moved by the handsome and infatuating men played by Yam Kim-Fai, characters that were ideal men beyond their reach outside of the theater. The freedom of real-world consequence allowed for free fantasy and these audience members treated Yam Kim-Fai as an outlet for their feelings and emotions, who therefore earned the title of "the lover of the theater fans".

When it came to the era of Lung Kim-Sang and Koi Ming-Fai, the audience remained primarily female. The sentimental love stories performed by Female Wenwusheng on the Cantonese Yueju stage and their gentle feminine temperament provided great spiritual comfort for women with delicate and sensitive emotions, which was the advantage of Female Wenwusheng in comparison to that of males'.

To summarize, then, Female Wenwusheng were originally the product of the female-only class. After many roles of Xiqu that allowed the performance of men and women in the same class, this kind of cross-gender performance soon shrank and disappeared from the stage. However, the business of Female Wenwusheng in Cantonese Yueju has been preserved and continues to grow in prevalence. Continued popularity owes much to the success achieved by Yam Kim-Fai, who created a new era for Female Wenwusheng performance. After Yam Kim-Fai, through the continuous efforts of Lung Kim-Sang, Koi Ming-Fai and others, this type of role continues even now and bears responsibility as a staple characteristic of Cantonese Yueju, with fanciful charm and abundant vitality.

WANG YONG'EN

Professor of Communication University of China.

The Breakthroughs of Traditional Cantonese Yueju: Taking the Film *White Snake* as an Example

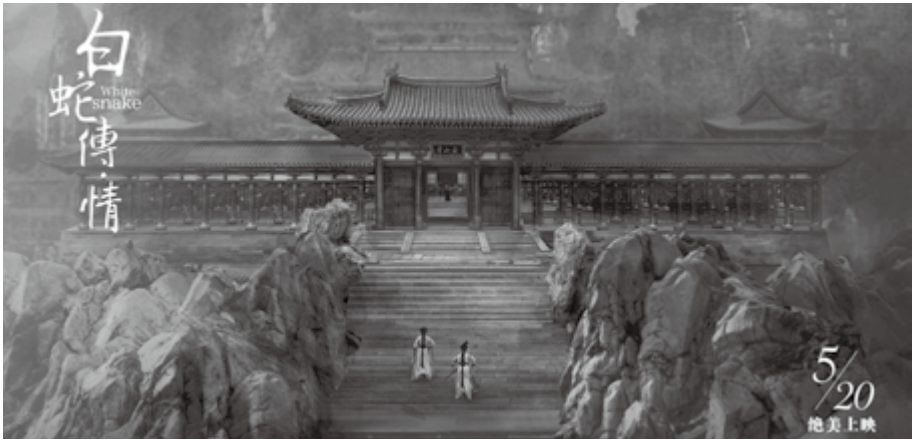
REN Tingting

In May 2021, the Cantonese Yueju film *White Snake*, produced by the Zhujiang Film Group, the Guangdong Cantonese Yueju Theatre, and a few others, premiered. As of August 1st, the cumulative box office reached 20.8 million¹ and continues to maintain a steady growth trend. Such financial achievement may rank comparatively low in the spectrum of the entire film market, but the box office numbers in context (the average screening rate for Xiqu films is less than 1% and the box office of traditional Xiqu films has never exceeded the ten million mark in the past five years) impresses greatly.



■ Poster of the film *White Snake*

1 The data comes from the "Maoyan Professional" app.



■ Poster of the film *White Snake*

Previously, a 20.8 million box office domination seemed unimaginable. The film itself is based on the youth version of the Cantonese Yueju *White Snake*. The story's narration unfolds through flashbacks and a deconstructed and re-arranged story of love in seven chapters including "Prologue: The Memory of Love", "Falling in Love", "Thrilling Love", and so on. The film took into consideration the aesthetic tastes of the audience through the use of multimedia in presenting a modern aesthetic conception of the rainy and misty South of the Yangtze River. The original play first started touring in 2014. Although critically acclaimed within the traditional Xiqu market, due to the limitations of the market, the number of tickets sold paled in comparison to that of a movie. It is also worth noting that the film *White Snake* attracted mostly young audience members. As of July 20th, audiences aged 24 to 29 accounted for 33.51% of the overall audiences; audiences under 35 accounted for 89.69%¹. If one calculates the number of audience members according to the average movie ticket price of 40 RMB, there are over 400,000 young audience members who watched the film. Considering the fact that traditional Cantonese Yueju generally appeals to an older audience, (an issue that plagues and has plagued the industry for a long period of time) the success injects hope into the industry. It is difficult for Guangdong Cantonese Yueju Theater to attract more

1 王垂林：《戏曲电影〈白蛇传·情〉为何叫好又叫座——优秀传统文化“双创”的一次成功探索》，《中国文化报》文艺评论版，2021年7月22日。[Wang Chuilin: why the Xiqu film *White Snake* is popular - a successful exploration of "mass entrepreneurship and innovation" of excellent traditional culture, *China Culture Daily*, Literary and Art Review Edition, July 22, 2021.]



■ Poster of the film *White Snake*

than 400,000 young audience members through one production even though the theater has gained reputation as a trendy and cultured venue to attend.

The breakthrough of the film at the box office is largely due to the production team's hard work. With the help of large swathes of data collection and the analysis of the position of traditional culture, the distributor selected Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, and other cities to concentrate on publishing and advertising. With the help of personal media and mainstream media working together (as well as organizing Hanfu¹ show events that were related to *White Snake*) the campaign successfully targeted traditional Chinese culture fans and Hanfu fans mainly born in the 90s and 2000s. Concurrently, the movie uses special effects, 4K panoramic sounds, and other audio-visual technologies to present classic scenes such as the "Stealing of the Immortal Grass" and "Water overflowed Jinshan Temple". The technological advancement satisfies the audience's visual needs, and the story is also more in line with the taste of a modern audience. For example, on the basis of keeping classic lines and lyrics while adding accessibility, the film team altered parts of the songs: simplifying and compacting them in comparison with the stage version. The classics scenes are also integrated with popular singing methods, and Western orchestration supplements the accompaniment music.

It should be noted that the film is more in line with the main consumer –

1 Hanfu (汉服), the traditional dress of the Han Chinese people.



■ Poster of the film *White Snake*

a young audience, whether in regards to the publicity strategy, content optimization, or technological innovation. Certainly the aforementioned adjustments contribute to the large difference in box office between the stage version and the film, but the fundamental reason remains that the audience of movies runs deeper than that of traditional Xiqu. According to the “2018 China Performance Market Annual Report” of the China Performance Industry Association, the number of traditional Xiqu performances dropped by 3.09% in 2018, while the box office revenue dropped by as much as 10.54%¹ compared to 2017. In general, the marketability of traditional Xiqu seems relatively weak. Therefore, most Xiqu productions rely on government support, and public “pro bono” performances account for a large proportion. Few audiences are willing to pay to enter the theater for traditional Xiqu performance and a reliable support system for performances remains to be formed.

As the film market grows, Cantonese Yueju films have already taken a part of the audience away from the traditional Cantonese Yueju. From the historical perspective of the integration of traditional Cantonese Yueju and Cantonese Yueju films, before the 20th century, the traditional Cantonese Yueju was an art form viewed in public areas and theaters. Traditionally, then, the Xiqu’s primary venues included squares in rural areas and theaters in cities. Upon entering the 20th century, with the emergence of new media such as movies, this traditional

1 See the official website of China Association of Performing Arts: <http://www.capa.com.cn/news/showDetail/143428>.

model lost its monopoly on public attendance and could not compete with movie theaters. Due to the limitation of time and space with regards to theatrical performances, films offer both lower costs and repetitive viewing with regards to the actual scenes. In 1933, the first audible Cantonese Yueju film, *The White Golden Dragon*, starring the famous Cantonese Yueju actress Sit Kok-Sin premiered to great success in Shanghai, and soon, in Guangzhou and Hong Kong, and even in Singapore and other Southeast Asian countries. The flexibility of time and space allowed audiences in these regions to see Mr. Sit's skillful performance at the cost of a movie ticket. Statistics show that the cost of the film was 1,500 USD at the time, while the box office income reached over 100,000 HKD in a little more than a month when released in Hong Kong. While Xiqu films gradually developed into an independent artistic genre, Cantonese Yueju films matured along the way as well. Various forms such as Cantonese Yueju documentaries, Cantonese Yueju excerpts, and Cantonese Yueju songs emerged and won over large audiences from traditional Cantonese Yueju production. The 1959 Cantonese Yueju film *The Emperor Flower* not only restored the story and the songs of the stage version faithfully, but utilized film conversion, close-ups, special effects, and other motion-picture camera techniques to highlight the actors' specialties. What traditional Xiqu fans obtain from the films is not simply the recording of a stage performance, but a more pleasing – modern – aesthetic experience. The advantages of Cantonese Yueju film over traditional Cantonese Yueju particularly express themselves within the production process. At this point, Cantonese Yueju films compete with traditional Cantonese Yueju performances and have won a larger share of the market. Today, we have already entered a new age for modern media. The continuous development of movie technology allows movies to develop far ahead of the traditional Cantonese Yueju. The integration of movies and other modern media challenges traditional Cantonese Yueju to adapt or fade away. Although more and more live broadcasts of Cantonese Yueju have improved the timeliness of Cantonese Yueju production, it also increased the risk of losing audiences in the theaters. There are also over-packaged Cantonese Yueju online games and other fake Cantonese Yueju on the Internet, causing misunderstandings among audiences and contributing to an inaccurate perception of the art.

It is without question that film as a modern media led to traditional Cantonese Yueju losing some audience members. It is worth pondering, however, the timing of such loss; traditional Cantonese Yueju faced the impact of modern media for more than a century and it has never died out. One might speculate as to why there remains a loyal majority of audience members willing to travel to a theater to watch a Cantonese Yueju performance. The reason is as follow: the fundamentals of drama remain true. The difference between watching



■ Poster of the film *White Snake*

a show on the screen and the experience in a live theater can never be eliminated. A theater lover will always insist on the live experience of interacting with actors. The view aligns itself with Polish dramatist Grotowski's classic definition of drama: "After gradually removing what proved to be superfluous, we found that even with no makeups, no costumes, no scenic design, no independent performing areas (the stage), and no lighting and sound effect, etc., drama exists. On the other hand, without emotional, direct, and live communication between the actors and the audience, drama doesn't exist."¹ What Grotowski highlighted is that the essence of drama emerges from the live performance of the actors and the live experience of the audiences at the same time. Audiences need to go to the theater to experience the real drama, for it is only within the halls of the theater that personal and intimate connections between performer and viewer exist.

Alternatively, when the art of traditional Cantonese Yueju integrates with modern media such as movies, it maintained its artistic identity and even explores more possibilities, even when these possibilities are accompanied by challenging obstacles. Compared with other types of Chinese Xiqu, the history of Cantonese Yueju destined it to be more flexible and diverse. Cantonese Yueju already started to learn from films during the process of localization in the early 20th century. With audiovisual products challenging traditional Cantonese

1 [波兰]耶日·格洛托夫斯基:《迈向质朴戏剧》,北京:中国戏剧出版社1984年版,第3页。[Grotowski: *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Beijing: China Drama Publishing House, 1984: 3.]



■ Poster of the film *White Snake*

Yueju's presentation, a group of nostalgic audiences used Cantonese Yueju films, TV shows, and other modern media to express their feelings for their hometown. Traditional Cantonese Yueju also developed its influences by taking advantage of films and TV. As a result, Cantonese Yueju gained a group of Chinese audiences who were living far away from their hometown.

The question develops, then, into whether we can achieve a positive outcome from the integration of modern media and traditional Cantonese Yueju. The film *White Snake* provides a good example of how traditional Cantonese Yueju responds to the challenges of modern media. It aids us in realizing that Xiqu can also win the hearts of young audiences and successfully develop new audiences. The key lies in how to use modern media to popularize the art of traditional Xiqu, reminding young people of the beauty of tradition while encouraging them to know and learn more about it.

In this sense, *White Snake* has successfully taken the first step, leading the audience into the world of Cantonese Yueju film. The next step, from the perspective of the theater performance market, is to encourage young audiences to return to the theater. This is not only the "second step" for the Xiqu film industry to tackle, but also an effective breakthrough for the Cantonese Yueju market. How then, might one take the on the "second step" in a convincing manner. The key seems to lie in the use of modern media to awaken the collective memory of young audiences. The well-known legend of the White Snake is a common sentiment of the Chinese. While the legend itself is an expression of our concern for traditional Chinese literary culture, the story on stage became a collective memory of generations of ordinary people.



■ Poster of the film *White Snake*

The aforementioned collective memory connects the story and Cantonese Yueju. Time proves that the *White Snake* on stage is technically and artistically developed, and the theme and content are more in line with the taste of the public; a spirit of traditional arts. At the same time, the dialect heavy singing and the skillful martial arts arouses the collective sentiments and arouses nostalgic emotions among the Chinese who are living abroad. It is fair to say that the Cantonese Yueju “White Snake” deeply ingrained itself into the memories of Cantonese and even other Chinese communities, whether its popularity has dwindled recently or not. The fact that many young people lack attendance with regards to the theater is not because they dislike it, but because of the diversified contemporary entertainment industry that diminished their fondness for tradition. Using modern technology, films with sophisticated camera work and technology can help bring back young audiences’ interest in the story of White Snake. Perhaps in addition to the technological prowess of the modern age, the professional skills of Cantonese Yueju actors on the big screen along with the influence of the celebrities might attract large swathes of the public to attend a live performance of Cantonese Yueju “White Snake” in a traditional theater. Ideally, in a world filled with a plethora of entertainment options, the art of Cantonese Yueju might continue its development with the aid of modern media, and at the same time, protect its artistic values and traditional status while telling stories that are needed today.

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Research on the Performances of Cantonese Yueju in the United States

MA Hui

The spread of Cantonese Yueju in the U.S. relates closely to the living conditions of Chinese immigrants. Early immigrants primarily moved from Guangdong province, specifically from the Pearl River Delta. Cantonese Yueju emerged as the first genre of traditional Chinese Xiqu that spread to America. Later, due to the “Chinese Exclusion Act” issued by the U.S. government, Chinese immigrants in the U.S. were forced to gather in Chinatown, separated from mainstream society, and formed a relatively autonomous and closed society. Chinese culture has since preserved its completeness there, providing Cantonese Yueju with an adequate environment to develop in a foreign country. Thus, the Cantonese Yueju gradually evolved into one of the most dynamic genres of Xiqu in America. From the 1850s to the present, the performance and dissemination of Cantonese Yueju in the U.S. has experienced four historical periods: the boom during the initial period, the sluggishness after the World War II, the flourishing of amateur theatre societies after the 1970s and 1980s, and the new phase after the successful application for World Heritage in 2009. Based on these four historical periods, this article will briefly investigate the performances of Cantonese Yueju societies in the U.S. during each stage of development.

I. Transpacific travel and initial boom (1850-1930)

Most of the early Cantonese Yueju troupes in the U.S. centered around San Francisco on the west coast, and later radiated to multiple parts of the U.S. and other countries in the Americas. According to America’s *Daily Alta California* on October 28, 1852, the earliest recorded performances were those

by the Cantonese Yueju troupe "Hong Hook Tong"¹ at the American Theatre in San Francisco on October 18, featuring such traditional Cantonese Yueju as *The Eight Immortals Congratulate the Queen Mother on Her Birthday*, *Su Qin Made High Minister by the Six States*, *General Guan escorts his sisters-in-law*, and *Forced to go to Liangshan*. *The Eight Immortals Congratulate the Queen Mother on Her Birthday* is a short Auspicious Play usually found performances before the main performance, enhancing the atmosphere along with performing rituals of prayer for blessings and redeeming a vow to the immortals. The excerpt *Su Qin Made High Minister by the Six States* is a piece of traditional repertoire with grand scenery and a full range of businesses, best representing the professional level of a troupe. *General Guan escorts his sisters-in-law* was a frequently performed play by the Yueju troupe at that time, and it was immensely popular. In addition, their occurred numerous performances of the adapted American play *My Neighbor's Wife*. With some martial arts performances inserted in, foreign audiences unfamiliar with the plot could instead enter the theatre to enjoy the physical and visual masterwork. The cooperation and competition of China-U.S. Xiqu on the same stage opened a real cross-cultural exchange. The troupe performed from October 1852 to April 1853, moving from the west coast to the east coast of the country. Eventually, the troupe faced disbandment due to the limited audiences. Though this performance ultimately failed, it laid the foundation for the spread of Cantonese Yueju in the U.S.

Later, several troupes such as Daan Fung Saan, Jiu Tin Coi and Daan Gwai Jyun emerged on the west coast, most of which were established in the 1850s and 1860s and owned their own theatres of the same name. They performed mostly popular plays passed over from China at that time, such as the "Eighteen Repertoires of Cantonese Yueju"². Healthy competitions

1 The name of the troupe was transliterated by Americans according to Cantonese language, and since there was no standard Romaji at that time, the translations were often a little bit strange. "Hong Hook Tong" (鸿福堂) alone has more than ten translations such as "Hong Fook Tong", "Tong Hook Tong" and "Tung Hook Tong". Later, English reports often used "Chinese Theatre" or "Oriental Theatre" to refer to all the Cantonese troupes. The Chinese names of the other troupes in this article are all referenced from: *Cantonese Yueju Dictionary* [M]. Compiled by the Compilation Committee of Cantonese Yueju Dictionary. Guangzhou: Guangzhou Publishing House, 2008.

2 Eighteen Repertoires of Cantonese Yueju (江湖十八本) refers to eighteen popular and frequently performed Cantonese Yueju, including A Handful of Snow (一捧雪), Two Plum Blossoms (二度梅), Three Immortals' Hall (三官堂), Four Scholars (四进士), Five Sons Passing the Imperial Examination (五登科), Snow in June (六月雪), Seven Sages' Family Members (七贤眷), Eight Beauties (八美图), Nine Watch-Beatings (九更天) and Ten Times to Impeach Yan Song (十奏严嵩). However, these plays are not unique to Cantonese Yueju. Most of them are long pieces adapted from the legends of the



■ The interior of the Chinese Theatre on Jackson-Street in San Francisco in the 1860s

carried out among the theatres, and thus in order to win over each other, they sometimes hired famous Cantonese Yueju singers from Guangdong to join the performances. Most performances ran from 6 p.m. to midnight, and the audience members were predominantly Chinese. Unfortunately, these three troupes eventually disbanded one after another, either due to accidental fires or by natural disasters like earthquakes. After that, there existed a few small troupes scattered among the populace, but none of them found widespread success. It was not until the early 20th century that a professional Cantonese Yueju troupe, New Stage, was established in Oakland, San Francisco, fittingly a city that once led to great impact in the U.S. It was founded by the patriotic overseas Chinese leader Li Shinan and gathered famous overseas Chinese actors. To support Sun Yat-sen's National Revolution, the troupe often performed revolutionary repertoires such as *Awakening the Soul of the Nation* and other patriotic and progressive plays. In 1905, the New Stage Troupe, then known as Man Gwok Ngon, performed at the World's Fair held in San Francisco, creating an instant sensation. Although most of the plays they performed were traditional productions from China, they also frequently innovated; using spoken dialogue in Cantonese and inserting the Cantonese song *Daffodil Flower* adapted from a folk song from the south of the Yangtze River, which was widely sung among the overseas Chinese. The group also wrote new revolutionary plays directed and acted themselves. In the early 1920s, the troupe disintegrated due to the departure of Li Shinan.

Ming and Qing Dynasties. They are popular in all kinds of Xiqu in the country. In the past, Xiqu troupes judged the artistic achievements of actors by the performance of these plays.

In the 1920s, immigration policies in the U.S. loosened restrictions on Cantonese Yueju artists, and several professional Cantonese Yueju troupes established themselves. The Jan Sau Nin Troupe, established in 1922, brought in Cantonese Yueju artists from Hong Kong or Guangdong and rented the Crescent Moon Theatre in San Francisco to perform. The repertoires included *Jinlian Flirts with Her Brother-in-Law*, *Red Maned Horse (Lady Precious Stream)*, *Water overflowed Jinshan Temple* and so on. In 1924, New York's Chinatown ushered in Zuk Man Ngon, a large troupe from Guangdong, which staged *The Eight Immortals Congratulate the Queen Mother on Her Birthday*, *The Romance of The West Chamber* and other repertoires at the Bowery Street Theatre. The theatre was sold out almost every night. Another rival to Zuk Man Ngon in New York was the Lok Cin Cau Cantonese Yueju Troupe, which, like Zuk Man Ngon, traveled from China and toured Canada before entering American theatres. It made its debut in 1925 at the prestigious Thalia Theatre in New York with a cast of 44, and shared the same status and influence as Zuk Man Ngon. In 1927, in order to avoid vicious competition, these two merged into one company and performed at the Thalia Theater. Most of the plays were classic traditional plays, but there were also some new plays that reflected the lives of Chinese immigrants. Unfortunately, a fire broke out in the Thalia Theater in 1929, and the troupe could not afford to hire enough famous actors to participate in the performances. Thus the troupe declared bankruptcy at the end of 1930.



