

## INTRODUCTION

In Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The King and I*, the protagonist Anna comes across as both an Orientalist and a feminist. A nineteenth-century British widow, she will not stay home waiting for a chaperon or a second husband; instead she travels to Siam (as Thailand was known until 1939) to instruct the seven dozen children of King Mongkut in the English language and in Western culture. During her five years at the Siamese court, she has an ambiguous relationship with the Orient. King Mongkut's unique qualities fascinate her, but she becomes indignant at the brutal oppression in his royal harem, where thousands of women and children are confined as wives, concubines, captives, and slaves. As in Anna Leonowens' 1870s memoirs, on which *The King and I* is based, Anna exhibits the European imperialist's feeling that the natives of the Orient must be turned into a civilized and enlightened people. At the same time, she empathizes with the Siamese women, identifying with them as a woman and as a member of Victorian England's lower classes.<sup>1</sup> Thus an American dramatic representation of the Orient can be seen through the windows of race (white/colored), nation (Britain/Siam), gender (patriarchal King/Siamese woman), and class (poor British woman/establishment).

All these issues, as we shall find, can serve as points of comparison for a critical study of modern Chinese drama (*huaju*). For example, in the third scene, the king's singers and dancers perform a play adapted from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, to demonstrate to the British royal visitors that the Siamese are already sufficiently civilized and require no British instruction. While playing Eliza, an escaped slave from Kentucky searching for the lover who has been sold to "O-hee-o," Tuptim, one of King Mongkut's captive women, steps out of character to condemn "any King who pursues/ a slave who is unhappy and tries to join her lover!"<sup>2</sup>

The basis for this Siamese play within an American play is nowhere to be found in Anna Leonowens' memoirs, although Leonowens does write about the Siamese people's love of traditional drama and the anguish that women endured as slaves. These two themes, however, perhaps inspired the creation of the Siamese woman in Margaret Landon's 1948 bestseller, *Anna and the King of Siam*, based on the author's research into Leonowens' life and writing. Landon's novel portrays a Siamese woman so moved by the courageous spirit expressed in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that she turned "the beloved story into Siamese."<sup>3</sup> As a token of respect for the American woman, she adopted the name Harriet Beecher Stowe as the first part of her Siamese name. After her experience in Siam, Leonowens befriended Stowe while in America and shared her antislavery stand, which led to the Siamese staging of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the *The King and I*. The combination of distinctive cultures rooted in history and drama is a hallmark of the long Orientalist tradition of Broadway (and Hollywood) flirting with exotic others (women in particular), as exemplified by such other theatrical creations as *Madame Butterfly* and *Miss Saigon*. The 1999 movie *Anna and the King of Siam* further testifies the continuing fascination with cross-cultural romance.

The Siamese staging of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* might strike us as an ingenious dramatic device for linking British, Siamese, and American experiences. The historical connection between *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the origin of modern Chinese drama, however, does not require any comparable stroke of imagination. Despite early contacts with Western drama through missionary schools and foreign residents, modern Chinese drama did not really begin until the 1907 premiere of *The Black Slave Cries Out to Heaven* (*Heinu yutianlu*).<sup>4</sup> This full-fledged dramatic adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by a group of overseas Chinese students in Tokyo embodies a paradox in the development of modern Chinese drama. Using the American founding

fathers' vision of equality to oppose the Confucian tradition, the first generation of Chinese dramatists was nevertheless attracted to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for its denunciation of the slavery system and its critique of the hypocrisy in the founding principles of the United States. Both Chinese and American writers saw in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* a springboard from which to challenge their respective mainstream cultures. Indeed, Lin Shu's Chinese translation of Stowe's novel, in 1901, on which the dramatic adaptation was based, was triggered by his fury over reports of the brutal treatment of Chinese coolies overseas by the American "white race," who oppressed both the "black race" and the "yellow race." At its inception, therefore, modern Chinese drama took seriously the issues of racial conflict, national identity, and resistance to domestic and foreign oppressors, and developed these issues in subsequent plays during the War of Resistance to Japan, when the Japanese--that same "yellow race," and yet an ethnic "other"--became the arch enemy of the Chinese nation.

Indeed, even before the war against foreign aggressors broke out, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was also successfully staged as a class-conflict play in the Jiangxi Communist soviet areas in 1931. Li Bozhao, a female playwright in the Red Army, adapted *Peasant Slaves (Nongnu)* from a dramatic version of Stowe's work she saw in the USSR. Unlike the performance of Spring Willow Society in 1907, Li's production contained four acts, ending with the oppressed black slaves defeating white slave owners. Although racial conflict did not figure in the Chinese cultural scene of 1930s, local peasant audiences responded enthusiastically to the theme of class oppression against local landowners. The performances often ended with applause and slogan such as "down with slave owners" and "down with landowners."<sup>5</sup> A 1961 adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin (Heinu hen)*, however, strikes a different tone. Although class-conflict remained a major part of Communist ideology, Sun Weishi, a female director who had received formal training in theater

in the USSR for six years, attempted to break the “fourth wall” of illusionary theater and expanded dramatic actions to other space such as that of the orchestra.<sup>6</sup> In modern China where female playwrights and directors were few, both Li and Sun significantly were drawn to this Western drama for its political and artistic appeal.

In terms of formalist innovations, modern Chinese dramatists drew inspiration from Western drama for their own theater reform. Modern Chinese drama, like its Western counterpart, consists mostly of speaking and acting; it challenged the conventions of the operatic theater, known as *xiqu*, which combines singing, speaking, acting, and acrobatics. As a seminal form of a new culture, modern drama first appeared at the beginning of the Republican period (1911-1949), which saw the fall of the last imperial dynasty and the establishment of the Republic of China, under the leadership of the Nationalist Party (hereafter referred to as KMT). At this time, “civilized drama (*wenming xi*),” characterized by improvised dialogues and spontaneous speeches addressing current political events, responded to the social concerns surrounding the Republican revolution. In the May Fourth movement, modern drama was explored as an alternative to operatic theater, viewed then as too “dehumanized (*feiren*)” to express the concerns of an increasingly problematic world. During the War of Resistance to Japan (1937-1945), it played an important role in the cultural construction of the concepts of knowledge, power, identity, nation/state, gender politics, and twentieth-century Chinese national characteristics.

In the Maoist period (1949-1976), theater in the People’s Republic of China (hereafter referred to as PRC) mostly followed the Maoist ideology of literature and art, which saw serving the interests of the proletariat cause--that is, the cause of workers, peasants, and soldiers--as its main function. As we shall see shortly, the politics of representing the proletariat raises intriguing

questions about the relationship between dramatists and their objects of representation, many of whom were deprived of real power to express themselves at the same time as the state dubbed them masters of socialist China.

The post-Maoist era began in 1976 with the death of Mao and the end of the Cultural Revolution. Initiated