■ The Greater China Theater, 1925. Exquisite photo gallery (Wangwanli collection, Performance and Design Museum, San Francisco)

II. The flourishing of amateur theatre societies 1970-2009

Since the mid-1940s, affected by WWII and the economic crisis along with the impact of the film industry, Cantonese Yueju gradually declined overseas. Following the 1960s, due to the lack of professional talents, professional Cantonese Yueju societies overseas disintegrated. From the 1970s and 1980s onward, however, amateur troupes slowly rose to prominence, with nearly 100 in the U.S. alone, concentrated in various cities such as New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Honolulu, and Phoenix among others. Troupes such as the South China Music Society in San Francisco, the Minzhi Society and the Chinese Musical Theatre Society in New York, and the Music and Arts Society in Seattle were generally founded in the 1920s and 1930s, all of which were non-profit in nature and funded by the local government and overseas Chinese groups. They initially organized pro bono performances in support of China's War of Resistance against Japan, but their real development and prosperity emerged after the 1970s. Though founded in 1925, the South China Music Society did not really flourish until the 1980s. It adhered to charity acting, entertaining the public, and serving the community. In 1990, a 140-person "San Francisco Cantonese Yueju Delegation", mainly composed of the members of the troupe, traveled to Guangzhou in order to observe the first International Cantonese Yueju Festival, and performed the classic play, *The Imperial Flower*. In 1992, on the 67th anniversary of its establishment, the society held three charity performances: *Laugh in the Sleeve*, *The Peony Pavilion: An Enchanting Dream* and *Lee Sam-neung*, to raise funds for the construction of a local elderly self-help center.

The Minzhi Society mainly performed dramas at the beginning of its



■ The program list of *The Imperial Flower* of 1990 Guangzhou International Cantonese Yueju Festival



■ Photo of the 8th Cantonese Opera Festival

establishment, and only incorporated Cantonese Yueju after the 1930s. After a hiatus during the Pacific War, it resumed its activities and held annual large-scale public performances of Cantonese Yueju for the Chinese community. Its first public performance of Cantonese Yueju was in 1933. In the 1990s, it received voluntary teaching from professionals Huang Yuefeng and Wu Jinzhi, opened a training course on the performing arts of Cantonese Yueju, and trained a number of actors, thus stabilizing making the various performance activities. Founded in 1930 as a non-professional Cantonese Yueju troupe in New York, the Chinese Musical Theatre Society was founded as a pure Cantonese Yueju society. Charity performances were often organized in the 1930s and 1940s in order to support the Anti-Japanese war. After that, in addition to maintaining daily performances, they would actively organize charity performances to raise funds whenever China ran into difficulty. After the 1990s, its prestige and influence in the U.S. increased day by day. In 1992, it rehearsed and performed the large-scale Cantonese Yueju *The Nymph of the River Luo* four times in a row, breaking the performance record of the local amateur troupes. The Music and Arts Society was a non-professional Cantonese Yueju society registered in Seattle and much smaller in scale as compared to larger societies like the South China Music Society. It truly developed after the 1980s, and rehearsed repertoires including *The Lion's Roar*, *The Princes in Distress*, and *A Ten-Year Dream* among others. The Overseas Chinese Musical Theatre Society in Boston was founded in 1939, and in its formation presented a modest size. It was not until 1967 that Yin Zizhong, a Cantonese Yueju musician, and Feng Shaojian, his chief apprentice, joined the club and successively presided over artistic training, cultivating a group of talents in performing and singing, which enhanced the influence of the society. Since the 1990s, it has traveled out of Chinatown to perform at Beacon Hill Community College and Boston University in Massachusetts.

In addition, there existed a few relatively active theater societies in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Washington, Hawaii and other places, such as the Southern Xiqu Research Center in San Francisco and the Huitiansheng Cantonese Yueju Troupe in Los Angeles. The aforementioned groups actively continue in various Chinatowns all year round and have contributed positively towards enriching the cultural and recreational life of the Chinese community along with spreading and singing the Cantonese culture of Yueju and music.

III. The diversified road of the Cantonese Yueju as "Intangible Cultural Heritage" 2009

After the successful application of Cantonese Yueju as an "Intangible Cultural Heritage" in 2009, three trends emerged in terms of its performances in the U.S.

Firstly, the troupes from China have increased their performances in the U.S., while troupes from America increased their opportunities to perform in China and abroad. The increase in opportunities occurred through platforms such as the Cantonese Yueju International Theatre Festival, which promotes the arts and cultural exchanges of Cantonese Yueju between China and the U.S. in many ways. The basic form of Cantonese Yueju troupes from Guangdong touring in the U.S. was as follows: the tour lasted no more than one month, the locations were concentrated in Chinatowns on the east and west coasts, the actors have multiple duties with government officials accompanying them, and the plays were all traditional repertoires. For example, in late August 2010, Tang Ti-Sheng's classic masterpiece *Love in the red chamber* was performed in New York's Chinatown to great acclaim. In 2017, the Guangzhou Cantonese Yueju Troupe traveled to America to perform in San Francisco and Los Angeles, starring two renowned Cantonese Yueju artists and Plum Performance Award winners Li Junsheng and Chen Yunhong. They performed for almost half a month from April 12th to 26th, involving grand spectacle and far-reaching influence. They also held lectures on the knowledge of Cantonese Yueju and conducted artistic exchanges with American Cantonese Yueju enthusiasts, providing them with artistic guidance. The Guangzhou International Theatre Festival, held every four years since 1990, has gained more opportunities for performances and exchanges with American Cantonese Yueju societies ever since Cantonese Yueju successfully applied for the Intangible World Heritage. For example, Cantonese Yueju societies such as the American Arts and Cultural Exchange Association, the San Francisco Whirlwind Music Society, the Chinese Xiqu Arts Association, and the New York Qingxinyaji Music Society participated in the theatre festival numerous times.

Secondly, the actors and audience slowly expanded from Chinese to the ABCs (American-Born Chinese) and even native Americans. At the end of the 19th century, Cantonese Yueju gained its early prosperity in the U.S. due to the demand of Overseas Chinese traveling to the U.S. to seek gold. After World War II, the second generation of overseas Chinese were attracted by modern entertainment such as film and television and lost interest in Cantonese Yueju. After the 1970s, through the efforts of several amateur societies, Cantonese Yueju took the initiative to expand from Chinatowns into communities and



■ The appearance of Leonard Rose in costume and makeup as Princess Changping



■ Lyle M. Rose and Leonard Rose as emperor's son-in-law and Princess Changping



■ From right to left: Lyle M. Rose and Leonard Rose

schools. In order to make it more accessible to overseas audiences, many theatre societies also introduced English versions of Cantonese Yueju. In fact, this form appeared on the stage of Hawaiian theatre as early as the early 20th century. To be more precise, the modified performances are actually a variant of Cantonese Yueju, where the stage, costumes, music, and workmanship of Cantonese Yueju were paired with English dialogues. The Hawaiian Cantonese Yueju troupes have also invited American theatre artists and Chinese Cantonese Yueju artists to direct together, with the Americans in charge of the English dialogues and the Chinese in charge of other routines. From 1905 to 1929, the Hawaiian Chinese School and the Overseas Chinese Students' Association successively presented repertoires such as *Autumn in the Palace of Han*, *Pretty Princess*, *The Yellow Jacket* among others, bringing Cantonese Yueju out of Chinatown. Additionally, after the Cantonese Yueju successfully applied for the Intangible World Heritage, more Americans actively stepped onto the international Cantonese Yueju stage, further popularizing the art form for the world. For example, at the Chinese Xiqu Festival held in Hong Kong in 2014, the Irish-American Mai Junwen was in charge of playing the lead instrument in the first performance of "The Eight Great Pieces of Lingnan's Lingering Rhyme" at the Yau Ma Tei Theatre on July 8, and performed with an unhurried beat and a steady and clean tone. At the age of 12, he heard someone singing Cantonese songs in Chinatown and fell in love with it immediately. From that moment, he learned Mandarin, Cantonese, and Taishan dialects, and found admittance to Boston College to delve into Asian Studies. In order to deepen his knowledge on Cantonese Yueju, he dropped out of school a year before graduation and traveled to the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts for further study. In 2012, on the 100th anniversary of the birth

of the famous Cantonese Yueju master Liang Yintang, a father and his son, Lyle M. Rose and Leonard Rose from the U.S. performed the classic Xiqu excerpts of Cantonese Yueju, "The Death of the Princess" in *The Imperial Flower*, with the father playing the emperor's son-in-law and the son playing the female character Princess Changping. Their body movements and expressions were appropriate, and their pronunciation very accurate.

Thirdly, there occur more rehearsals of classic Xiqu excerpts, but less full sets. Chen Feinong has mentioned that in the past, most Cantonese Yueju would perform nine sets of plays over four days and five nights, with some even performing eleven sets over five days and six nights¹. However, after the 1960s and 1970s, as both actors and theatergoers underwent a transition from the old generation to the new generation, coupled with the accelerated pace of modern society and the impact of new media, the aesthetic taste of audiences gradually favored short and concise performances. Zeng Mengyun, the president of Guangdong Quyi Research Association in New York, conducted research determining that "(Overseas Chinese) generally liked to sing new Cantonese Yueju which were longer and had many small tunes, and made little effort towards the basic Erhuang, Longzhou, and Nanyin. The masters mostly accompanied or led the singing with musical instruments, and seldom analyzed the music theory. The crews in the theatre societies often taught themselves Xiqu excerpts by watching recorded videos. Therefore, the crews knew little about postures, movements, and the technical formats of performance, and they rarely rehearsed a full set of Cantonese Yueju either."² As an example, on September 16, 2012, the commemorative performance to celebrate the birthday of the Master Hua Guang was held at the Grand Star Theatre in San Francisco, hosted by the Barwo Artists Association of Kwangtung in the Western United States. Famous artists from Guangdong, Hong Kong, and San Francisco joined hands to perform nine Xiqu excerpts, including *People in the Same Boat*, *Snatching the Flute*, *Ten Times to Impeach Yan Song*, *The Night Sacrifice of Emperor Guangxu to Concubine Zhen* among others. Given its content, then, it might have been advertised a special showtime for Cantonese Yueju highlights.

Ultimately, since being included in the UNESCO's "Representative List of

1 陈非依口述、余慕云执笔. 粤剧六十年 [M]. 中国香港: 香港中文大学出版社, 2007:31.[Dictated by Chen Feinong and written by Yu Muyun. *Sixty Years of Cantonese Yueju* [M]. Hong Kong, China: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2007:31.]

2 曾梦云. 美国纽约华人粤剧粤曲活动简介. 《南国红豆》1997 (1): 18.[Zeng Mengyun. *Introduction to Chinese Cantonese Yueju and Music Activities in New York, USA*. Southern Red Beans 1997 (1): 18.]

Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" in 2009, along with the increasing frequency of globalization and international exchanges, the spread of Cantonese Yueju in the U.S. enters a new stage. Today, the spread of Cantonese Yueju in the U.S. is still restricted by various conditions. However, like other Chinese Xiqu cultures that are relatively minor on the international stage, although the inheritance and development of Cantonese Yueju in the U.S. appears difficult, it continuously gains more and more popularity among audiences for its unique artistic appeal.

Retrospect and Prospect: The Communication of Cantonese Yueju in Southeast Asia from the Perspective of Mutual Learning among Civilizations

HUANG Lu & LIU Junling

Abstract: The culture of Southeast Asia and China share similar origin and characteristics. To study the communication of Xiqu culture like Cantonese Yueju in Southeast Asia and to communicate cultural identity through art leads to healthy dialogues between cultures. Mutual learning among cultures requires Cantonese Yueju to take the initiative to enter Southeast Asian counties and absorb the excellent Xiqu culture already present. Therefore, this paper briefly reviews the communication and evolution of Cantonese Yueju in Southeast Asia over the past century, providing an in-depth understanding of the barriers and dilemmas it has encountered during its attempted spread. Then, combined with the needs of innovation for modern times, we will find an open and inclusive way of communication from the perspective of mutual learning between cultures. That is, spreading out from Chinatown, participating in local festivals, cultivating new successors, integrating and interacting with Southeast Asian media, and realizing harmonious coexistence among civilizations.

Key words: Cantonese Yueju, dilemma, communication and mutual learning, communication strategy

The charm of civilization lies in its classics of philosophy and social sciences, and literary and artistic works such as literature, music, films, and TV plays. Xiqu is an excellent traditional culture with "Chinese characteristics and styles". The wide dissemination of such works forms an important aspect of artistic and cultural exchange, and aids the world in further developing towards its global culture. In 2015, the Department of Culture and Tourism of Guangdong Province sponsored "The dissemination of Chinese Guangdong culture along the Silk Road: Touring of the Cantonese Yueju Theatre", opening a new era of cultural exchange between Cantonese Yueju and Southeast Asia. It is also

reminiscent of history as well as a co-construction for future development. This paper focuses on the communication and evolution of Cantonese Yueju in Southeast Asia, and its inheritance and development in the context of a new era.

I.The Communication and Evolution of Cantonese Yueju in Southeast Asia

“Wherever there is a sea, there are overseas Chinese speaking Cantonese and the singing of Cantonese Yueju.” This, to a certain extent, reflects the widespread popularity of Cantonese Yueju with regards to overseas dissemination. If one believes rough statistics among all the overseas Chinese in the world, Cantonese account for 70%, and they are distributed widely in Southeast Asia. From a certain point of view, Cantonese Yueju has become more than just a Xiqu genre. It has become the main carrier and emotional comfort for overseas Chinese in the world, especially in Southeast Asia, to maintain contact with their homeland spiritually.

According to historical records, the earliest introduction of Cantonese Yueju into Southeast Asia can be traced back to the Xianfeng period of Qing Dynasty. With the development of overseas economy and trade, numerous Chinese businessmen traveled abroad to conduct business or develop their careers. A large number of Chinese workers also traveled to “go to Nanyang”, i.e, migrate into Southeast Asia”, providing conditions for the further development of Cantonese Yueju troupes in that area. Southeast Asia remains the main destination for Cantonese Yueju troupes because of its geographical proximity and cultural parallels with China. From the late Qing Dynasty to the 1930s, Cantonese Yueju was performed frequently in Southeast Asia, gaining great attention and popularity. Singapore and Malaysia were even known as the “second home of Cantonese Yueju”. After World War II, performances rapidly declined due to the effects of the war. However, the situation varied from country to country, and the development of it was polarized. Post-1960s in Singapore and Malaysia, Cantonese Yueju continues to develop and presents a promising view for eventual prosperity. Throughout the communication and evolution of Cantonese Yueju in Southeast Asia, there exist three historical stages: the flourishing in the early Republic of China (1912-1917), the decline during wartime, and the polarization of its communication.

I-1 The Flourishing of Cantonese Yueju in the Early Republic of China

The period from the late Qing Dynasty to the 1930s witnessed the great popularity and widespread of Cantonese Yueju in Southeast Asia. It is recorded that in 1857, a guild organization with the same nature as the Barwo Artists Association of Kwangtung, Liyuan Hall, was established in Singapore. By 1881, there have been 240 Xiqu actors, most of whom majored in Cantonese Yueju. As early as in the middle of the Guangxu period in the Qing Dynasty, there were Cantonese Yueju troupes traveling to perform in Vietnam. In Ho Chi Minh City and Cholon in Vietnam, there were even theatres where many famous domestic Xiqu actors have been invited to lead their troupes to perform, kicking off the upsurge of their performances in Southeast Asia.

The flourishing of Cantonese Yueju in Southeast Asia during this period and the frequent arrival of theatre troupes from China's mainland and Hong Kong contributed to the most vigorous spread of Cantonese Yueju thus observed. They not only preserved the traditional performance style and artistic characteristics of the art form, but focused on the combination of tradition and innovation in terms of content: creating new plays based on local history and realistic themes. Most importantly, many outstanding actors were locally cultivated, allowing for the continued practice of Cantonese Yueju.

I-2 The Decline of Cantonese Yueju during Wartime

The outbreak of World War II changed the world landscape, interrupting cultural and recreational activities in Southeast Asian countries and breaking the habit of watching Xiqu performances during leisure time for local people. Cantonese Yueju was also included. The decline did not comprise a sharp downward slope, but a gradual decline. Concurrently, the emergence of new technologies in the broadcasting and film industries caused the focus of the entertainment industry to shift, and the original way of recreation including watching Cantonese Yueju and other Xiqu performances, changed. Many actors gave up their stage performances and moved to the big screen, which marked the beginning of the decline of Cantonese Yueju.

In the years just after the war, Cantonese Yueju saw a short period of prosperity. However, as there were hundreds of thousands of things waiting to be done, and the real economy was in urgent need to be restored, there existed little energy or financial resource that could support the recovery and development of Cantonese Yueju. Therefore, the troupes cut down their performances to the public, and many full-scale plays were reduced to excerpts. Many practitioners and enthusiasts have tried to save it from recession, but with little success.

I-3 The Sudden New Development of Cantonese Yueju in Singapore

The flourishing in the early Republic of China and the depression after the WWII constituted the main state of the development of Cantonese Yueju in Southeast Asia. Singapore, where Cantonese Yueju was first introduced and most widely disseminated, also witnessed a gradual decline. However, there lived a group of talented individuals who were dedicated to the preservation and promotion of it, thus keeping it alive in this region.

I-3-1 The Establishment of Local Theatre Troupes

Liyuan Hall was the first Cantonese Yueju guild organization established in Singapore. In 1881, it was renamed the Barwo Artists Association of Kwangtung, and then registered and operated in Singapore. As the first local Cantonese Yueju guild organization, it was the main source of Cantonese Yueju performances. With the help of the troupes from China's mainland, local Chinese in Singapore also established troupes and presented performances. Even during and after WWII, local troupes in Singapore kept regular performances.

I-3-2 The System of Company Operation

At the end of the Qing Dynasty, Guangzhou, as the only foreign trade port in China at the time, experienced a great economic boom, and national capital gradually flowed into various industries. As Cantonese Yueju was a thriving entertainment industry, the capitalists also wanted to get a share of the then huge profits. As a result, companies began to invest in and run the theatre business, which grew into a main source to promote the development of Cantonese Yueju in China. This model eventually spread to Singapore. From the beginning of WWII to 1948, the troupes mainly performed Anti-Japanese war plays in Southeast Asia. Cantonese Yueju in Singapore survived the depression during WWII with the support of the Shaw Brothers from Hong Kong.

I-3-3 The Innovation of Amateur Troupes

Dr. Cai Shupeng, dean of the Chinese Opera Institute in Singapore, states that the golden period for traditional Chinese Xiqu like Cantonese Yueju in Singapore spanned from WWII to the 1960s. The arrival of troupes from China's mainland gained more attention and appreciation from the locals, and improved the quality of performances of professional troupes. Concurrently, local troupes established themselves successively, renovating and recreating the scripts. The most famous troupe is most likely the Chinese Theatre Circle established by Mrs. Hu Guixin, a Justice of the Peace, in October 1981. After

30 years of exploration and development, it has grown from a small theatre without a fixed venue to a well-known overseas Xiqu troupe that has visited various countries around the world. From compiling Cantonese Yueju in English to holding lectures specialized to the troupe's own knowledge, from persisting in "street performances" to going abroad for communication, it has not only rooted Cantonese Yueju in Singapore, but also expanded its influence on the world stage.

In its century-long history of spread in Southeast Asia, Cantonese Yueju has experienced both heyday and decline, with obvious difficulties. In order to find a suitable way of its communication in Southeast Asia to break down the barriers of cultural exchanges, we must first understand the obstacles and difficulties in its communication, figure out the ideas and content in line with its development, and achieve mutual participation in learning among civilizations.

II. The Barriers and Dilemmas in the Spread of Cantonese Yueju in Southeast Asia

When studying the development of Cantonese Yueju and even Chinese Xiqu in Southeast Asia, scholars like Lai Bojiang, who have devoted themselves to the research of Xiqu dissemination, often reference the interrupted communication and the lack of subsequent efforts. Coupled with the impact of the times on traditional culture, Xiqu itself has already been faced with difficulties and few successors, let alone its overseas spread and promotion.

II-1 Differences in Cultural Understanding Result in Rare Audience for Cantonese Yueju.

Influenced by the West, China, India, and even Arabia, Southeast Asian countries retain diversified cultures. Although China borders on them and owns close cultural ties with them, there are still great differences among countries, regions, and cultures. "Every sound is singing, and every action is dancing." Cantonese Yueju is a high-context culture that integrates language, music, singing, and other skills. Its performing arts, including singing and movements, are indeed incomprehensible to overseas Chinese descendants and Southeast Asian natives who have no common cultural foundation. Furthermore, the Southeast Asian countries have various local languages, and it is difficult for them to understand Cantonese. The general public, therefore, gradually lost its interest, resulting in the dissemination of Cantonese Yueju. Therefore,



■ Chinese Troupes in Thailand

performance venues opted for traditional repertoire with fast rhythms and gorgeous stage designs, and there were few new productions.

II-2 The Impact of New Technologies and Diverse Cultures Has Accelerated the Depression of Traditional Cantonese Yueju Performances.

In the era of digital media, the Internet connects the world and also immerses people in a "short, flat, and fast" time and space. The Internet, as a carrier of video, audio, images and text, has steeped people with massive amounts of information, while the traditional stage presentation of Cantonese Yueju retained in Southeast Asia gradually fades out of the audience's view. According to the BBC report "Chinese Xiqu in Thailand: The Struggle of Chinese Troupes" on February 26, 2019, the spread of Xiqu there has mostly attracted Southeast Asian audiences with peculiarity and heterogeneity, and most of them are live performances. "In the past, a Chinese troupe could have more than 100 actors and attracted thousands of audiences. But today, we have only a few dozen actors and a few hundred audience members." Under such a trend, the performing market of traditional Cantonese Yueju in Southeast Asia will further shrink if it fails to grasp the characteristics of the times and promote its dissemination through new technologies.

II-3 The Single and Outdated Performing Style Has Gradually Labeled the Cantonese Yueju as an "Arts for the Old".

The shortage of successors is a major problem for many traditional arts today, and Cantonese Yueju, which has been labeled as an "Arts for the Old", gives people an impression that both the communicators and the audiences of it are aging. The lack of understanding, knowledge, and inheritance of Cantonese Yueju among the new generation in Southeast Asian Chinese diaspora—mainly due to the single way of communication—presents an urgent problem to be solved. In cross-cultural communication, the focus is on explaining

one's own culture in terms of a heterogeneous culture, so as to eliminate the estrangement between cultures. The difference in foreign communication, however, lies in the need to demonstrate this cultural heterogeneity, while also reflecting the similarities between cultures. Dialogue among civilizations requires equality and diversity, and a careful examination of cultural diversity. Given the cultures and national conditions of Southeast Asian countries, the only way to spread Cantonese Yueju easily and readily is through diversified communication methods.

III. Open and Inclusive Xiqu Exchanges in Southeast Asia from the Perspective of Mutual Learning Among Civilizations

The development of Xiqu in Southeast Asia has been influenced by Indian Sanskrit drama and Chinese Xiqu, both of which belong to the “Three Major Ancient Theatres in the World”¹. And the elements of Chinese Xiqu, especially Cantonese Yueju, can be observed in the works of many countries. Due, however, to their own cultural and historical backgrounds, each country has its own system of Xiqu, forming their unique Xiqu culture.

In order to achieve mutual learning among civilizations, it is necessary for Cantonese Yueju to take initiative in entering the Southeast Asian region and draw on the excellent Xiqu sub-genres of various countries. Through multilingual translations and adaptations, Cantonese Yueju has introduced “itself” to Southeast Asian countries. It is of equal importance to provide a display platform for Southeast Asian countries and hold friendly exchange activities to absorb beneficial elements from each other and promote the excellent spirit of Xiqu culture.

III-1 Focusing on the Cultivation of Local Successors and Building the Platform for Exchanges

III-1-1 Getting out of Chinatown and Participating in Local Festivals

Chinatown has always been a major area for Cantonese Yueju performances, attracting large numbers of overseas Chinese. Concurrently, it has attracted

1 “Three Major Ancient Theatres in the World” refers to the ancient Greek theatre, Indian Sanskrit drama and Chinese Xiqu.[Translator’s note]



■ Chinatown in Bangkok, Thailand



■ Chinatown in Singapore

many foreign tourists to experience the cultural charm of it. Chinatown, as the area with the most distinct Chinese identity, should indeed be the first choice for Cantonese Yueju performances. The geographic limitations of Chinatown, however, exclude many other Southeast Asians from the experience. Only spreading out of Chinatown and into the local streets and alleys might better inform the public about Cantonese Yueju.

III-1-2 Seeking Support from the Government and Building the Platform for Exchanges

Numerous scholars mention the importance of government-involvement when analyzing the evolution of Cantonese Yueju in Southeast Asia. In fact, a reason for the difficulty of dissemination for many small troupes of it or other Xiqu genres that still exist in Southeast Asia is due to the “playful” perception of the art form due to lack of attention. Even though the tradition of performing at festivals is inherited, due to the lack of funds, professionalism, and government traction, only short excerpts can be performed in Chinatown or at old theatres. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen cooperation with the local government, proactively enhancing the ability of Cantonese Yueju to attract audiences, and expand its dissemination. Through the government, there might also occur facilitation of gatherings of more professionals for exchange and mutual learning, so as to better promote the development of the art form locally.

III-1-3 Cultivating Successors for Cantonese Yueju

As mentioned above, Cantonese Yueju is gradually becoming an “Arts for the Old”. From the 1970s to 1990s, the popularity has gradually dwindled. In order to achieve its sustainable spread in Southeast Asia, it is necessary to

cultivate successors and lead it from the current stage of satisfying curiosity, to that of understanding China through learning Cantonese Yueju. One must strive to make learning Cantonese Yueju one of the channels for dialogue with China. Meanwhile, it should also actively blend with local culture, innovate the performing style, or interpret in the way of local Xiqu, creating works that are “novel” for both sides (performers and audience).

III-2 Integrating Media Interaction in Southeast Asia and Enhancing the Effectiveness of Publicity

In today’s society where technology develops so rapidly, the new media, known as the “fifth media”, has extraordinary transmission speed and effectiveness, providing a new perspective for the dissemination of Cantonese Yueju in Southeast Asia. The Internet has broken the boundaries of space-time communication, and the development of Cantonese Yueju in Southeast Asia should take full advantage of the convenience brought by the technological developments of the times. It must also aim to pioneer ways of utilizing the technological advancements. The Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) and the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD) have played key roles in promoting mutual learning among civilizations. As the cornerstones of Cantonese Yueju’s dissemination to Southeast Asia are being laid gradually, it is important to grasp the top-level design and take the advantages of media integration in order to expand its spread and establish a two-way international communication platform, allowing youth from different countries to appreciate the charm of Cantonese Yueju.

III-2-1 Making Use of Social Platforms and Communicating with the Users Directly

With the development of social media, various groups are gathered in major social apps around the world. According to CAMIA, apps such as Facebook and Instagram rank top among the mainstream social media apps in Southeast Asia due to their huge user bases. In cyberspace, users are no longer the fixed “target” audience. It is paramount for Cantonese Yueju to change its current approach of being “discovered” by users. Such an approach is too passive. Xiqu has a natural dependence on the media. The large variety of social media outlets create a communication matrix, expanding the spread of Cantonese Yueju in Southeast Asia through widespread and varied communication, which opens the art form to the younger generation, thus opening a cultural dialogue.

III-2-2 Spicing up with Short Videos and Attracting the Youth

Using short length to spread information, short videos have changed

entertainment for the youth and have also become the main channel for their users to obtain information. Tik Tok, Viva Video, and other major short video platforms in Southeast Asia can serve as the preferred channels to approach and aggregate audiences. Recording Cantonese Yueju performances and narrating its culture in the form of short videos is a way to bring it closer to the youth and attract them.

III-2-3 Constructing a Communication Matrix through Audio-Visual Integration

Audio-visual programs, both entertaining and hyper-textual, are the main content of today's international exchanges. Their great vitality and far-reaching influence warrant them an important carrier of wide-spread communication today. From film and television works to variety shows, audiovisual programs are equipped with the functions of mutual economic assistance and cultural exchange. In the era of mass media, radio is the main catalyst for the dissemination of Cantonese Yueju, and now digital broadcasting proposes its own unique advantages in the era of Internet media. Cantonese Yueju continues to adopt new ways of broadcasting, allowing people to experience the artistic charm of it at their leisure, allowing for an almost imperceptible (but real) youth involvement and interest.

Conclusion

Given that recently the world leans towards the learning of other cultures, there currently exists a favorable opportunity for the spreading of Cantonese Yueju throughout Southeast Asia. Those who study Cantonese Yueju, then, should attempt to make full use of the opportunity to deepen the dialogue and exchange among civilizations. During the process of foreign communication, flexibility with regards to presentation must vary depending on time or place. Combining script innovations, performing forms and stage designs with the development of the times, and revamping older traditions in a modern light comprise necessary actions to best spread the art form. As a high-context art form, Cantonese Yueju is difficult to understanding from a non-educated view. However, by decomposing its elements, combining them with local cultures of various countries and appealing to different groups, we can promote the spread of Cantonese Yueju in a specifically targeted way. Spreading the art promotes intercultural exchanges and integration, builds bridges between cultures and arts of different countries, and results in perhaps all civilizations prospering and coexisting harmoniously.

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On the Changes of the Types-of-Role in Cantonese Yueju

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Abstract: As a genre of Chinese Xiqu that has spread far and wide, Cantonese Yueju has absorbed the features of Chinese Xiqu genres of both the North and the South, as well as some overseas culture since its birth, helping it adapt to the changes of the times and the demands of the market. Hundreds of years of development and innovation has caused Cantonese Yueju to make breakthroughs in terms of types-of-role, performances, singing, creation, stage design and so on. The analysis on the changes of types-of-role in the Cantonese Yueju can reflect the transformation process to a certain extent, allowing us to better understand the artform.

Key words: Cantonese Yueju, types of role, changes, development

Cantonese Yueju is said to be the most dazzling artistic pearl of Lingnan culture. In the middle and late Ming Dynasty, Yiyang Qiang and Kunqiang had already been spread throughout Guangdong. Gaoqiang and Jingqiang were also popular in Lingnan in the early Qing Dynasty, and after the integration with local tunes such as Yueou, Nanyin and Longzhou, the initial "Guangqiang" style was formed.¹

¹ Gaoqiang (高腔), one of the four major tunes of Chinese Xiqu. It was originally called "Yiyang Qiang" or "Yiqiang" because it originated in Yiyang, Jiangxi Province. He is a variety of tune operas derived from Yiyang tune in Ming Dynasty and later Qingyang tune. Jingqiang (京腔) was formed by combining Yiyang Qiang with the local language after it was introduced into Beijing in late Ming and early Qing Dynasties. Yueou (粤讴), a popular folk art in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province. Nanyin (南音) is a folk art form of singing in Guangzhou dialect, which was formed in the middle of the Qing Dynasty. Longzhou (龙舟), also known as Longzhou song, it was produced in Shunde in the early Qing Dynasty, and Guangzhou is also the main popular area. Guangqiang (广腔), a kind of Xiqu tune by the combination of Yiyang Qiang and Kunshan Qiang since the Ming and Qing Dynasties. [Translator's note]

During the reign of Emperor Qianlong, the "Waijiang Troupes"¹ from various provinces came to Guangdong to perform more popular tunes such as Bangzi and Luantan², which were more acceptable for the common people. They competed with "Local Troupes" and influenced each other in the Cantonese-speaking area, and Cantonese Yueju, the large-scale local genre of Xiqu identified with the unique Lingnan style, was gradually formed. From the late Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China, the whole society was in decline, leaving the door open to foreign influence. Influenced by foreign art forms such as movies, novels, and popular music, Cantonese Yueju has actively or passively undergone unprecedented dramatic changes, soaking up all these new influences had to offer. A number of masters with great artistic attainments such as Sit Kok-Sin, Ma Sze-Tsang, Kwai Ming-Yang, Liu Hap-Wai and Pak Kui-Wing³ emerged and formed their schools respectively according to their singing, which became a sign of the maturity of the Cantonese Yueju.

In 2009, following Kunqu, Cantonese Yueju was successfully selected into the list of "Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity". As we all know, Intangible Cultural Heritage is not static, and it is continuing to adapt, innovate, improve, and even reconstruct itself in varying degrees according to social developments and aesthetic changes of the public. Taking the types-of-role of Xiqu as an example, Cantonese Yueju, being deeply influenced by the Xiqu genres of northern areas, had "Ten-Major-Types-of-Role" as well at the beginning of its existence just like Hanju. The "Six-Types-of-Role System" gradually took form later, due to various reasons such as the size of the troupes, market preferences, performance venues and the masters. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, due to the impact of the foreign arts and the loss of talents itself, Cantonese Yueju is faced with a "Dual-Types-of-Role" situation where "Zhengyin⁴ Wenwusheng" or "Zhengyin Huadan" takes the lead. In the face of the tide of times, the only thing that remains the same in the current Cantonese Yueju in comparison with the original one is that it is always changing.

1 Waijiang Troupes (外江班): Waijiang Troupes in the Cantonese-speaking area refer to the troupes from other provinces that come to Guangdong to perform, as opposed to the "Local Troupes" (本地班).

2 From the Ming Dynasty to the early Qing Dynasty, Shaanxi local Bangzi (Qinqiang) was called Luantan (乱弹) because it was accompanied by plucked string instruments. [Translator's note]

3 Liu Hap-Wai or Liao Huaixia (廖侠怀), Pak Kui-Wing or Bai Jurong (白驹荣). [Translator's note]

4 Zhengyin (正印): originally referring to Zhengtang (正堂), the highest leader of the official government. In Cantonese Yueju, it specially refers to the first leading actor in each type of role and the role with the highest artistic level and the strongest appeal to the audience.

I. The inherited “Ten-Major-Types-of-Role”

As mentioned above, Cantonese Yueju was gradually formed through the process of continuous competition and integration with local tunes and Xiqu genres from outside of the Cantonese-speaking areas, among which the Hubei Hanju had the greatest influence. In the 1920s, Mr. Mai Xiaoxia, a famous dramatist in Guangdong, suggested a theory that “Cantonese Yueju originates from Hubei Hanju”¹, which triggered a profound and extensive discussion on the origin of Cantonese Yueju in the field of Xiqu. Tian Han, Ouyang Yuqian, Zhou Yibai and other dramatists have expressed their own opinions. Although they held different positions, Hubei Hanju definitely had a very important role in the formation of Cantonese Yueju, proven by the fact that the classification of the types-of-role of early Cantonese Yueju was almost the same as that of Hubei Hanju.

The “Ten-Major-Types-of-Role” of Cantonese Yueju refer to Mo, Jing, Sheng, Dan, Chou, Wai, Xiao, Tie, Fu and Za², which are consistent with the types-of-role of the Pihuang genre in Hubei, Hunan, and Shaanxi.

After such types-of-role system of Pihuang was introduced into the Lingnan region, it has undergone continuous transformation to adapt to the local culture, and the titles of the “Ten-Major-Types-of-Role” have also undergone some subtle changes. For example, in Cantonese Yueju, Mo is called Gongjiao, Jing is called Huamian, Sheng is called Zhengsheng, and Xiao is called Xiaosheng and Xiaowu³. As Cantonese Yueju develops, the Barwo Artists Association of Kwangtung⁴ has unified the management of the casts and crews and reordered the “Ten-Major-Types-of-Role” according to market demand and social influence into: Wusheng, Zhengsheng⁵, Xiaosheng, Xiaowu, Zhengdan, Huadan, Gongjiao, Zongsheng, Jing and Chou.

It becomes apparent that the stalwart and handsome Wusheng, the elegant

1 Cantonese Yueju originates from Hubei Hanju: From *A Brief History of Guangdong Xiqu*.

2 Mo(末), Jing(净), Sheng(生), Dan(旦), Chou(丑), Wai(外), Xiao(小), Tie(贴), Fu(夫) and Za(杂). [Translator's note]

3 Gongjiao(公脚), Huamian(花面), Zhengsheng(正生), Xiaosheng(小生) and Xiaowu(小武). [Translator's note]

4 Barwo Artists Association of Kwangtung (八和会馆): This is the guild organization of Cantonese Yueju artists. According to the profession and responsibilities of the practitioners, there are eight halls in all, namely Zhaohe hall (兆和堂), Qinghe hall (庆和堂), Fuhe hall (福和堂), Xinhe hall (新和堂), Yonghe hall (永和堂), Dehe hall (德和堂), Puhe hall (普和堂) and Shenhe hall (慎和堂).

5 Zhengsheng (正生). [Translator's note]

and solemn Zhengsheng, the charming and graceful Xiaosheng, and the Xiaowu with skilled Neigong ranked very high, and such ranking was inseparable from the increasingly fierce competition among various types of Xiqu in Lingnan at that time. This is well documented in contemporary texts such as, *The Eighteen Repertoires of Cantonese Yueju and The New Eighteen Repertoires of Cantonese Yueju*, the audiences at that time tended to favor those works concerning patriotism and chivalry. In order to attract the audience, the troupes had to strive to adopt various methods. Take Wu Song, a character of Xiaowu, as an example. In some of the early Cantonese Yueju, Wu Song's makeup did not need to be very demure and handsome, only a layer of rouge was needed. The actors only needed to activate their internal strength (neigong) to make their faces flush when acting out anger.

The preferences of the audience has directly determined the ranking of the types-of-role and the related amount of remuneration, which stimulated the troupes to try every means to innovate and caused the actors to risking everything to pursue excitement and adventure, further forming some unique martial arts of Cantonese Yueju, such as “Da Zhen Jun”¹, “Da Wu Jian”², “Ou Zhen Xue”³, “Shua Ya”⁴ and so on.

The market of Cantonese Yueju was flourishing because of competition, while the obvious shortcomings have also been revealed. The popular types-of-role demanded more and more personal qualities from their performers, not only in terms of their skills, but also in terms of their handsome appearance and distinctive tones, almost requiring them to become all-rounders. In contrast, the lower ranked ones in the “Ten-Major-Types-of-Role” was increasingly declining. The actors engaged in unpopular types-of-role were forced to switch to other industries as they lost the stage, and the classic repertoires and exclusive skills were lost. Such conditions directly contributed to the reform of the Cantonese Yueju types-of-role. At the beginning of the 20th century, the “Ten-Major-Types-of-Role” began to change quietly into the “Six-Types-of-Role System”.

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- 1 “Da Zhen Jun” (打真军), where the actors fought with real Kung Fu and didn't need a stand-in. [Translator's note]
 - 2 “Da Wu Jian” (打五件), where the actors played multiple roles and could play multiple instruments at the same time. [Translator's note]
 - 3 “Ou Zhen Xue” (呕真血), where the actor forcibly drank a lot of red hematoxylin water before the performance, and then used Qigong to force the hematoxylin water out during the performance, giving the effect of blood when spat. [Translator's note]
 - 4 “Shua Ya” (耍牙), where the actors performed with fake teeth in their mouths and played with those teeth in various ways. [Translator's note]

II. The “Six-Types-of-Role System” in response to the times

In 1889, the Barwo Artists Association of Kwangtung (Guangdong) was built in Huangsha, Guangzhou, and a systematic management model was established according to the classification of the “Ten-Major-Types-of-Role”, prompting Cantonese Yueju to move towards a more mature period.

With the increasingly fierce competition of the market, some types-of-role in the “Ten-Major-Types-of-Role” merged with each other in response to the situation, and others could even be said to be on the verge of elimination. The most representative of the mergers was the most important type-of-role of Cantonese Yueju, the Wenwusheng, which was a combination of “Xiaosheng” and “Xiaowu”. In his article *Changes in Cantonese Yueju Performance in the Past Forty Years*, the famous Cantonese Yueju artist and founder of the Bai School, Pak Kui-Wing, clearly mentioned the origin of “Wenwusheng”: “There are not many actors who can master Shaolin martial arts...since few can inherit the performing set of Xiaowu from the predecessors...When performing Zhou Yu’s cultivated elegance, some Xiaowu often use singing to remedy the defects in their performance. Jinshan Qi, Zhou Yuli, and Zhou Yulin all belonged to this category, and the Wenwu singing style was created by them...”

Unlike the increasingly popular “Wenwusheng”, the “Gongjiao”, which once ranked among the top ones of the “Ten-Major-Types-of-Role”, differed from both Xusheng¹ and Wusheng. Its singing style was extremely unique, existing between singing and non-singing, and placed the emphasis on pronouncing words rather than singing, the subtleties of which cannot be expressed in words but can only be transmitted orally or learned by heart. This has also become an important factor limiting the development of types-of-role. There were also other types-of-role such as “Zhengdan”, “Zongsheng” and “Dahuanian” sharing similar characteristics. It was only after decades of internal adjustments that the original “Six-Types-of-Role System” was formed in Cantonese Yueju, including the “Wenwusheng”, “Zhengyin Huadan”, “Wusheng”, “Chousheng”, “Xiaosheng,” and “Second Huadan”.

At the beginning of the formation of the “Six-Types-of-Role System”, in order to maintain the balance among the types-of-role and keep the performance level of the actors, the artistic creation of the troupes, both in terms of performances and repertoires, had to be evenly distributed among these six major types-of-

1 Xusheng (须生). [Translator’s note]

role. But new cracks soon appeared in such balanced situation. As a matter of fact, the two groups of Wenwusheng and Xiaosheng, Zhengyin Huadan and Second Huadan were almost identical in performances except in terms of the significance of their roles, and there were no substantial differences in terms of genres or types-of-role. In addition, the Choushengs were required to perform all male and female roles of Choujiao¹, while the Wusheng were responsible for all stage characters who has a beard or has their faces revealed. It can be seen that the “Six-Types-of-Role System” was not the six separate types-of-role we simply thought it was. At that time, it was still very common for one person to perform multiple roles, which placed higher demands on the actors and led to further integration and narrowing of the “Six-Types-of-Role System”.

Foreign cultures, being affected by the war, flooded in to the country during the 1920s and 30s, and the local culture of Lingnan region, led by Cantonese Yueju, was severely impacted. In order to survive the predicament, artists and various large and small troupes have carried out the fastest and most drastic changes in Cantonese Yueju in history. In terms of its characteristics, Cantonese Yueju has completed the transformation of stage language and rhythm form under the initiative of famous masters such as Ma Sze-Tsang, Sit Kok-Sin and Ouyang Yuqian. In terms of performance venues, Guangfu troupes of Cantonese Yueju moved from outdoor performance venues such as platforms in temples, under the sheds and on the grass, to major theatres in Guangzhou, and made corresponding changes in bands and stage designs to adapt to the contemporary viewing habits.

The most important change during this period was the change in the organization of the troupes from the all-male classes to the co-educational classes of both males and females. It was forbidden and severely punished in the early days, under the joint administration of the government and the Barwo Artists Association of Kwangtung, for female Cantonese Yueju actors to join the troupe. With the accelerating reformation, a large number of new repertoires based on foreign novels and American movies were produced, forming a great contrast with the stage performances of traditional Cantonese Yueju. The inclusion of female Cantonese Yueju performers has also brought unprecedented freshness to the audience. For a time, the status of the Zhengyin Hua Dan played by women was so much improved to the point that it was almost equal to that of the Wenwusheng.

1 Choujiao (丑脚). [Translator's note]

The rise of female artists has brought new hope to Cantonese Yueju, and new plays with themes of love between men and women and family ethics have occupied the largest share of the Cantonese Yueju performance market. This period has also created a large number of mature Cantonese Yueju classics, such as *Forty Years after Her Left*, *The Sassy Princess and Her Blunt Husband*, and so on. The joint performance of the Zhengyin Huadan and the Wenwusheng rescued Cantonese Yueju from its predicament, and the major troupes rushed to launch a series of plays concentrated on the talents and beauties to keep the heat on, directly causing other types-of-roles to take a back seat. This also implies that the “Six-Types-of-Role System”, which was designed to give equal weight to the number of scenes, exists now in name only.

III. With no other choice, the Sheng and Dan take the lead

The emergence of the “Six-Types-of-Role System” broke the strict boundaries between various types-of-role and the conventions of “facialization” and “fixation” of traditional Chinese Xiqu, allowing the actors more freedom in their performances and fleshing out more of their characters. Although the names of the types-of-role seemed to be the same as those of most Xiqu genres, the core of its performance was completely different, which was also a unique feature of Cantonese Yueju.

When the boundaries between types-of-role became ambiguous, the actors' performances and artistic skills were no longer bound by specific rules. In his famous work *Bitter Phoenix and Sorrowful Orioleas*, the famous Cantonese Yueju artist Ma Shizheng pioneered the integration of the performance techniques of the Wenwusheng with those of the Chousheng, and his performance was well received. Based on this feature, a series of new Cantonese Yueju with both the solemn and humorous style such as *A Perfect Match* and *The Vagabond Prince* were launched, thus forming a highly mixed original type-of-role of “Wenwuchousheng”¹. It is common to find artists like Ma Shizheng who were constantly exploring in Cantonese Yueju. In addition to being able to play the pitiful Lin Daiyu, one must also be able to play Liu Jinding, who goes into battle to fight with the enemy, in order to become a

1 “Wenwuchousheng” (文武丑生). [Translator's note]

favorite Zhengyin Huadan favoured by the audience.

In this way, those all-round actors were constantly trying to make breakthroughs and constantly squeezing the living space of other types-of-role. The decline of the types-of-role has made it difficult for many of the basic skills, rehearsals, and routines that were developed during the period of “Ten-Major-Types-of-Role” to appear on the stage, and they were gradually abandoned. The situation continued to worsen. Due to the precarious situation under the war and the increasing salary demands, many troupe owners continued to reduce the number of secondary roles to cut down the costs. There were, at this time, only four types-of-role left in the “Six-Types-of-Role System,” which are Wenwusheng, Zhengyin Huadan, Chousheng, and Wusheng.

As the “Six-Types-of-Role System” developed into the 1940s, Cantonese Yueju experienced important migrations and changes. Due to the Japanese invasion of China and the turbulent situation in the Mainland, Hong Kong and Macau became the wartime refuges for Cantonese Yueju. A large number of artists and troupes went to Hong Kong and Macau for development. In order to compete for space with fresh and fashionable foreign arts such as American blockbusters, Western European dramas, and musical films that had been popular in Hong Kong for a long time, Cantonese Yueju began to undergo new changes. The repertoire creation of this period paid equal attention to the sound and color, love and affectation, and laughter and anger, and was characterized by a variety of forms with very distinctive features. For example, new repertoires such as *Why Not Come Back* and *The Romantic Monk* were mostly written for the three types-of-role including Wenwusheng, Zhengyin Huadan and Chousheng. Traditional artists also considered this period to be the transition from the “Six-Types-of-Role System” to the “Three-Types-of-Role System”.¹

In 1953, a state-run troupe of Cantonese Yueju was established, and in October 1956, the first Member Representative Conference of the Guangzhou Branch of the Chinese Theatre Association was held. “The type-of-role classification of Cantonese Yueju” became a hot topic of discussion at that time. However, it was very difficult for Cantonese Yueju, which had been undergoing drastic changes from its birth to its maturity, to be recovered and rescued. The cultural department gathered a group of well-known artists, introduced the director system, and released a group of artistic works with exquisite performances

1 “Three-Types-of-Role System” (三柱制), also known as “San Wang Ban” (三王班).

such as *White Snake*, *Lotus lantern*, and *The You Sisters in the Red Chamber* and so on.

However, the short-lived artistic peak did not prevent the dispersion of talents and the loss of skills in Cantonese Yueju. Despite the emergence of good actors like Hung Sin-nui, the decline of the entire industry was inevitable, and many theatre companies were left with only “One Sheng and One Dan”, “One Sheng Half Dan” or “One Dan Half Sheng”. The once popular “Six-Types-of-Role System” had no other choice but to enter a new stage of “Sheng and Dan Taking the Lead”.

Conclusion

Since the 1970s, “Let A Hundred Flowers Blossom, Weed Through the Old to Bring Forth the New”¹ has become an important instruction to encourage and develop traditional Chinese Xiqu. Cantonese Yueju has revitalized and embarked on a new journey under the care and support of the state, local governments, state-owned theatres and troupes, and private organizations at home and abroad. In order to adapt to the requirements of the new era and realize its development, it is necessary to comprehensively develop the types-of-role of Cantonese Yueju, promote the training of various talents, and to rescue and restore, the originality of the repertoires, and break the performance barriers of actors. As the most influential genre of Chinese Xiqu and the most widely distributed and representative genre overseas, the birthplace and development of Cantonese Yueju is a strong testament to the dramatic changes it has endured that no other genre has been able to withstand. That's why it has a speed of transformation unmatched by other genres.

In recent years, Cantonese Yueju has gone further and further in its innovative journey. For example, the *Fighting for the Great Tang Empire* adapted from a popular online game and the 4k Cantonese Yueju movie *White Snake* have continued to gain popularity from viewers across the country, thus opening up another feasible path for the development of Cantonese Yueju.

1 Let A Hundred Flowers Blossom, Weed Through The Old To Bring Forth The New (百花齐放, 推陈出新): It is the policy proposed by the CPC to reform and develop the art of Chinese Yueju at the early stage of the founding of the People's Republic of China, and it also applies to other literary and artistic sectors.

In addition, many local troupes have started to rehearse traditional plays or create new modern plays in order to train young actors. For example, the Jiangmen Cantonese Yueju Troupe invited the famous artists to rehearse *Breaking Open the Mountain to Rescue Mother*, which fully demonstrated the “Ten-Major-Types-of-Role” of Cantonese Yueju in the early stage. Another example is the original modern play *Daybreak in South Guangdong* by Zhuhai Cantonese Yueju Troupe, which is set according to the types-of-role of the troupe's actors and attempts to move closer to the “Six-Types-of-Role System”.

Cantonese Yueju has undergone centuries of dramatic and magnificent developments and has never ceased to change from the day it was born, striving to keep developing. As Kant said, "There is nothing eternal in the world. Everything changes and everything develops". Perhaps the layout of the types-of-role of Cantonese Yueju will not change in the near future, but we believe that such an innovative and groundbreaking genre will certainly stir up the tide in the Sea of Xiqu in the future new eras.

Immersing in Arts, Sublimating Hearts: Ding Fan and His Artistic Achievements

ZHANG Jinqiong

It is said that Ding Fan holds a “special” place in the field of Cantonese Yueju, and a quick glimpse into his biography shows that this is by no means an exaggeration.

Born in Liling, Hunan Province, he had not started to learn Cantonese Yueju from an early age, and had neither a familial nor professional connection to the form. Despite this, he became one of the inaugural recipients of the “Plum Performance Award”, the highest performance award in Chinese theatre. Other distinctions include his position as the representative inheritor of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Cantonese Yueju Project of the United Nations Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

More than this, he is considered the “role model”, recognized by leaders, experts and audiences and a guaranteed “box office” in the Cantonese Yueju market, having won the “Wenhua Performance Award” twice. His performances hold a great appeal to both men and women of all ages, but especially to female audiences. He puts himself into the “red boat”¹, performing various emotions and feelings on the stage. It is oft said that onstage it seems as though he has lost “himself”, “hiding” in the characters of “emperors and generals”, “talents and beauties”, “common people and amorous monks”. It can be said that he treats Cantonese Yueju as his own wife and has “dedicated” his whole life, faithfully, to her.

Some say that Xiqu is a profession that depends on talent. Indeed, God

1 “Red boat” refers to the boat that the Cantonese Yueju Troupe takes when touring around in the early times. [Translator’s note]



■ Ding Fan(1952-)

favored Ding Fan greatly, not only endowing him with a tall and straight figure, a handsome appearance, and a good voice that many actors admire, but also allowing him to meet his “Bo Le (talent-scout)” Luo Pinchao at a crucial time in his development. From then on, he has established a connection with Cantonese Yueju and has loved it ardently all his life.

However, who knows how much hardship and suffering a teenager from another province with no foundations has had to go through to catch up with his peers who have been practicing since childhood? And who knows how difficult it is to make a decision to resist the temptation of other industries which earn a lot more financially and stick to this "hardship" and "infatuation" soberly and persistently when Xiqu is faced with declination? I am afraid that only Ding Fan himself knows.

In my opinion, at such a time when everyone can be called a “famous artist”, three requirements should be satisfied to truly live up to this title. That is, as a famous Xiqu artist, one must have a number of masterpieces to be retained; as a traditional artist, one must help an art system to be spread widely; and finally, as an inheritor of a Xiqu genre, one must have a group of apprentices to pass on the classics. Throughout his nearly 50 years involvement in Cantonese Yueju, Ding Fan has fully lived up to these standards, and is a well-deserved “famous Cantonese Yueju artist”.

Anyone who knows Ding Fan knows that he has a gentle personality and elegant demeanor, and lives a casual life. However, he is persistent and



■ Cantonese Yueju *The Love Story of Guanyin and Weituo Tian*, starred Ding fan, photographed by Xue Caihuan



■ Cantonese Yueju *The Tragic Sacrifice*, starred Ding fan, photographed by Xue Caihuan

scrupulous in his pursuit of art. He has practiced diligently and painstakingly day and night to make up the gap and catch up with those who came into contact with Cantonese Yueju much earlier. Besides, he has also learned from others and gradually formed his own unique performing style, becoming a famous actor noticed by all walks of life and welcomed by audiences at home and abroad.

Looking dapper in costume, he plays a wide range of characters and is adept in both Wensheng and Wusheng roles as well as singing and acting, particularly in Xiaosheng. On the stage of Cantonese Yueju, he has successfully portrayed many characters with distinctive images and different personalities that are deeply loved and followed by audiences. He has starred in many representative repertoires that have become famous, such as *Her Soul haunting in Zhuji Alley*, *The Legend of Lun Wenxu*, *Lotus Lantern*, *Emperor Taizong of Tang and His Prime Minister Wei Zheng*, *Emperor Minghuang of Tang and His Imperial Concubine Yang Yuhuan*, *Junzi Bridge*, *King of Lanling*, *The Legend of Red Plums*, *Substituting a Civet Cat for the Crown Prince* and many others. All of them have become the classic plays of Cantonese Yueju Theatre, and are performed repeatedly to a fine reception from audiences, with a good reputation and being passed down from generation to generation.

With his starring roles in these plays, he has also won a large number of awards including the First Guangdong Young and Middle-aged Theatre "Hundred Flowers Awards", the Guangdong Art Festival Performance First Prize, the First

and Fifth "Wenhua Performance Award" of the Ministry of Culture, the eighth Chinese Theatre Plum Performance Award, the First Guangdong Dramatist "Outstanding Contribution Award" and the fifth China Gold Record Award (CGRA). In addition to his many excellent artistic achievements, he has been awarded the honorary titles of "Outstanding Expert of the Ministry of Culture", "Excellent Young and Middle-aged Artist", and "Young and Middle-aged Artist of Outstanding Performing Skills and Moral Integrity".

Ding Fan is well known in the field of Cantonese Yueju. Whenever he shows up in a play, the "Female Fans" in Guangdong, Hong Kong, Macau and even overseas will definitely rush to the theatre, creating a buzz and a high demand for tickets. He has led troupes to perform in the United States, Canada, Australia, Singapore and other countries many times over the years, and almost all the theatres visited by his troupe are full sold-out. However, as a great master who is obsessed with Cantonese Yueju, he is never just satisfied with the audiences' support and his success at the box office. In his opinion, since the times have changed, the performing forms themselves should undergo a similar innovation. Keeping up with the aesthetics of the times and striving for innovation should be taken into consideration.

In order to innovate, it is necessary to be recognized by experts, leaders and audiences. Although it is very difficult to achieve these three recognitions, his masterpiece *The Legend of Lun Wenxu* is one of the "three-recognition" plays with which he won the Wenhua Performance Award, performing over 600 times with great popularity even till today. Moreover, it has been made into a Cantonese Yueju film where it was also a box office success. But he is still not satisfied, because he clearly knows what it means to achieve such acclaim, as he himself has noted: "Since my own involvement in this field, there are indeed only one or two plays which meet the standard. It's really difficult to achieve the 'three - recognitions', but we will never give up. We hope that we could direct at least one play, or part of a play, every year that can gain popularity among all the audiences".

Ding Fan's perception of life itself lies behind his desire to innovate his artform. He is acutely aware that during this information age where the internet is so developed, traditional Xiqu has fallen behind in many aspects including aesthetic awareness, performing forms, plot structures and appreciation habits. Compounding this, people now have more choices in culture and arts, and traditional Xiqu is no longer the main form of entertainment for the common people. Therefore, it is inevitable for traditional Xiqu to face the dilemma of audience reduction and even aging. To keep pace with the times,

it is necessary for it to reform. This does not necessarily need to entail a drastic change in inherent characteristics of the genre, nor to change the form completely, but to "change the form of performance appropriately while fully preserving the cultural connotations".

Ding Fan has made continuous attempts and efforts in inheritance and development. In his performance system, we can see both the fine traditions of Cantonese Yueju and his innovative ideas closely keeping up with the times and innovative efforts according to the aesthetic tastes of the audience. In terms of singing, he adopts a combination of old and new: "Unlike Bel Canto which has a rigorous system of teaching methods in singing, there is little research on the singing of Cantonese Yueju. And there are no teaching materials, relying completely on the actors' own feelings of it. Many styles of the masters are based on their own exploration, and a singing style is formed when they feel it is in line with what is needed and the audience feel it is special. So I think the Cantonese Yueju should follow the path of the music industry, standardize the study of singing, and form a set of reasonable educational standards." Therefore, he has consciously incorporated some of his own ideas and made some attempts when learning singing from famous predecessors in Cantonese Yueju, and eventually developed his own singing characteristics.

In order to better put into practice his concept of reform in the creative process, Ding Fan is no longer satisfied with being identified purely as an "actor", and has entered the field of directing. In his opinion, the traditional Cantonese Yueju is protracted in plot development, and it often takes more than three hours to finish watching a play, which will certainly make the audience impatient and stay away from it in such a fast-paced contemporary era.

So, in the process of creating and rehearsing, he has tried to simplify the script, speed up the development of the plot, and make it as concise as possible. Meanwhile, he has also tried to free pieces from the limitations of traditional Cantonese Yueju and innovated in the aspects of stage design, costumes, lighting, sounds and so on. As he has himself said; "Of course, to be a director of Cantonese Yueju and to innovate, one must first have a deep understanding of its tradition, so as not to lose its traits. New forms can be used, but the key is to use them in the right places. And when used appropriately, they can contribute to good works."

At present, the popular Cantonese Yueju *Love at Lake Dongting*, which is performed by numerous local and municipal troupes, is adapted by Ding Fan based on the plots of *Liu Yi Delivers A Letter*. This is a classic play by Luo Jiabao, but due to various reasons, it has rarely been rehearsed in recent years.



■ Cantonese Yueju *Her Soul Haunting in Zhuji Alley*, starred Ding fan, photographed by Xue Caihuan



■ Cantonese Yueju *Meeting His Lover in Sweet Dream at Tang Palace*, starred Ding fan, photographed by Xue Caihuan

Ding believes that the singing and story of it is quite attractive and worthy of rehearsal. While retaining the classic arias such as “Ten Farewells at Dongting Lake” and “Perfect Conjugal Bliss”, he has presented the story to the audience in a more novel form. With his careful “design”, the play takes on a rather new look when it reappears on the stage, and it has achieved good results in both artistic quality and box office figures.

As a representative inheritor of the national intangible cultural heritage, in addition to his own efforts to inherit Cantonese Yueju and put artistic ideals into practice, Ding Fan also spares no effort to cultivate successors in the field. He has always thought that there is constantly new blood flooding in and the new generation always excels the old. The competition in this field is also very fierce. Most of the actors who have received systematic and professional training have a good command of basic skills and master the “Four Skills and Five Means¹” well. What they lack is performing opportunities and stage experience. Therefore, though he doesn’t have many apprentices, he is very strict with them and has high expectations for them. He hopes that they would “not seek to win

1 Translator’s note: 四功五法: “Four Skills” refer to the four performing techniques in Chinese traditional Xiqu, considered the basics for an actor: singing, reciting, acting and martial arts (唱念做打). “Five Means” refer to the five techniques of Xiqu performing art including: gestures, eye expressions, postures, steps and rules (手眼身法步). [Translator’s note]



■ Cantonese Yueju *The Legend of Red Plums*, starred Ding fan, photographed by Xue Caihuan



■ Cantonese Yueju *The Legend of Lun Wenxu*, starred Ding fan, photographed by Xue Caihuan

awards, but to win the audiences' favor", and attract more fans with unique artistic charm. He has also tried his best to create performing opportunities for them.

For example, he gave Peng Qinghua, who was very hardworking and had just graduated, the opportunity to play the hero Chen Xiang in *Lotus lantern*, created and rehearsed *The Double-Speared Luk Man-lung* and directed *Dream-The Red Boat* for him. In order to foster Zeng Xiaomin, he had acted as a supporting role for her when she graduated, allowing her to star in *The Chilly River Pass*, and spared no effort to support her in administration. He was also often seen at the rehearsal site of *Return the Money* starring his apprentice Wen Ruqing and *Barwo Artists Association of Kwangtung* starring his other apprentice Huang Chunqiang. He often sat quietly aside, carefully recorded the parts that needed improvement in their performance with a small notebook, and corrected and demonstrated for them again and again after the rehearsal. In his opinion, the teacher-apprentice relationship should be open and inclusive. In order to equip them with more skills and make them more well-rounded, he personally found teachers for them: Peng Qinghua has learned the manner of articulation from Guan Guohua, and his Southern Martial Arts in *Dream-The Red Boat* were taught by Ou Kaiming.

Ding Fan's efforts in the inheritance and innovation of Cantonese Yueju have set a good example for his apprentices. Peng Qinghua believes that his master's

experience in acting and directing has taught him that Cantonese Yueju performers should not only follow the principles of Xiqu inheritance, but also make innovations and changes in practice. In other words, he thinks that they need to find a suitable way to fully express themselves on the stage, set foot on their own way of art and take on the responsibility of inheritance. Indeed, as for the duty of inheritance, Ding Fan has kept it in mind and carried it on his shoulders ever since he first stepped onto the grand stage of Cantonese Yueju. Now, he has passed it to his apprentices who are both diligent and excellent. It is soon to be the duty of all of them to shoulder this responsibility inheritance and carry forward Cantonese Yueju.

Some say Luckiness is its own virtuous circle. For Ding Fan, to have Cantonese Yueju in his life is lucky. And for Cantonese Yueju, to have Ding Fan as her star is also good luck. It's really a great joy and happiness in life to immerse in the arts and performances, and enrich and sublimate our hearts.

Profile of Ding Fan (1956-)

Honors and Titles: National First-class Actor; Winner of the eighth Chinese Theatre Plum Performance Award; Representative Inheritor of National Intangible Cultural Heritage; Famous Cantonese Yueju Performing Artist and Wenwusheng.

Work Experience: Member of the Guangdong Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC); President of Guangdong Cantonese Opera Institute; President of the Guangdong Province Iheairisi Association; Vice Chairman of the Guangdong Federation of Literary and Art Circles; Director of the China Theatre Association.

Treatment: Enjoying the special allowance of the State Council.

Looking dapper in costume, Ding Fan plays a wide range of characters and is adept in both Wensheng (civil) and Wusheng (military) roles as well as singing and acting, particularly in Xiaosheng (the young male role). He is known as "Madam-killer" among fans in Guangdong, Southeast Asia, the United States and Canada.

He has starred a host of plays such as *Her Soul Haunting in Zhuji Alley*, *The Legend of Lun Wenxu*, *The Tragic Sacrifice*, *Lotus Lantern*, *Junzi Bridge*, *King of Lanling*, *The Legend of Red Plums*, *The Legend of Purple Hairpin*,

Substituting a Civet Cat for the Crown Prince, Meeting His Lover in Sweet Dream at Tang Palace, Love at Lake Dongting, The Story of Dongpo and Chaoyun and The South China Sea NO.1.

He has also successfully directed such repertoires as *Meeting His Lover in Sweet Dream at Tang Palace, Love at Lake Dongting, Four Beauties in Ancient China: Jiang Wenduan Art Special Art Performance, The South China Sea NO.1, Dream-The Red Boat and Hongsheng Martial Club*, which won him Director Award of the 11th Guangdong Art Festival and Excellent Director Award of the 12th Guangdong Art Festival.

He has won the First and Fifth "Wenhua Performance Award" of the Ministry of Culture, the First Guangdong Young and Middle-aged Theatre "Hundred Flowers Awards", the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth and Tenth Guangdong Art Festival Performance First Prize, the First Guangdong Dramatist "Outstanding Contribution Award", the Fifth China Gold Record Award and other awards. He has been awarded the honorary titles of "Outstanding Experts" of the Ministry of Culture", Guangdong "Excellent Young and Middle-aged Artists" and "Young and Middle-aged Artists Excellent in both Performing Skills and Moral Integrity", and is a bearer of the "representative inheritor of the second batch of Provincial Intangible Cultural Heritage Projects in Guangdong". In addition, he was awarded the title of "National Advanced Worker".

ZHANG JINQIONG
Vice President of Guangdong Cantonese Opera Institute.

Guangdong Cantonese Opera Institute

LIU Shiyun

The Guangdong Cantonese Opera Institute was established in 1958, with the master of Cantonese Yueju, Mr. Ma Sze-Tsang as the first director and Ms. Zeng Xiaomin serving as the current director. Formerly known as Guangdong Cantonese Yueju Troupe, it later merged with the Municipal Cantonese Yueju Troupe, Pearl River, Yongguangming, New World, Dongfanghong and other troupes. Currently it consists of twelve internal organizations, including the Guangdong Cantonese Yueju Troupe I, Guangdong Cantonese Yueju Troupe II, Guangdong Cantonese Yueju Arts Center, Dance Design and Production Center, and different academies and departments. This first class Yueju Institute is the largest performing arts group in the field of Cantonese Yueju, and is regarded as the highest artistic palace of Cantonese Yueju.

With the tenet of "Cultivating Talents, Rehearsing Good Performances, and Pursuing Better Benefits", Guangdong Cantonese Opera Institute



■ Guangdong Cantonese Opera Institute

continues traditions while concurrently innovating. After more than 60 years of development, the institute has successfully cultivated numerous talents and produced a plethora of quality plays. The older generation of Cantonese Yueju masters, such as Ma Sze-Tsang, Hung Sin-nui, Pak Kui-Wing, and Luo Pinchao, were renowned at home and abroad for their superb performances. They embraced the inheritance and development of Cantonese Yueju as their mission, and left behind many classics such as *Search the College*, *The Legend of Lun Wenxu* and *Lady with a Brocade Umbrella*. They also solidified their legacies by cultivating many successors for the profession. Ten new-generation Cantonese Yueju artists, including Ding Fan, Cao Xiuqin, Liang Yaoan, and Wu Guohua, have successively won the "Plum Performance Award". Guangdong Cantonese Opera Institute, therefore, holds the honor among troupes as one of the contestants that won the award the most times.

The new Guangdong Cantonese Yueju Building (also known as the "Guangdong Cantonese Yueju Arts Center Building") began usage in 2012, and currently resides at No. 703 Dongfeng East Road, Yuexiu District, Guangzhou. The whole building contains an 800-seat main theatre, Cantonese Yueju Exhibition Hall, Training Center, and office areas for the troupe. The Institute owns a full range of departments and plans several performance brands in combination with its own resource advantages. "Weekend Cantonese Opera", which focuses on staging high-quality classic Yueju repertoires, is one of them, and was first performed at the Guangdong Cantonese Yueju Theatre on May 25, 2018. Since then, fans of Cantonese Yueju and tourists, alike, maysee performances at the Guangdong Cantonese Yueju Arts Center Theatre every weekend. After several years of development, "Weekend Cantonese Yueju" has become the first choice for people to view and experience Cantonese Yueju. In order to diversify its performance style and content, a special "Celebrity Performance Week" launched since late March 2019, led by national first-class actors such as Peng Qinghua, Wen Ruqing, Jiang Wenduan, Lin Jiabao and Huang Chunqiang, among others. Every season, a famous artist presents his/her masterpiece to the audience, and after the last performance of each "Performance Week", the "Famous Artist Seminar" is held so that the audience can communicate with the artist face to face.

In addition to serving as the audience's viewing space and the daily rehearsal and office space for the troupe members, the building contains a pro bono "Cantonese Yueju Cultural Experience Hall" specially designed and designated mainly for focus on Cantonese Yueju performances, historical and cultural relics exhibitions, and interactive experiences. Not only does the hall contain antique stages for performances, but the staffs also keep various stylistic props. On

the left side of the stage is an open dressing room, where audience members might learn about the actor's makeup process within an intimate distance. On the right is the location of the open band, whose configuration and accompaniment can be seen at a glance. These spaces are suitable for visitors of all different ages. The hall is open to the public every Saturday from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. and can accommodate up to 100 spectators. Activities related to "Adapting Cantonese Yueju into Schools" are also carried out in it. Often, Institute invites students from primary schools, secondary schools, universities, and international students to the hall to appreciate the charm of Cantonese Yueju.

In addition to the award-winning classics such as *Lotus lantern* and *The Story of Returning Gold*, the Institute presents innovative productions such as *Fighting for the Great Tang Empire*, *White Snake* and *Youth*, which found critical success and youth popularity, alike. *Fighting for the Great Tang Empire* was the first "Internet+Cantonese Yueju" based on and adapted from a popular online game, and premiered at the Guangdong Cantonese Yueju Arts Center in January 2015.

It dominated the box office of Xiqu performances according to the box office statistics of the national performance market that year. Another innovative achievement of the Institute was *White Snake*, which stemmed from and developed the basis of the traditional play *Legend of White Snake*. Zeng Xiaomin, the lead actress, won the 28th Plum Performance Award for Chinese Xiqu in 2017 as well as the 16th Wenhua Performance Award in 2019. The film version of *White Snake* was originally planned for a theatrical release during the Spring Festival of 2020 but had to be postponed to May 20th of 2022 due to the epidemic. The film used its modern form to narrow the gap between Cantonese Yueju, an art form that has spanned nearly three hundred years, and the young people of the 21st century. Many young viewers were deeply impressed by the beautiful costumes, singing, and plot after watching it on the big screen. The netizens also expressed their positive reactions through good reviews of the movie, currently enjoying an 8.1 on Douban and 9.2 on Maoyan. On October 10th, the film version premiered on the paid channel of the video website bilibili (abbreviated as B station) and can be watched online for only 12 yuan. As of October 16th, the number of online views has exceeded 6.602 million, and the audience rating on B station was as high as 9.8.

The aforementioned successes manifested many of the efforts of the Institute to become innovate in the modern age, particularly with regards to the internet. The sudden outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 posed a large challenge



■ Poster of Cantonese Yueju theme party on July 1



■ Cantonese Yueju Online



■ The experiential activity of Cantonese Yueju of Dongfanghong kindergarten, 2019



■ Cantonese Yueju Return the Money



■ Cantonese Yueju on campus, 2018



■ Zeng Xiaomin, President of Guangdong Cantonese Opera Institute (2019-)



■ Cantonese Yueju *Madame Huarui*, starred Zeng Xiaomin, photographed by Xue Caihuan



■ Cantonese Yueju *Samsui Women*, starred Zeng Xiaomin, photographed by Xue Caihuan



■ Cantonese Yueju *Youth*, starred Zeng Xiaomin, photographed by Xue Caihuan



■ Cantonese Yueju *Liu Yi Delivers A Letter*, starred Zeng Xiaomin, photographed by Xue Caihuan

as it removed the possibility of conducting offline performances. Adhering to preserving traditional Cantonese Yueju, the institute actively tried to mesh its ideas with young thought, combine tradition and innovation, modify the performance style in accordance with the new procedures during the epidemic, and boldly brought the theatre stage directly to the live broadcast room. On the evening of May 1, 2020, the online live broadcast brand "Yueyun ONLINE" launched its first online live broadcast in conjunction with a number of online media such as We Sing (a mobile ktv app), CCTV News, People's Daily Online, Tencent.com among others. Many Cantonese Yueju performing artists took turns giving Yueju performances for the general public, with more than 2.766 million online views worldwide. After the "first success" of the online live broadcast, the Institute would simultaneously broadcast live online during festivals or large-scale performances. As a result, more and more young Guangzhou citizens expressed interest in Cantonese Yueju and proposed their willingness to watch the wonderful performances presented by these outstanding actors offline at the Institute as the pandemic situation improves. Guangdong Cantonese Opera Institute continues to hope that more and more young people will fall in love with Cantonese Yueju and gradually regard it as a part of their daily life. As the continued legacy of Cantonese Yueju remains paramount, that hope extends to the possibility of recommending the art form to their family and friends alike.

LIU SHIYUN

Master's Degree candidate of Shanghai Theatre Academy.

Epilogue to the Modern Drama Version of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*

YU Rongjun

The Dream of the Red Chamber is one of the most outstanding representatives of Chinese classical novels. Over the years, it has been performed and recreated in various forms, with successful examples being the Yueju version and the 1987 TV series, both of which have influenced generations of audiences. The reason for their success, apart from the factors of their contexts, is that both of these two versions have been recreated on the basis of the original work that accord with the characteristics of the transplanted art ontology.

In terms of stage plays, not only Yueju, but also almost all theatre genres have adapted and staged *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. There are also many dramas, most of which are completely new interpretations, drastic subversions, or episodic presentations of the original. And no one presents the whole piece in a panoramic manner. This is probably because the original work is characterized with numerous characters, complex plots and rich content. So it is hard for the dramatists to decide which to choose and take all factors into account. Therefore, it is indeed difficult to structure and adapt according to the traditional form of drama performance. More often, the theatre practitioners prefer to find a path to evade the major and focus on something minor.

Absolutely, it is never an easy thing to re-adapt and reinterpret *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. The point is how to find the angle of adaptation and the relevance of the play to contemporary audiences. Even the same story can be told in different ways. In order to be performed on the stage of drama, it is necessary to be endowed with the characteristics of the art of drama, which is the most basic.

The rich content and connotations of the novel *The Dream of the Red Chamber*

not only grants infinite room for adaptation, but also poses great challenges. Adapting masterpieces is inherently a laborious but thankless job, let alone a well-known masterpiece like this. My approach is to first "break up" the original for my better use. In other words, we should neither deviate from the original nor be bounded by it, but reconstruct and recreate based on close reading and comprehensive understanding. Then, another point we should bear in mind is to forget the original when adapting or recreating. After all, what is finally presented on the stage is a drama, not the Xiqu, even less a novel or a film and television work. Therefore, the essence of the original as well as that of the art of drama should never be lost. Besides, the work will ultimately be presented on today's stage, with contemporary audiences sitting in the theatre, so there must be contemporary aesthetics, emotions and interpretations.

What I want to present is a stage work both with modern consciousness and in line with contemporary aesthetics. It conforms not only to the audience's imagination, but also to the artistic characteristics of the drama. As such, it is a re-creation of a drama rooted in the original, with the aesthetics of contemporary audiences at its core. This refers not only to the adaptation of the script, but also to the various parts of re-creation in the future, including directing, acting, and stage art.

The audience has expectations for the performance of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* on the stage. Everyone has their own images of Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu and other characters in their mind, with slight differences, but also common characteristics. These common features are what we need to grasp when creating, while those differences provide opportunities for us to give full play to our creativity.



■ *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, 2021.9, Photographed by Yin Xuefeng



■ *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, 2021.9, Photographed by Yin Xuefeng

The modern drama version has not been divorced from the original, but is a synthesis, concentration and reorganization of it. A period of history, two great families, the relationship among three people (Baoyu, Daiyu and Baochai), and the fate of all characters are the most crucial parts. The theme that interests me most in the original is fate. The fate of Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu seem to have been doomed in previous lives, kind of predestined. It may also be one of the few novels that tell the readers the ending from the very beginning. So what matters is not the result, but the process. The author also seems to be recalling the past of his family. Though there was unwillingness, he had no other choice but to succumb to fate. Therefore, in terms of structure, I have adopted the four seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter to show the whole process of the rise and fall of the family. Destiny can be of a person, a family, or even a nation or the whole history, with different dimensions. However, the wheel of destiny is ultimately unstoppable.

The drama started from the most prosperous moment of the Jias of Rong-guo House when Yuanchun was crowned as the imperial concubine. The whole House was immersed in a kind of ecstasy after panic. This was the most joyous moment for both Houses¹ after so long, and also a sudden glorious act after which the Jias of Rong-guo House begin a gradual decline. All the worries seemed to have vanished, and all that remained was joy. However, in the midst of this joy, Jia Zheng and Baoyu both seem to have seen what they would be like years after and their already doomed destiny. Then, this joy becomes

1 The Jias of Rong-guo House (贾府 / 荣国府) and the Ning-guo House (宁国府). [Translator's note]



■ *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, 2021.9, Photographed by Yin Xuefeng

complicated. No matter how life went on, the shadow of fate always existed. This joy, then, was more like a temporary superficial prosperity before things getting worse.

Then the vibrant spring came, and the twelve women characters¹ gradually made their appearance. They are as beautiful as flowers and full of vigor and vitality as spring. But in such an energetic spring, there were also hidden sadness, loneliness and fear. The apparent joy cannot cover up the cruel nature of life, that is, impermanence.

Immediately afterwards arrived the summer, when everything in the stuffy afternoon was sleepy and stifling amidst the continuous hissing of summer cicadas. The vigor and vitality turned into restlessness and sin. However, those girls in a fretful state were losing their lives one after another due to the tricks of fate, all because of Jia Baoyu who in fact cherished them so much. Baoyu seemed to be running all the time. He didn't understand what had happened and had no time to pity or complain, with so many lives lost for him. The evil in the hot summer sun was so wanton and blatant that it made people dizzy.

The desolate and depressed autumn began with the Mid-Autumn Moon Feast at the Jias of Rong-guo House. Uncertainty surged in people's hearts, and those romance and beauty slowly dissipated, revealing the hidden hideousness.

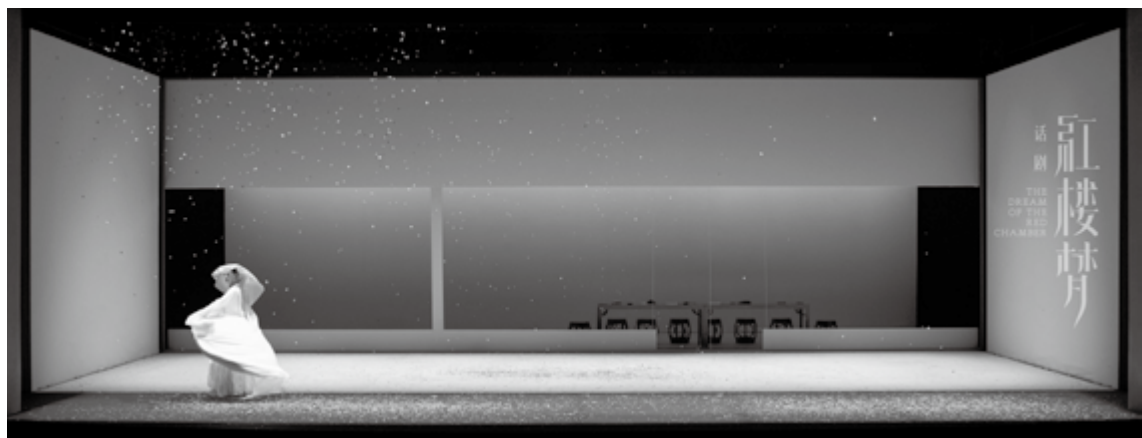
1 Including Lin Daiyu(林黛玉), Xue Baochai(薛宝钗), Jia Yuanchun(贾元春), Jia Yingchun(贾迎春), Jia Tanchun(贾探春), Jia Xichun(贾惜春), Wang Xifeng(王熙凤), Qin Keqing(秦可卿), Li Wan(李纨), Shi Xiangyun(史湘云), Miaoyu(妙玉), Sister Qiao(巧姐). [Translator's note]

Powerful forces turned weak, fate revealed its cruel side, and illusions were smashed into pieces unconsciously.

Then came the harsh winter, accompanied by the bitter wind that no one could bear after the depression. Those hopes all turned into ice and snow and fell silently, covering all the evil, as well as the prosperity of the past. It seemed that everyone had found their final destination, crawling at the feet of fate, without any decency. All the glories in the past seemed to become a flash in the pan.

Seasonal changes in the nature are irreversible and destined to be from spring to winter. This is the common law for the development of all the things in the world. Therefore, I structured the whole play based on the four seasons and the combination of joys and sorrows, which was a general consideration of the conception, imagery and structure.

In addition, the drama breaks down the linear time and space in its narrative, allowing them to converge at any time. The way of performing as both a narrator and role player can not only simplify the story, but also make it possible for the actors to be measured and judged, producing the effect of defamiliarization, and thus presenting a more calm and objective performance. This is also the method of storytelling of traditional Chinese Xiqu, which makes the story more three-dimensional, thereby greatly expanding the capacity of the script and preserving the essence of the original as much as possible. In the theatre, the audience will be reminded from time to time how to be in and out, something that traditional Chinese Xiqu has enlightened us with. The



■ *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, 2021.9, Photographed by Yin Xuefeng

drama comes to an end when the property of the Jias of Rong-guo House was confiscated, at which time the endings of many characters have yet to be touched upon. Therefore, I have adopted the method of telling the ending in advance in my adaptation. Wang Xifeng, for example, could see her own corpse being dragged in the snow in her dreams, which foreshadowed her end. And Xue Baochai, embroidering the bellyband for Jia Baoyu when he was taking a nap, seemed to see her future. Perhaps several years later, this would be the daily life of them both. There is a character Fairy Disenchantment throughout the drama, through whose point of view we could overlook the fate of all the characters.

Jacques Derrida once illustrated the intertextuality delay of meaning by using the term “consulting the dictionary”, that is, the meaning of a word will produce endless intertextuality delay through constantly looking up synonyms and related words. This is also the approach I have taken in this creation. The novel is the basis, which not only conforms to the expression of polysemy, but also generates the tension of intertextuality. The plots and scenes of it form intertextuality with my reading experience and expression, as well as with the audience's experience and thoughts, thus highlighting the significance of the drama. I tried to frame the play in a narrative way so that the characters can be in or out, creating the effect of defamiliarization. Both actors and characters could comment on the scenes and plots, which are also my own understandings, and perhaps the perspectives of the audience as well.

In the drama, each character, plot or scene could be singled out and linked



■ *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, 2021.9, Photographed by Yin Xuefeng



■ *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, 2021.9, Photographed by Yin Xuefeng

to various meanings and interpretations, and even to our life experiences. For instance, Borges, Márquez, and even Chandler and Mo Yan, their works are all associated with history through the fate of a family. Borges' s imagery, for example, includes mirrors, dreams and destiny. I also hope to make *The Dream of the Red Chamber* more accessible to contemporary audiences through this analysis and interpretation. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* has created a unique world. "Many years later as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice". My script also tries to create a unique world. That's why at the beginning Jia Zheng says: "It seemed that I have heard the thunderbolt in the snowy night at Piling Post Station many years later, and see the vague figure kneeling by the river, all of which disappeared within just a few minutes."

The Dream of the Red Chamber, also known as *The Story of the Stone*, is about the journey of a stubborn stone in the human world. The destiny of the characters in it has a predestined karma in past lives, while the book tells the story of their present life and foretells the future. I have found many plots related to mirror image in the original and have incorporated them in the drama. Such as the scene in which Grannie Liu saw herself in the mirror in Green Delights when entering the Grand View Garden and Jia Baoyu saw Zhen Baoyu in the south of the Yangtze River in his dream. Plots of happiness and sorrow are also put together to form a contrast, such as the death of Qin Keqing and the imperial concubine Yuanchun's family visitation, Tanchun's marrying far away and the death of Yingchun, Bao and Chai' s wedding and Daiyu' s death etc., hoping to reflect the impermanence of fate through these sharp contrasts.

In terms of recreation, the character modeling, dialogue, blocking, body,



■ *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, 2021.9, Photographed by Yin Xuefeng

and even the tone of speech and the way of walking on the stage are all extracted from the Xiqu tradition and integrated with modern dance, forming a presentation that originates from tradition but not bound to it, contemporary but not too modern. The two workshops allow the recreation to finally reach the balance, that is, a form with contemporary aesthetic but not divorced from the tradition. And in rehearsals, the director put a lot of emphasis on the shaping of such form.

As for stage presentation, the main creators have reached an agreement on the direction, that is, to present in an impressionistic style of Xiqu tradition. The stage design is in an impressionistic and flowing style, thus leaving a great deal of room for the actor's creativity, but also posing a considerable challenge for them. The stage is based on white and embellished with red, black, gold and other colors. But such white is also the "colorful" white, with various types and layers, thus highlighting the "unsullied" world in the eyes of Baoyu, and the metaphoric meaning of the last sentence, which reads, "the vast white land is really clean". From creation to recreation, great attention has been paid to the audience's on-site feelings and perspectives. For *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, every audience may more or less have their personal understandings before entering the theatre. Before the performance, I predicted the differences between the audience's cognition and that of the creators. But it turns out to be much better than I have imagined, and the vast majorities were very receptive to our presentation and aesthetics.

We hope to arrive at the state where "Wu (Nothingness) Is the Origin", so as to make room for the audiences' reflection. Therefore, we have adopted the blank-leaving and impressionistic style of Chinese aesthetics. Li Zehou once said that



■ *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, 2021.9, Photographed by Yin Xuefeng

beauty is a form with meaning. Therefore, the creators have been trying to find such a form and finally made it, that is, to return to the tradition and bring the drama close to the traditional expression. From the script and director to the stage design and performance, we have always adhered to this form. In the creation, we are supposed to deal with the relationship of “existence and non-existence”, “won and done”, “emptiness and reality” and “rise and fall”; to deal with the relationship of the present, past and future, reality, imagination, and dream; to deal with the relationship between people and politics, family and individual.

We hope to involve the audience as participants, since they are undoubtedly part of the performance. Great attention should be paid to “Capturing the Spirit Beyond Form” in creation, that is, expressing the spirit with the form. This is something like drawing. Though it is easy for us to draw eyes, it requires a lot to draw the expressions in people’s eyes. We hope to convey the “spirit” through “form”, whose establishment would ultimately contribute to the expression of “spirit”. For example, we have taken “the sprinkling of red confetti” as an imagery which appeared as many as 15 times throughout the drama. This imagery was originally designed to show “the fallen reds into heaps”, while in different plots, it could be different things such as the fallen flowers, drifting snow, the shedding tears, or even the loss of life or the sad mood, with different interpretations of the same form. The fallen confetti scattered in all corners of the stage, and the actors often make them float up as they walk on the stage.

These flying and flipping confetti are also traces of youthful life.

We also hope to gain the effect of “Qi Yun Sheng Dong (a vivacious artistic conception)”. “Qi Yun (Artistic Appeal)” is the external form from which the “vitality” is generated, and this “vitality” is the story and the reality it can express, which is dynamic and externalized. Especially in the performance, the director attaches great importance to the externalization of psychological space, trying hard to achieve the result of “vividness from stillness” through the performance of the actors. Then it is crucial to achieve the effect of “Yan Bu Jin Yi (Words cannot fully express thought)”. Yi Zai Yan Wai (The meaning is implied), what we present is only the foundation, a basic expression which has to be in dialogue with the audience's imagination, and sometimes even in confrontation.

We sincerely hope that the audience could let go of their inherent imaginations or stereotypes of this classic and enter the stage world we have created. In this way, we can find the possibility of a dialogue between “viewing” and “performing”, and finally reach the state of De Yi Wang Xing (emphasizing more on meaning and less on form). Thus, we have completed a dialogue with the audience in the theatre. This is why we revive *The Dream of the Red Chamber* in contemporary times. The world outside the theatre is very complicated and impetuous. But inside the theatre, we can calm down and reflect on our lives. This may be the significance of contemporary theatre.

YU RONGJUN

Playwright of the modern drama version of The Dream of the Red Chamber. Vice Chairman of the 8th Council of Shanghai Dramatists Association.

Six-hour Version of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*: Contemporary Aesthetic Reconstruction and Interpretation

SUN Yunfeng

One of the so-called Four Chinese Literary Classics, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* is an encyclopedic novel of the Chinese feudal society. Set during the first half of the eighteenth century, the story focuses on the decline of the Jia clan, the tragic love triangle between Jia Baoyu, Lin Daiyu, and Xue Baochai, and the lives of female characters represented by the “Twelve Beauties of Jinling”. In China, the novel retains favor with artists and widely finds regular adaptations into local Xiqu, Quyi, film and TV series, stage plays, musicals, ballets, etc. Its adaptations remain popular with considerable number of fans.

In September 2021, a six-hour adaptation of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* immediately attracted audiences in Shanghai to attend the theater. The original novel retains a highly loyal fan-base, and the full-length stage play produced by Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center was highly anticipated, resulting a rapidly sold-out production. Shortly after its premiere in Shanghai, the six-hour adaptation drew even more attention and spread its box-office success to Hangzhou. Part of the reason for this success relates directly to the production itself; after all, no one could have foreseen such a stylistic adaptation of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*.

I. Interpretation in Reconstruction

In an interview, Yu Rongjun, playwright of the drama, claimed that with regards



■ *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, 2021.9, Photographed by Yin Xuefeng

to adaptation, “the most challenging aspect is to make audiences have an open mind, not with their stereotyped impression of the original work, so that they can get involved in our play”¹. The six-hour play includes some of the main plot of the original literary work (120 chapters in total) but is not a complete reproduction; the playwright adjusted certain aspects of the plot. Similarly, the play is presented in a “discrete” manner, which differs from the novel’s narration style.

The adaptation is split into two parts, comprising four sections: spring, summer, autumn, and winter. The first half composing the spring and summer sections, and the second composed of autumn and winter. The play spans one year, during which the prosperous Jia clan (representing the privileged class in feudal society) declines, and the characters’ fates echo the lines chanted by Daiyu when burying the fallen flowers: “one day when spring has gone and youth has fled/ the Maiden and the flowers will both be dead”. With an opening parallel to mythological stories, the novel intrigues readers with its combination of reality and illusion. The stage play inherits its juxtaposition of the dreaming state and the waking world. In addition to the aforementioned aspects, the play flexibly shifts between different times or spaces and further alternate’s reality and

1 《专访话剧<红楼梦>编剧喻荣军：这部剧有点挑观众，但这6小时值得》，陈宇浩，《钱江晚报》，2021年9月23日 [Interview with Yu Rongjun the playwright of "A Dream of Red Manshions": The six-hour play has a threshold for the audience but is time worthy. Chen Yuhao, *QianJiang Evening News*, Sept 23, 2021.]

illusion. If audiences expect to witness a play that aims to represent the original aesthetic of the work, they might be disappointed. The play structure does not strictly follow the novel. In the book, “Daiyu buried the fallen flowers” takes place before “Jia Zheng disciplining Baoyu”, while the sequence is reversed in the play to serve as a transition between the two parts. Relating to the spring-to-winter cycle in the play, the sequence rearranged is the playwright’s new interpretation of “Flower Burying Poem” (a poem chanted by Daiyu when burying flowers). The two events bear symbolic meanings in the play, perhaps only alluded to within the narration of the novel. The play also emphasizes and highlights the tragic fates of females in feudal society. The playwright remarked, “The play would be superficial if it only focused on the love triangle of Baoyu, Daiyu and Baochai.” Instead, he thinks the adaptation should be thought provoking, full of power, and against standard conventions. He reconstructs the novel’s famous episodes in an interconnected and intertextual way, challenging audiences’ impression of the original work and bringing to them a remarkably fresh theater experience. The “discrete” reconstruction of the plot reminds audiences to reconsider what reflections the play has on contemporary society, rendering them co-creators of the play.

The play rearranges the sequence of events according to spring, summer, autumn, and winter cycle. It starts with Jia Zheng kneeling in the snow, and other characters standing in a row in the distance—a scene that immediately



seals their sad fates even at the start. The play, after the four seasons, returns to the “desolate and bare landscape covered by snow”. Time, an essential element of the play, differs from the time or event sequence in the novel. The play rearranges the sequences to reset time, transcending the original work to philosophy. It is the play creators’ interpretation and refinement of the novel, which are not implicit but explicit, that lead to a philosophical expression beyond the characters and plot, and a conversation with the original work.

II. Discrete Staging

The play is consistent with the rewritten story, presented with “discrete” performance and staging. Many of the wonderful plot and psychological descriptions in the novel are condensed into episodic dialogues, not intended for actors to play realistic characters, but the director’s attempts to achieve discreteness through staging.

For instance, the scene of “Daiyu’s first arrival at the Jias of Rong-guo House” carefully depicted in the novel, however, is composed of only a few actions of characters in the play—

■ *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, 2021.9, Photographed by Yin Xuefeng





■ *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, 2021.9, Photographed by Yin Xuefeng

In front of a sedan chair, stand Daiyu and her two maids. One maid says: “Before Daiyu disembarks, a sedan-chair from the Rong-guo House and carts for her luggage are waiting in the wings.” The other says: “Daiyu has heard a great deal from her mother about the magnificence of her grandmother’s home; she will have to watch every step she takes and weigh every word she says, for if she places the wrong foot down they will surely laugh her to scorn.” Along with the words, the three slowly sway their bodies and try stepping forward but withdraw their feet. The maid continues: “In the capital, the bustle in the streets and the crowds of people are much more than anywhere else.” After what seems a long time, they come to a street with two huge stone lions crouching on the north side, flanking a great triple gate with beast-head knockers. There is a board above the center gate on which are written in large characters the words: NING-GUO HOUSE Founded and Constructed by Imperial Command. A little further to the west, Daiyu approaches another imposing triple gate. This is the Rong-guo House. Each hand resting on the outstretched hand of an elderly attendant, Daiyu and others enter through a smaller gate on the west. Supported by the other maid, Daiyu steps through the gate. After a pause of a few seconds, they take short quick steps. One maid reads lines along the rhythm of steps: “Through an ornamental gate, into a courtyard, around a screen of polished marble, across three halls, they enter the large courtyard of the mansion’s principal apartments and stand by the rock.” They stop all of a sudden. Daiyu takes off her cloak, revealing her face, and recites slowly to the audience: “By the rock, I seem to recall the Crimson Pearl Flower, on

the bank of the West Sacred River and beside the Rock of Rebirth, watered by the attendant Shen Ying to whom the Flower can hardly repay her debt of gratitude. I would like to pay off my debts, yet I do not know how. I have no water to pay back, except for my tears.”

In the play, the director outlines more than one event in an easy and condensed way for staging. In “Daiyu’s first arrival at the Jias of Rong-guo House”, Daiyu takes up less than a third of the stage, with neither redundant actions nor movements. The two maids, as the omniscient “voiceover”, narrate Daiyu’s entering the Jias of Rong-guo House, with only a few words. Daiyu’s monologue, composed of three sentences, covers the first two chapters of the novel. The actors on the stage sometimes are the characters and sometimes onlookers who indicate the current situation for the audience. The shift between characters and onlookers, so-called “discrete” performing, creates difficulties for audience’s sense of involvement. Consequently, audiences must ponder and interpret the actors’ performances with neither aid nor prompt.

The play’s arrangement of space combined with the arrangement and style of characters also adds to the play’s dubious nature of reality. In the prologue, for example, Jia Zheng kneels as other characters stand in a row in the distance, an image representing at once their first appearance, their fate, and a destined ritual at a point in time. There are many such meaningful appearances. The creator condenses the connections between the “Twelve Beauties of Jinling” into monologues or dialogue consisting of several sentences. Sitting in a row, the twelve beauties face the audiences with prescribed postures, and deliver their lines in certain moods, appearing in the scene “Baoyu travels to the Land of Illusions”. The Fairy Disenchantment leads Baoyu into the land, while the twelve beauties move quickly across the stage one by one and chant their own prophecies¹—Baochai and Daiyu chant “One was a pattern of female virtue/ One a wit who made other wits seem slow/ The jade belt² in the greenwood hangs/ The gold pin³ is buried beneath the snow” while moving. In the end, the twelve stand in a row on the stage. The creator uses their appearances to reflect and accentuate the tragic fate of females in the play.

1 Prophecies (判词) in *The Dream of the Red Chamber* are the poem of fate for major characters in the novel, predicating their destiny in an obscure way.

2 “Jade belt” refers to Daiyu. [Translator’s note]

3 “Gold pin” refers to Baochai. [Translator’s note]

III. Contemporary Aesthetics: Simple and Neat

The play is characterized by its stage setting and costumes, an aspect that greatly attracts the audience members. In the 1980s, a TV series titled *"The Dream of the Red Chamber"* (released in 1987) gained enough popularity with the Chinese people that it was regarded as a near-definitive adaptation of the novel. Its costumes were elegant, exquisite, and diverse, a dedicated combination of historically accurate costume elements from Chinese dynasties, painstakingly designed and produced with wonderful quality. The adaptation of Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center, however, does the opposite. It chooses simplicity over complexity. Its simple stage design and costumes allow audiences space for imagination. Such a bold take won it the Best Stage Design in the 5th Chinese Theatre Awards.

In a theatre, what impresses the audiences most is what meets their eyes. In the play, white is the base color, signifying that all the luxury and prosperity in the novel ends with a "desolate and bare landscape covered by snow". At the beginning, stage designer Liu Xinlin takes the "desolate and bare landscape covered by snow" as the prime concept for the stage design and decides on the structure of space and visual elements. The main stage structure comprises three huge "white walls" that transform throughout the production in accordance to the storyline. After the prologue, three "white walls" pop up from the ground and a thin, hollowed, red frame falls from the ceiling to stand on the stage, forming a symmetrical square structure conforming to Chinese traditional philosophy and aesthetics. Actors can perform freely on the spatial stage. Their flexible performance coincides with the play's non-linear narrative to present the dream-like metaphors and the endless life cycle of "having" and "losing", and "winning" and "finishing". At the end of the play, the three huge "white walls" gradually close with the "Fall of Tragic Fate" theme, as if the landscape is covered by "snow" and turns empty and void. Besides the minimalist staging, the designer uses exquisite props for decoration. These props indicate the places wherein events unfold: —the wooden bridge in "Daiyu's first arrival at the Jias of Rong-guo House", the Jias of Rong-guo House's chairs and desks with carved patterns, the stone bridge in Grand View Garden, an artificial hill of rock, and the half-hidden pavilion, etc. They seem to be of Chinese classic style at first glance, but actually exemplify contemporary aesthetic elements, different from the traditional objects. Their outlines are mostly simple geometry, creating a more modern and stylish—even philosophic—staging.

In addition to the stage setting and props, the costume and makeup of actors were also excellent. To match the stage style, all the characters dress in white



■ *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, 2021.9, Photographed by Yin Xuefeng

silk. White, according to costume designer Yang Donglin, appears simple but retains profound meaning. “Immaculateness” formed Yang Donglin’s aesthetic concept while designing costumes. He deploys white (Tea-like white, moon-like white, tooth-like white) as his base color, and low saturation colors (vermillion, saffron red, black, raven blue) for decoration according to the character’s identity, personality, and destiny. Such costumes, however, may blur the differences between characters. Only characters with strong features in their age or personality, like Wang Xifeng, Grandmother Jia, and Granny Liu, might be recognized through performance and costumes. The other “Twelve Beauties of Jinling” are to be differentiated through their lines, a feat manageable only for audiences familiar with the novel.

The six-hour adaptation of *A Dream of Red Manshions* is a stage play of contemporary aesthetics. It transformed abstract words into a real and concise performance. It pioneers a new interpretation of the original work from the perspective of a modern people. It breaks the structure and narration of the novel. As its playwright Yu Rongjun said, “The play is reconstructed according to the novel’s character relationship, people’s connection with family, politics and society, transition between illusion and reality, relations of past, present, and future, and the fight against fate.” Besides the reconstruction of the storyline, the play incorporates elements of traditional Chinese Xiqu. Through its simple staging, the play transforms the characters, events, and items into a cohesive work, and exhibits a psychological world in the theatre—highlighting “the battle between free will and predetermined fate”. The protagonists experience frustration, hints of nihilism, introspections, and find relief.¹ Undoubtedly, the adaptation is innovative and introduces another perspective for evaluating stage plays adapted from literary works. Should the adaptation be faithful to the original work? Will contemporary audiences prefer to approach classic literary works through reconstruction and interpretation, like the play does? I think, for the six-hour adaptation, the tremendous box-office success lends credibility to an answer.

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1 《话剧〈红楼梦〉为何值得看六小时？古典与现代交织出“新国风”》，童菁薇，《文汇报》，2021年12月24日 [Why is the stage play of *A Dream of Red Manshions* worth six hours? The Chinese classic style combines with the contemporary aesthetics to form “new Chinese aesthetics”. Tong Jingwei, *Wenhui News*, Dec 24, 2021.]

Poetry, Xiqu and Classicism: The Modern Drama Version of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*

CAI Xingshui

To fully present a masterpiece like *The Dream of the Red Chamber* in the form of the modern drama undoubtedly requires extraordinary skills. Written by Yu Rongjun and produced by Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center, the play adapted from *The Dream of the Red Chamber* is highly impressive with its artistic techniques and means of expression. Based on traditional Chinese Xiqu, it shows a multi-dimensional and diversified artistic style applied to historical themes. With modern and innovative ideas, the play is an atypical one, bringing the audience a mind-blowing experience.

I. Multi-Structure

The playwright is the first to be greatly challenged when a classic novel as profound as *The Dream of the Red Chamber* is adapted for performance on the stage. If he wants to lead viewers to the cultural and artistic treasure, the playwright needs to not only achieve a balance between the stem and branches of the story, but also keep the essence of the book without getting the audience lost in the vicissitudes, which is really difficult.

The play *The Dream of the Red Chamber* is divided into two parts, with the total two-night performance running for duration of approximately six hours. One can feel that the complex plot of the original, mostly preserved intact in the play, has been carefully deconstructed, reorganized into multi-structures



■ *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, 2021.12, Photographed by Zhizhi Zaigewu

where relationships of characters are interlocked. The playwright not only highlights the love story between Baoyu and Daiyu, along with the love triangle of Baoyu, Daiyu and Baochai, but also almost all the well-known classic plot points including the characters and their stories, the essence of time and space in the Grand View Garden, including “Daiyu’s first arrival at the Jias of Rong-guo House”, “Baoyu dropping the jade”, “Yuanchun’s home visit”, “Granny Liu’s visit to the Grand View Garden”, “Qingwen tearing the fan”, “Jia Zheng disciplining Baoyu”, “choosing pen-names at the Poetry Club”, “Daiyu buried the fallen flowers”, “the death of two You ladies”, “the Lady Dowager’s Birthday”, “raiding the Mansion”, and “Baoyu’s marriage”. These stories are all essential to the playwright’s faithful, thoughtful, and detailed recreation.

The complex character relationships and intertwined plots are carefully structured into the time setting of passing seasons, which saves space of the script and creates images of a group of characters with detailed description of their appearances and personalities foregrounded by the multi-structure, and thus the main point of the play is underlined. The double perspectives of reality and imagination, of subjectivity and objectivity, showcase both an acute observation of people and events and sometimes an insight from an outsider making thorough comments and in-depth summaries, guaranteeing a comprehensive and artistic reproduction of the classic’s strong inner power, and displaying the meaning of the original aptly, such as the interplay of truth

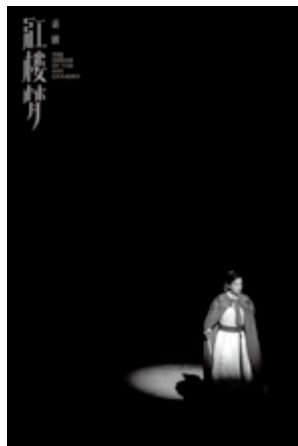


■ *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, 2021.12, Photographed by Zhizhi Zaigewu

and illusion and the emptiness of all things.

It is the playwright's great familiarity and understanding of the original that lays an essential foundation for the accurate adaptation of the play. Yu's version not only interprets the spirit of the classic with a focus on the traits of the characters, but also incorporates certain modern ideas, securing harmony between modern and traditional ideologies. Yu's study and rewriting of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* indicates his inquisitive eye and a tendency to largely keep what is in the original novel. Some of his adapted stories coming from the classic are enriched by thoughts and quests from today's world, such as the entangled love between Baoyu and Daiyu and Jia Zheng's submissive life.

The playwright, faithful to the original, takes pains to break the constraint of the original's artistic form and bring the complete story to their audience. His adaption and reinterpretation reflects his boldness and insight. No matter how noble or humble they are, people all have a day when their life comes to an end. Wax and wane are inevitable in the world and the fate of an individual occupies just a bit of the book of history. Roughness, power play, cheating, struggle and freedom all ultimately fade away as flowers flowing afar along the stream. Emptiness is unavoidable.



■ *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, 2021.12, Photographed by Zhizhi Zaigewu

II. Multi-dialogue

Drama is an art that relies mainly on character's monologue and dialogue to show the plot, build character, and reveal the characters' relationships and their mental states. For a work as complex and intertwined as *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, it is difficult to outline and present its threads and the reorganization of the plots is bound to cause pity. Although the playwright has successfully sketched out the characters and pictured their life, it is a challenge to secure linguistic activities among individuals and even groups in the cramped and confined stage space.

Based on *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, the playwright has wisely built up the dialogue system of the characters, fully displaying the opposite but complementary elements of discourse conflict in the book, and therefore enabling audience to perfectly experience charm of the rich and complicated discourse of the original work. The play at least includes corresponding or opposite ideas such as man and woman, master and slave, legal wife and concubine, child of the legal wife and of other concubines, sky and earth, ruler and courtier, Buddhism and Taoism, immortal and demon, life and death, love and hate, sadness and joy, truth and falsity, reality and illusion, existence and nonexistence, nobleness and lowliness, richness and poorness, prosperity and decline, reunion and parting, laughter and cry, inside and outside, cause and effect, past life and present life, the moon in the water and the flower in the

mirror, absurd words and bitter tears.

Each pair of the binary collides and bursts out the dazzling impact of language. The macro complexity of linguistic system can be seen from such micro language pairs. In the play, there are a single person's confession or introspection, communication or inquiry between two characters, intertwined chats and disputes among three people, and even multiple voices in one scene to create a lively atmosphere. The play also makes one character speak in multiple voices or different voices interact with each other to communicate, refute, comment, and examine. The "dialogues" consisting of various voices build up a complicated linguistic field and perform a joyful, noisy symphony.

Besides voices from the real world like characters' self-talk, self-examination and verbal exchanges mentioned above, there are also illusive words from the fairy *Disenchantment*. Moreover, the play includes modern consciousness and today's appreciation of beauty that crosses time and space. With the history and present echoing, the playwright's thinking of the novel and his learning from the author not only break historical limits, but also express the pity for the recycling of human sadness and happiness, as if he was looking back at the time-honored prestigious, long-fallen families represented by the house of Jia, the empty and decaying garden, the collapse of the tumbledown building and the beauty, anxiety, loneliness, helplessness and sorrow.

The play version of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* with its multi-dialogue and poetic discourse successfully goes back to the past, which indicates the creator's respect to the classic and his joy of sharing personal thoughts from the perspective of the present with audience.

III. Various Skills

The play *The Dream of the Red Chamber* does its best to present the essence of the original novel, which can be proved by its distinctive portrayal of the characters. It embodies the idea of democracy through the implied equality of all beings with their ending in emptiness no matter he or she is noble, common, lecherous or jealous.

The success of the whole play is attributed to its integration of art and technology. Not to mention its clever and grand setting, the first minutes of its opening can amaze people with the imaginative design. The three huge white screens move horizontally or vertically, just as a book being slowly opened

or a painting being gradually unfolded. The oriental poetic atmosphere is created with a landscape in the play superimposed in layers and adding a unique charm. The wide space shaped by the large stage set seems to shrink the people in the story, but at the same time magnify and highlight them to an infinite degree, thus conveying the point of what the Lady Dowager said when characters were visiting the Grand View Garden: "I sit here and look at everyone. It seems that I can see everything, but nothing as well".

The personification of multi-dimensional sound, light and color embodies a rather westernized technical creativity. Although it is not the initial trail of the kind, it shows the appropriate use with sincerity. The scene of Baoyu getting beat is a good example in which the screams simulated with scary sound and light effects are shocking and unnerving.

It is most impressive that the play is distinguished with various elements of the traditional Chinese arts, among which the elegant ancient Chinese Xiqu, epitomized by Jingju and Kunqu, has a powerful influence on the story. The impact of the traditional Chinese arts has its solid evidence in the soundtrack, costumes, mise-en-scène, lighting and even physical movements. The meaningful traditional elements in the novel *The Dream of the Red Chamber* have been already absorbed and integrated into the Chinese Xiqu. As a modern drama adapted from the classic work, it is wise to borrow elements from existing Chinese Xiqu to give a poetic performance full of traditional art features.

To be more specific, symbolism of the play's beautiful, minimalist, modern and meaningful mise-en-scène both relates to its historical subject matter and the artistic pursuit of the playwright, reflecting a deep understanding of the essence of the book. Not only is the stage set like a book that opens and closes freely, the whole performance is a scroll unfolded at the prologue and rolled up at the Epilogue, leaving lingering charm for people to taste after the show.

The play itself is full of symbolic meaning. For instance, the petals falling from the sky many times are both a sign of the changing seasons, and an indication of the fading of life and a pitiful decay, which also adds a visual beauty and rich meaning to the stage. With the chanting of the dead maiden and flowers, the tragic aesthetics of pathos and sadness are highlighted as it is an implication of the silencing of everything and emptiness in the world. The main color of the play is white (partly red). Not only the characters in the play are basically in white costumes, but also the three huge screens (walls) that extend freely are also snow-white. Besides, the background, lighting and the whole stage are mostly milky white. All of these have profound and diversified meanings.



■ *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, 2021.12, Photographed by Zhizhi Zaigewu

First, it conveys the idea that no matter how noble, rich or lowly, poor one is, life is in fact ant-like with an empty ending. Second, it symbolizes Baoyu's inner hollowness and enlightenment, as in "all that's left is emptiness and a great void". Third, it reflects the author's aesthetic pursuit of the "pure substance" and his life of questioning.

In summary, the *The Dream of the Red Chamber* produced by Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center is a play that glows with the interaction between tradition and fashion, and is supported by both Chinese and Western artistic techniques. It provides people with the all-round aesthetic enjoyment.

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“Purification” of Theatrical “Chineseness”: Manifestation and Reception of Cultural Identity in Western Tours of the Mei Lanfang Troupe in Early 20th Century

GAO Yang

Abstract: The Western tours of the Mei Lanfang Troupe in the Early 20th Century tell us a lot about the implicit and explicit reception of modern and traditional Chinese culture a cross-cultural context. By using cryptic means of modernization to set off a meticulously purified theatrical "Chineseness", their western tours revealed the plasticity of national cultural identity in a specific historical context, and at the same time exposed the essentialist view of cultural reception in the West that homogenizes cultures by “othering” them.

Key words: Mei Lanfang, theatrical “Chineseness”, cultural identity

I. Refine and Go Retro: The “Purification” of Theatrical “Chineseness” by the Mei Lanfang Troupe

An idea of cultural "Purity" has always been a key issue of when it comes to considering improvements and innovations in Chinese theatre, so much so that there are two schools of thought dedicated to the idea of "pure theatre".

In contrast to the literary-centric view of "pure theatre" held by intellectuals who held radical criticism and negative attitude toward theatre, some literati with deep sympathy and understanding for traditional theatre, such as Zhang Houzai and Yu Shang Yuan, insisted on finding the essence of theatre as "pure theatre" in the stylized aesthetic characteristics of stage performances. By relying on this stage-centered view of "pure theatre", Qi Rushan, Zhang



■ Mei Lanfang (1894-1961)



■ A picture taken in the 1920s features Qi Rushan (left) and Mei Lanfang

Pengchun and other intellectuals who played a core planning and leading role in Mei Lanfang Troupe' s Western tours, carried out "purification" on the theatrical "Chineseness" embodied in the stage performances of their troupe based on their literary aesthetic aspirations as well as speculations about the cultural psychology of Westerners.

As Zhang Pengchun pointed out, "Foreigners prefer to see the traditional things in Chinese theatre."¹ The literati around Mei Lanfang who gave advice on their Western tours clearly realized that for Westerners who are not familiar with the tradition of Chinese theatre, the "uniqueness" of the stylized representation system of theatre on stage is the greatest focus of their interest and concern. The presentation of "purity" of Chinese theatre lies in the perfect presentation of such "uniqueness" without any Western practices or elements. However, in order to create the "pure" "uniqueness", it is not only necessary to exclude external influences, but also to screen out internal "impurities". If the overall "uniqueness" of theatre performances highlights the "childlike" purity and simplicity of ancient Chinese civilization for Westerners, then the "impurities"

1 黄殿祺：《话剧在北方的奠基人之一——张彭春》，北京：中国戏剧出版社，1995年，第269页。[Huang Dianqi, *Zhang Pengchun, One of the Founders of Drama in the North*, Beijing: China Drama Publishing House, 1995: 269.]



■ Mei Lanfang in America

contained within would reveal the "childish" side of this civilization— a civilization which, at that time, was already seen as frivolous from a Western lens.

For Qi Rushan and other literati of the Mei Lanfang Troupe, the first step in "purifying" the theatre tradition is to remove these "impurities" at all levels of stage performances— specifically, to "refine" those elements that were considered "corrupt customs," "vulgarity," or incompatible with the tastes of Western audiences. For example, in the selection of repertoires, Qi Rushan and others put great emphasis on the elegant style of the script in terms of subject matter and content. As for the musical composition of stage performances, by adding musical instruments with softer tones such as the Yueqin, Hulei, and Pipa, they were able to mitigate the acoustic effects, which were produced on account of the dissonance made by the Gongs, Drums, Huqin and other instruments that sounded harsh to the Westerners. They also abolished the "corrupt customs" in traditional theatre performances such as drinking, setting or packing up props, and throwing and kneeling on mats on stage. .

In addition to the improvement of these "childish" "impurities" in theatre performances by means of "refining", another important aspect of Mei Lanfang Troupe' s "purification" is to use the method of "retroizing" (i.e. making retro) to strengthen the "childlike" "uniqueness" of the stylized representation system of theatre on stage, which is the most appealing to Westerners. To be specific, such "retroization" mainly includes two directions of "artistry" and "Kunquization", which highlight the quaint "quintessence of Chinese culture" contained in the visual effects of performances from the two aspects of "static"



■ Mei Lanfang in America- A stage photo of *Return of the Phoenix*



■ Mei Lanfang in America- A stage photo of *Concubine Gets Drunk*

and "dynamic".

As far as "artistry" is concerned, Mei Lanfang Troupe's performances in the United States and the Soviet Union were keen to seek inspirations from ancient Chinese art resources, whether in the design of actors' appearance, the production and setting of stage sets and props, or even in publicity materials and the distribution of gifts to the audience, so that they could "reveal the Oriental colors and the unique art value of China"¹ to Western audiences.

In terms of "Kunquization", based on his consistent belief that body movements in performances are "transmuted from ancient dances"², Qi Rushan, through his intense study of the aesthetics and practices of Kunqu performance, came to the conclusion that the essential characteristic of theatre performance is that "The actors' voice must be expressed in the form of singing, and all of their movements on stage must be performed in a uniform and harmonious dance gesture, giving people a dance-like aesthetic enjoyment." This aesthetic quality of feeling inspired by "singing and dancing in one", which closely combined singing and body movements, had been lost in the evolution process from

1 梅兰芳（遗稿）、许姬传、李斐叔（整理）：《梅兰芳游俄记》，梁燕主编《梅兰芳与京剧在海外》，郑州：大象出版社，2016年，第512页。[Mei Lanfang (posthumous manuscript), Xu Jichuan, Li Feishu (collated): *Mei Lanfang's Journey to Russia*, edited by Liang Yan, *Mei Lanfang and Jingju on Abroad*, Zhengzhou: Da Xiang Publishing House, 2016: 512.]

2 齐如山：《齐如山全集》（第一卷），台北：联经出版事业公司，1979，第373页。[Qi Rushan: *The Complete Works of Qi Rushan* (Volume 1), Taipei: Linking Publishing CO., LTD., 1979: 373.]



■ Mei Lanfang in the Soviet Union



■ Mei Lanfang and an actress of the Soviet Union



■ Mei Lanfang in the Soviet Union- *The Rainbow Pass*

Kunqu to Jingju.

Qi Rushan purposely sought dance images from classical poetry and verses of all the past dynasties, and used them as sources of inspiration to create a series of "classical dances" for Mei Lanfang's new plays in ancient costumes such as "Water Sleeve Dance" (*Chang'e Flying to the Moon*), "Ribbon Dance" (*Fairy Scattering Flowers*), and "Cup-and-Plate Dance" (*Magu Offering Birthday Congratulations*). Moreover, in accordance with the principle of "equal emphasis on singing and acting and the integration of singing and dancing as one" reflected on the stage performances of Kunqu, he also "designed a body movement for every vocal verse making it a musical". It can be said that this kind of "Kunquized" musical theatre with its "retroized" body movements

as the core of performances, is undoubtedly the most effective way to demonstrate to the Westerners the "purity and elegance" of Chinese theatre among all of Mei Lanfang Troupe's repertoires.

Under the design and guidance of Qi Rushan and other literati, the Mei Lanfang Troupe strove to present a refined and retroized theatre tradition to the Western public through the above-mentioned "purification" techniques in the course of their Western tours. Despite this, we can still find some traces of "modernity" in their performances behind this deliberately constructed "purity".



■ *The heavenly maids scatter blossoms*

Although Qi Rushan, Zhang Pengchun, and other literati strongly emphasized that the primary purpose of Mei Lanfang Troupe's Western tours was to serve as an "ambassador in art" to "promote the quintessence of Chinese culture," these intellectuals, who had both Chinese and Western cultural experiences and academic backgrounds, were well aware that in the face of the two most "advanced" Western "others" of that time, the United States and the Soviet Union, the mere emphasis on "tradition" was not enough to give theatre full legitimacy.

As mentioned above, in the view of these intellectuals, in addition to the aspect of "uniqueness" worthy of display, there are also some "impurities" in the theatre tradition. Under the standards of Western civilization, these "impurities" will undoubtedly expose the "pre-modern" characteristics of "childishness" in Chinese cultural identity. Therefore, in a sense, the Mei Lanfang Troupe's practice of removing these "impurities" in the theatre tradition through "refining" has implicitly demonstrated a tendency towards "modernity" with Western civilization as an external reference.

In addition to this negative approach of reducing "pre-modernity", the Mei Lanfang Troupe also tried to discover ideological resources within the theatre tradition that are not inconsistent with the moral requirements of Western "modernity", or to directly graft the external form of Western-style "modernity" onto the performances of theatre. Of course, these "modernity" operations only

play a complementary and beautifying role in the cultural identity of the Mei Lanfang Troupe, and they can only support and promote the explicit subject of this cultural identity-the "purified" "traditionality", in an unobtrusive way in order to present it more clearly.

II. The Construction of "Otherness": The value judgment of the Western public on the Mei Lanfang Troupe

Since early-modern times, the popularity of "Chinoiserie" in the Western world, which focuses on the dissemination and reception of Chinese art and crafts, has greatly stimulated the Westerner's exotic curiosity about Chinese culture. In this cultural atmosphere of "Orientalism", various art styles from China exude a fascinating "Orientalness" in the eyes of Westerners, the source of whose charm lies in the ancient traditions that has a strong sense of history. This fascination with the "sense of history", however, reveals Westerner's "ahistorical" cultural conception in the face of unique cultures. This conception believes that oriental culture and art have reached their peak of development a long time ago, and then this stagnant perfection has been preserved in the long course of time, free from the intrusion of evolution or foreign things. The evaluation of the Westerners on the artistry of stage performances of the Mei Lanfang Troupe is based on this kind of cultural imagination of "Otherness" that transcends the history of Oriental Art.

Members of the Mei Lanfang Troupe, whether Mei Lanfang himself or literati like Qi Rushan, were all well aware that constructing and reinforcing the "uniqueness" of the theatrical tradition in front of the Westerners would be of great importance for the enhancement of the cultural image of China. Therefore, on the one hand, they purified and transformed the "impurities" in the theatre tradition that might be offensive to Westerners by means of "refining" and obscure "modernization" in order to make the "orientalism" of the theatre tradition appear more refined and concise to Westerners. However, on the other hand, they would never make various "modernization" operations so obvious as to occupy the main position in the representation of the stage form, lest they undermine their promise to Westerners of a "pure" theatre free from foreign cultural intrusion, even if this insistence on the "otherness" can only arouse a sense of curiosity about Chinese Xiqu in the West.

In fact, most of the general public in the West were indeed fanatical about the performances of the Mei Lanfang Troupe out of their lust for exotic desire of

"Orientalism": they were enthralled by the ancient and stagnant yet pure and perfect "otherness" of the Chinese theatrical tradition in Mei Lanfang Troupe's stage performances, and lamented that the theatre art of their own country "has no tradition and no root"¹ compared to Chinese theatre. But they ignored the fact that the innovation practices of Mei Lanfang and the literati around him who introduced the stage performance elements of Kunqu into Jingju in the name of "retroizing", were actually breaking down the "purity" of the tradition of Jingju in the sense of historical evolution.

However, the complex and subtle differentiation and integration within the genres of Jingju and Kunqu is clearly not enough to change the Westerners' general view of the "Orientalness" of Chinese Xiqu. The artistic images obtained from the literature resources of the past dynasties and incorporated into the design and production of costumes, hair accessories, set props, and promotional materials by the Mei Lanfang Troupe undoubtedly further strengthened the overall "uniqueness" that was disconnected with the specific historical context, thus greatly stimulating Westerners to appreciate their performances with a kind of artistic perspective. This is true even in the Soviet Union, which claimed to have a deep understanding of the essential aesthetic features of Chinese Xiqu.

Conclusion

In the world order established in the early 20th century with Western civilization as the apex of the hierarchy, Westerners solidified and typified the image of the 'Orient' with the West as the center, to create an image of the 'Other'. It is this homogenization of the cultural "Other" embedded in the cognitive structure of Westerners that profoundly constrains the way in which the theatrical representation of modern Chinese cultural identity is presented and received in the Western world. The Western tours of the Mei Lanfang Troupe set off and support a carefully purified theatrical "Chineseness" by means of unobtrusive modernization, and this manipulation of the "explicit" and "implicit" positions of tradition and modernity in theatrical stage representations allows us to clearly recognize the plasticity of national cultural identity in a cross-cultural context. Although this caters to and strengthens the "ahistorical" and

1 Robert Littell. *New York World*, February 17, 1930.

homogeneous view of the "Other" held by Westerners towards Oriental culture to a certain extent, but at the same time, it also exposes the essentialist cultural identity perspective that the West forcibly endowed the Oriental culture with innocence and absolutely invariable "otherness" in the binary cognitive pattern of "civilization and primitive".

Introduction to Classical Plays (V)

LI Ran

I. Song of the Great Wind

*A great wind rises, oh! The clouds are driven away.
I come to my native land, oh! Now the world is under my sway.
Where are the brave men, oh! To guard the four frontiers today!*¹

Everyone in China knows that these lines are from the *Song of the Great Wind* by Liu Bang. However, most people are unaware that the reason for the popularity of these lines are because of a drama with the same name, that is, the historical drama *Song of the Great Wind* created in 1979 by the well-known playwright Chen Baichen, who has made unique contributions to the satirical comedy of the PRC and is known as "China's Gogol". In addition to this, Chen Baichen also wrote poems, novels, and prose. He was already 71 years old when he created the drama *Song of the Great Wind*, and had written nine historical dramas before then over the course of nearly 50 years. (The *Song of the Great Wind* mentioned below refers exclusively to the drama).²

At the end of the script of the *Song of the Great Wind*, Mr. Chen wrote a note, which read "This play has been compiled with reference to both the *Records of the History* by the great historian Sima Qian of Han Dynasty, and the *History of the Han Dynasty* by Ban Gu". The author provides us with a vivid artistic portrayal of the complicated history of the fifteen years after the death of the Emperor Gaozu Liu Bang, during which time the Empress Lv and other feudal lords who shared the surname Lv conspired to usurp the power while the

1 许渊冲英译本。[Xu Yuanchong's English Translation.]

2 Added by the translator for convenience.

ministers led by Zhou Bo and Chen Ping rose-up to fight and finally restored the governance of the Han Dynasty in the name of Liu.

The drama opens with a situation full of lurking dangers, for instance when Liu Bang dies, Empress Lv does not announce his death immediately, but instead buys time to plot to kill a group of old ministers. However, the news of Liu's death was leaked, and she is forced to make an announcement, burning the imperial edict of making King Zhao Ruyi the crown prince, and making Liu Ying the emperor instead. The next few scenes follow closely linked one by one, depicting the complex and sinister power struggle that spanned more than a decade, making the performance dramatic and shocking.

In terms of character design, this drama is also particularly notable. There are many characters in it, with at least twenty-one named characters, which can be roughly divided into the two schools of Liu and Lv, with Lv Zhi, Chen Ping and Zhou Bo as the main characters. The conflict between Liu and Lv is mainly reflected in the struggle among these three, and the skirmish between Zhou Bo and Chen Ping has severely affected their anti-Lv war.

The ups and downs of the relationship between the three characters were handled in a meticulous and methodical manner, creating fascinating and evocative climax points in every scene.

In Mr. Chen's writing, Lv Zhi is ruthless and brutal while the other two ministers are loyal, courageous, resolute, and wise. The drama appears to be a historical one on the surface, but it has a strong realistic meaning, expressing infinite nostalgia and reverence for the old proletarian revolutionaries in the political struggle. The integration of realistic passions makes the play a strong expression of sorrow, anger, and sympathy towards the innocent civilians who were prosecuted. However, Chen Baichen himself did not directly respond to the statement of "being close to reality and reflecting problems". He pointed out that "There are often striking similarities in history, but they are only similar, not the same. Writing about the similarities and using the stories of the past as a warning for contemporary problems would be enough for the writers. As for how to understand it, that should be left to the audience, who will naturally make associations from within the work".

When performed in 1979, the *Song of the Great Wind* caused a huge sensation and received the highest honors. The circles of literature and art quickly convened a high-level script symposium, and the national leaders recommended the performance of this drama in various localities. Both the script and the performance received first prize in the National Drama Festival

celebrating the 30th anniversary of the founding of the PRC. It also caused a wide resonance and national sensation among the audience. It can be said that the *Song of the Great Wind* is a monument in the history of Chinese drama.

II. In the Silence

In 1978, the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China was convened. The “left”-leaning political inclinations were cleared away and China began to enter a “new period” in contemporary history. Along with this, an ideological emancipation movement arose, and Chinese drama ushered in new opportunities for development. In this context, the art of drama carried forward the fine tradition of relating to reality, reflecting life, and expressing people’s heartfelt wishes, and acted as a pioneer in the ideological emancipation movement. The drama *In the Silence* is one of the representative works in this movement.

From 1973 to 1975, Zong Fuxian, a young literary enthusiast, enrolled in an amateur drama-writing training class at the Shanghai Workers' Cultural Palace to study scriptwriting. Many of the teachers in this class came from Shanghai Theatre Academy, including Qu Xinxian, Yu Qiuyu and Rong Guangrun. Under the guidance of these teachers, the class has gradually developed into a high-quality creative group. Then in 1978, Zong Fuxian, who had completed his study, was inspired by news reports and planned to write a reflective drama.

The plot of *In the Silence* goes like this: In the early summer of 1976, Mei Lin, an old cadre who has suffered political persecution, and her son Ouyang Ping flee to Shanghai to stay with an old comrade He Shifei, whom she has not contacted in nine years. To Mei Lin’s surprise He Shifei has defected from the revolutionary left. After meeting his old comrade, He Shifei spends his time writing fake materials to expose Mei Lin, to frame her as a traitor, despite the fact she saved his life in the past.

At the same time, He Yun, the daughter of He Shifei, is a public security officer ordered to search for and arrest a “criminal” who had distributed a collection of poems titled *Raising Eyebrows and Swords Out of Sheath*, in Tian’anmen Square at the public mourning to Premier Zhou. It just so happens that the one she is looking for is Ouyang Ping, the son of Mei Lin. Upon seeing Ouyang Ping, He Yun becomes enamored, and is plunged into anguish when she is called upon to arrest him, confiding in her mother her turmoil, and refusing to

believe that the object of her affections could possibly commit a crime.

Things come to a head when He Yun decides to report Ouyang Ping for his crimes. Liu Xiuying, the wife of He Shifei, reveals that her husband had been betraying Mei Lin for sometime. All denounce He Shifei as a traitor who betrayed his soul as well as his comrades. Finally, Mei Lin led Ouyang Ping, He Yun, and Liu Xiuying into continuing the fight against the enemies of the revolution.

In the silence was the first drama to eulogize the scene of millions of people mourning Premier Zhou in Tian'anmen Square in 1976 as a positive image on the stage. It consists of four acts with only six characters and inherits the traditional creative method of "classical unities" with a high concentration on the plot and space-time structure, showing the tense atmosphere and rigorous structure of the drama. The six characters in the play come from two families, with the living room of the He family as the only scene. The story takes place within nine hours, but the conflicts and entanglements span over three decades. Each character in it is portrayed with flesh and blood. Although suffering great injustice and humiliation, Mei Lin, an old revolutionist, never lost her faith in social justice and her vision for a better future. In portraying Ouyang Ping, the author breaks away from the technique of "Gao Da and Quan (高大全, Creating an idealized and perfect character)", and portrays him as a vivid young man valuing affection and righteousness.

The title of the drama "In the Silence" comes from the poem *Untitled*, a masterpiece written by Lu Xun in 1934, which expressed his confidence in the victory of the people's revolution at that time. Zong Fuxian's quotation of the poem as the title is in line with the spirit of the original work and gives great encouragement to the public.

The drama was first staged on a small scale in the small theatre of the Shanghai Workers' Cultural Palace, without publicity and at a very low-ticket price. After the first performance, the applause continued for a long time, and the audience lingered on for quite a while. Since then, it has become more and more popular. Even with more than 40 performances in a row, there are still audiences who have difficulty in getting tickets. Troupes from other places all come to observe and learn. For the first time, the *Wen Hui Daily* published the complete script of it in four pages for three consecutive days. As a result, the drama attracted the attention of the central leadership, and the troupe was urgently transferred to Beijing for a performance. After the performance, the *People's Daily* published a 10,000-word special reviewer's article titled "The Hopes and Power of the People--A Review of the Drama *In the Silence*". In

December 1978, the Ministry of Culture and the All-China Federation of Trade Unions held an award ceremony in Beijing, conferring special awards to the cast and crew of *In the Silence*, the Shanghai Workers' Cultural Palace, and Zong Fuxian personally.

Chinese Theatre in the Second half of 2021

Al Shasha

Looking back at the creation of Chinese theatre in the second half of 2021 the boom of the mainstream theatre industry has been an important phenomenon unneglectable to our close attention – and the role government policy has played in all this needs much exploration.

The 14th Five-year Plan for Artistic Creation was released by the government, requiring that artistic creation should be based on major historical occurrences, significant national strategies, spiritual wealth, and excellent traditional culture. The creation of national high-quality theatre should adhere, therefore, to the equal emphasis on realistic, revolutionary, and traditional themes.

In addition, "The centennial birthday of the Communist Party of China", which was of great historical significance, promoted the emergence of a large number of patriotism-themed repertoires. Art troupes (schools) of all levels and types across the country have created numerous excellent works focusing on the centennial history of CPC and people's life in the new era, which have been presented in major theatrical performances. A large number of profound and well-produced theatres have explored and told the stories of China in the spirit of realism and romanticism, promoting Chinese culture and highlighting Chinese characteristics and styles. In addition, the re-rehearsal of traditional fine productions, the theatrical adaptations of classic works, and the vitality of musical market were also theatrical phenomena worthy of attention.

I. Patriotism-themed repertoires springing up in praise of the centennial birthday of CPC

The main line of praising the centennial birthday of CPC has run through the entire creation and performance of Chinese theatre in 2021. Mainstream

productions have attracted much attention, and “patriotism” has become the most distinctive feature on the stage of Chinese literature and art.

Since last year, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has begun to implement the “Project for the Creation of High-quality Stage Works in Praise of the Centennial Birthday of CPC”, supporting and launching a series of outstanding works which showed the glorious course of CPC over the past century. The 300 works selected for the project have been intensively performed throughout the country from March to October, boosting the progress of Chinese stage art masterpieces from the “plateau” to the “peak”(i.e., to a higher quality).

From April to July, the Publicity Department of the CPC, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the PRC, and the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles jointly organized the “Performance of Excellent Stage Works in Praise of the Centennial Birthday of CPC”. A total of 140 masterpieces selected from all over the country were presented either locally or on regional tours, and 50 of them won the opportunity to be performed in the capital Beijing.

From March to August, the “6th Chinese Original Drama Invitational Exhibition” hosted by the National Theatre of China also opted for the theme of “Celebrating the Centennial Birthday of the CPC”. 22 exhibiting repertoires have



■ *People First*, photographed by Su Ning, illustration by official webset of National Theatre of China



■ The poster of *An Enchanting Dream*, illustration by ThePaper.cn

been selected from across the country, reflecting China's century-long history of revolution and reform from different perspectives. Among them, the opening play *People First* focused on fighting against COVID19, telling the story of the heroic figures during the anti-epidemic process.

From June to September, “The Performance of Newly-Created Excellent Repertoires for the Celebration of the Centennial Birthday of CPC in Anhui Province” was carried out in a combination of online broadcasting and offline theatre performance. 40 thematic works were selected from all over Anhui province for this exhibition.

From October 9th to the 27th, the 17th Chinese Theatre Festival was held in Wuhan, with 31 plays from 23 different provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities across China participating in the show. Works like *The Night in Xiangshan* and *Mother* focused on revolutionary history. *Against the Tide* depicted the heroism of the Wuhan people during the pandemic. *Miss Guimei* told the story of Zhang Guimei, the “model of the times” who has contributed a lot to education in poor areas. While *The Deep Sea* told the moving story of Huang Xuhua, the “father of China’s nuclear submarines”.

China Shanghai International Arts Festival Center has hosted several activities including the “Performance Season of the Newly-Created Stage Arts Works

for the Celebration of the Centennial Birthday of CPC” (from May to July), the “Performance Season themed ‘Great World of Performing Arts, Great Shanghai of Arts Gathering’” (from October to December,) and many more besides. The former brought together 14 newly created productions from 13 literary and artistic organizations in Shanghai, while the latter included 16 newly created stage works in China in the past two years. The works in these Seasons not only paid close attention to the important events in the history of the CPC and constructed specific imageries for revolutionaries, but also put emphasis on demonstrating cultural self-confidence in a cross-border form. Moreover, the stage comedy *An Enchanting Dream*, which was presented in November, achieved success in both box office and reception. This show was able to complete its first nationwide tour despite Covid, receiving a rating of 9.3 on the Douban platform, making it the highest rated piece of the year.

From October to December, in order to celebrate the centennial birthday of the CPC and make preparations for the coming 13th China Arts Festival, Shanghai also launched the “Shanghai Performance of Excellent Repertoires of the Stage Art”, with 20 patriotism-themed repertoires of different art categories being selected. Among them, the drama *The Outpost* created and rehearsed by Shanghai Theatre Academy and *Waves* performed by Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center both took the five martyrs of the League of Leftist Writers¹ as their main characters, showing great respect for history and revolutionary martyrs.

The second half of 2021 saw a steady stream of patriotism-themed productions on the stage of Chinese theatre. During this period, there were numerous works produced including the original Xiqu *The Song of Youth* by the National Centre for the Performing Arts, *Live Broadcast of the Founding Ceremony of PRC* performed by the National Theatre of China, *The Ultimate Law of Human World is Changing* by the Nanjing Drama Troupe, *Lu Yao* by the Xi'an Theatre, *Windless Zone* by Dalian Drama Troupe and *Always on the Way* created and rehearsed by The Central Academy of Drama as well as *The Outpost* by Shanghai Theatre Academy.

On the whole, theatre workers eulogized historical models to tell the story of China. Despite this, there was still room to search after the contemporary aesthetic expression of patriotism-themed theatre in practice. For example, *The Night in Xiangshan*, produced by the Beijing People's Art Theatre, has adopted the narrative strategy of combining temporal and psychological logic

1 Including Li Qiushi (李求实), Rou Shi (柔石), Hu Yepin (胡也频), Feng Keng (冯铿) and Yin Fu (殷夫).
[Translator's note]



■ *The Night in Xiangshan*, photographed by Li Chunguang, illustration by official webset of Beijing People's Art Theatre

to tell history, and explored the root cause of the victory of the CCP through a dramatic situation in which Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-shek had a "dialogue between minds".

II. Reviving the high-quality repertoires for the inheritance of traditional culture

In order to inherit and carry forward the traditional culture and promote all kinds of theatrical genres to take on a new look in the new era, all the theatres, troupes, and creators attached great importance to exploring, re-rehearsing, and adapting traditional high-quality repertoires. It has been a long-standing policy of the Chinese theatre to focus on and develop the traditional, modern, and newly written historical theatre altogether.

On July 9, Jixiang Theatre, a century-old theatre located in Wangfujing District of Beijing, reopened, taking "Original Sound" as one of its major features. Since



■ Reopening of Jixiang Theatre, photographed by Fang Fei



■ *Sunrise*, illustration by ThePaper.cn

reopening, the theatre has staged many traditional classics such as Jingju *Farewell My Concubine*, Kunqu *The Peony Pavilion*, Hebei Bangzi *The Story of Wang Baochuan* and Yueju *Butterfly Lovers*.

From July to December, the 2021 Great Theatre of China Theatre Festival was held in Shanghai, and several well-known works with a good reputation such as *Scenes from a Marriage* and *Poison* (which have both completed multiple rounds of tours) were performed.

From August 5th to October 26th, the 2021 NCPA International Theatre Festival, with the theme of "Inheriting the Classics from Diverse Perspectives", staged 8 rounds of 34 wonderful performances from both China and abroad. The dramas *The Stranger*, *Papa's Bed*, *Revolutionary Road*, and more interpreted international classics from a Chinese perspective. While a collection of Jingju such as *Stealing silver from the Treasury*, *Capture and Release of Caocao*, and *The Legend of White Snake* told the stories of China to the world.

On September 2nd, the new theatre of Beijing People's Art Theatre: Cao Yu Theatre in the Beijing International Theatre Centre was officially put into use. The new version of *Sunrise* directed by Feng Yuanzheng was a multi-spatiotemporal and multi-dimensional stage exploration; the new version of *Thunderstorm*, directed by Pu Cunxin and Tang Ye, expanded the hidden space and time of the original work; and the new version of *Wilderness*, directed by Yan Rui, presented the inner dilemma of Qiu Hu with a chorus composed of puppets. These three new rehearsals of Cao Yu's plays have

satisfied the audience's expectations for the recreation of the classics.

From September 23rd to 29th, the 8th Chinese Kunqu Art Festival was held in the form of offline and online integration, with a total of 22 big plays and excerpts from all over the country participating. Traditional plays such as *The Matchmaker Hong Niang*, *The Story of Washing the Silk*, and *The Rescue of a Courtesan* all took part in the performance.

From October 1 to 7, the 5th Chinese Xiqu Culture Week was held in the Beijing Garden Expo. During the week, 23 literary and artistic groups from Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei jointly presented more than 240 performances. Many traditional plays got the chance to be performed on stage, such as *Red Maned Horse (Lady Precious Stream)* jointly presented by actors of both the genres of Jingju and Hebei Bangzi, Jingju *Wu Zixu*, Hebei Bangzi *The New Story of Bao Zheng's Apology*, Kunqu *The Romance of West Chamber*, Beijing Quju *Dagon Beard Ditch*, Pingju *The Third Sister of Yang's Going to the Court*, and others.

From October 1st to 17th, the 2021 Beijing (Taihu) International Puppet Festival presented classic shadow puppet plays such as *The Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea*, *Lotus Lantern*, *The Mountain of Flames* and *Water overflowed Jinshan Temple*, as well as ten more foreign puppet works such as *Magic Flute* through both online and offline mediums.

From October 20th to December 19th, the 8th Xiqu Black Box Festival was held in Beijing Star Theatre, bringing together 16 wonderful plays from more than



■ *Center Stage*, illustration by Star Theatres



■ The Tibetan version *Hamlet*, illustration by sohu.com

10 theatre genres across China. The opening Yueju *Center Stage*, with the fusion of Western musical instruments and Yueju music, was very pioneering. The newly-adapted Jingju *The Miser* portrayed a typical Chinese miser. All the works performed were in the form of experimental theatre, reflecting the spirit of adhering to integrity and innovation of Xiqu practitioners in the new era.

From December 8 to 16, the 2021 China Experimental Xiqu Exhibition was held in Shanghai, presenting more than a dozen plays across 11 genres. Puzhouxi of Shanxi Province *King Oedipus* and Jingju *The Death of a Petty Official* interpreted the western classics in the form of Chinese Xiqu. While Cantonese Yueju *Jin Lian* and Kunqu *The White Silk Robe* adopted a contemporary perspective to interpret traditional Chinese texts, which was characterized with the spirit of experimental exploration.

From December 17 to 26, the 2021 Daliangshan International Theatre Festival was held in Xichang City, Sichuan Province. This festival focused on the concept of “National Style”, and performed 34 repertoires across 12 different genres. Dramas such as *Li Bai* by Beijing People’s Art Theatre, the Tibetan version of the drama *Hamlet*, the Jingju *The Taking of Tiger Mountain*, the Dance Poetry Drama *Jade Green*, the folk opera *Hearing Soma* and many other plays fully demonstrated the infinite glamour of traditional culture.

III. Adapting classic works into stage plays and highlighting literariness

While the weakening of ‘literariness’ has been a common trend in current Chinese theatre creation, the continued adaptation of literary classics, popular films, and television programs into stage plays has helped to enrich the literary charm of theatre.

In August, the “2021 5th Lao She Theatre Festival” with the theme of “calling for the literary spirit of theatre” opened in Beijing. During the ups and downs of the epidemic, the festival has performed more than 20 excellent theatres from both home and abroad. Based on the novel of the same name by Wang Meng, the opening play *Change Forms* has analyzed the spiritual growth of Chinese intellectuals in terms of both sorrow and joy. While the closing play *Diary of a Madman* was adapted from a short story by Lu Hsun and directed by Polish director Christian Lupa. The five-act play *The Tragedy of Dr. Faustus*, performed by the Central Academy of Drama, was adapted from Goethe’s famous poetic



■ *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, Photographed by Yin Xuefeng

drama *Faustus*. Starting from Faustus's failure in the original plot, the new play presented the five stages of human life backwards, in order to explore the significance and value of human beings.

From September 16th to October 2nd, the 2021 10th Hangzhou International Theatre Festival was held, bringing together 21 impressive repertoires including *The Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Don Quixote*. Among them, the drama *The Dream of the Red Chamber* presented by Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center was based on Cao Xueqin's classic masterpiece. This drama synthesized, condensed and reorganized the storyline of nearly 800,000 words, and reconstructed the narrative framework with the four natural seasons. The whole performance lasted six hours and presented the fates of the four families and all the characters involved concisely on a minimalist stage.

From October 15th to 24th, the 8th Wuzhen Theatre Festival was held, staging 23 specially invited plays. The opening play, *The Red and the Black*, was adapted from the novel of the same name by Stendhal of France and directed by Meng Jinghui. Li Jianjun's *World on a Wire* was adapted from the German director Fassbender's sci-fi film of the same name, which was created on the basis of Daniel Gallu's sci-fi novel. And the dance drama *Wild Grass*, performed by Beijing Dance Theatre, drew its inspirations from Lu Hsun's prose and poetry anthology that was also named *Wild Grass*.

From March 26th to December 30th, the 2021 Nanjing Drama Festival was

held. “The Collection of Masterpieces” interpreted literary classics with theatre, presenting many attracting plays such as *Deling and Empress Dowager* and *Dust Settled Down*. Many adaptations of literary classics also appeared in the theatrical activities for college students and young dramatists including the 2021 Beijing Fringe Festival, the 20th Golden Hedgehog University Students’ Drama Festival, the 7th China Campus Theatre Festival, and so on. For example, *The Metamorphosis* directed by Li Jianjun was adapted from Kafka's novel, and *King's Friends* directed by Zhang Hang was a contemporary reconstruction of *The Orphan of Chao*.

The dance drama *The Eternal Wave*, which has adopted the mode of “performing at a fixed place along with touring” since July, was a popular patriotism-themed drama of good quality and reputation. It was a performance that was adapted from a Chinese film of the same name released in 1958 that highlighted the inspiring value of revolutionary works in contemporary society. Adapted from a TV series of the same name, the drama *The Ultimate Law of Human World is Changing*, which was also themed on the history of revolution, reproduced the revolutionary process of China from the Northern Expedition to the founding of the PRC.

Many influential theatrical performances, such as the drama *Love in a Fallen City*, *In Full Bloom* and *A Lifelong Journey*, the dance drama *Don Quixote* and *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, the Beijing Quju Teahouse and *Four Generations Under One Roof*, the Hebei Bangzi *The City of Thebes* and *Medea*, the Pingju *Benediction* and *The Pretender*, and the Modern Quju *Lu Town*, were all adapted from literary classics or film and television programs. Among them, *Lu Town*, with a unique perspective, reconstructed and weaved the typical characters and events in several works of Lu Hsun, and showed the social outlook of China at that time by condensing it into such a limited time and space on the stage.

IV. The booming of musical market and the expression of local Chinese characteristics

In recent years, with the frequent performances of foreign original musicals in China, the rehearsals of Chinese musicals have also encountered a booming season. According to statistics, in 2021, there were 8,894 professional theatre performances in Shanghai, among which the number of musical performances reached 911, making musicals an important portion of stage performances.



■ *Romeo and Juliet*, illustration by shcstheatre.com

From the introduction of the original musicals to the production of Chinese musicals, and then to the mature creation of local Chinese original musicals, it is clear that musical has become a prominent type in Contemporary Chinese theatre.

The rehearsals of the world-known musicals that were adapted into Chinese versions including *Romeo and Juliet*, *Ghost*, *Rock Faustus*, *Agatha*, *Rock of Ages*, *Apolonija*, *Dangerous Minds*, *One More*, and so on has not only opened up a brand new mode of industrialization and commercialization of the theatre, but also made Chinese oriented innovations of stage performances.

The Chinese version of the musical *Romeo and Juliet*, which was also the first Chinese version adapted from the classic French musical, was directed and choreographed by the famous French choreographer Carl Portal. The classic Broadway musical *Ghost* has toured many cities in China and had a great appeal to the audience for its exquisite production. The performance of its Chinese version has once again shown the romantic miracle of love. The musical *Apolonija* was adapted from the Korean musical *A Loving Family*. It has not only been performed 380 times in the past year with a total of more than

43,000 audience members, but has also won the opportunity to be performed in Guangzhou, Chengdu, Changsha and many other cities.

Faced with the absence of foreign musicals in Chinese theatre markets, original Chinese musicals such as *The Story of Mei Lanfang*, *Family*, *Wu Kong*, *The Pretender*, *Under the Midnight Sun*, *Peach Blossom Letters*, *The Orphan of Chao*, *Emperor of the Southern Tang Dynasty*, *Letters Home from the War*, *On the Call*, *No Longer Human*, *Out of the dream* and *Cat's Cradle* have been emerging, continuously contributing to the development and prosperity of musical performances. Both *Under the Midnight Sun* and *No Longer Human* produced by Ran Space were adapted from the novel of the same name by a famous Japanese writer. While *Cat's Cradle* directed by Zhou Xiaoqian was adapted from Zijin Chen's deductive fiction *The Bad Kids*. Directed by Xu Jun and written by James Fenton, *The Orphan of Chao* has presented the classic Chinese story in the form of a musical on top of the foundation of the Zaju of Yuan Dynasty and Western adaptations. While the musical *The Story of Mei*



■ Group photo of Symposium On the Origin and Development of Contemporary European and American Theatre, 2021

Lanfang told the patriotism of Mei Lanfang, a master of Jingju, in the form of a fusion of Jingju and Western musicals.

In order to promote the development of Chinese musicals, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism hosted the 2nd National Excellent Musical Performances, selecting nine outstanding plays including *On the Road* and *The Light Chaser* from across the country to perform in Harbin. These repertoires focused on local Chinese stories and publicized the patriotism of Chinese sons and daughters.

There were also many theatre awards, academic forums, symposiums, and workshops held in China in the second half of 2021, including the 5th Chinese Theatre Awards, the 5th Jiangsu Wenhua Award, Constructing the system of Chinese Theatre Directors---the 17th China Theatre Festival·Theatre Directing Art Summit Forum, World Theatre Education Alliance·2021 International Forum on Theatre Education Research, 2021 NCPA Taihu Art Centre International Forum, Symposium On the Origin and Development of Contemporary European and American Theatre (Special sessions for France, Germany, Russia, and Northern Europe), the 14th Asia-Pacific Bond of Theatre Schools International Symposium, the 40th Anniversary of Experimental Theatre in China, and 2021 Advanced Workshop for Theatre Critics in Guangdong Province, and many more.

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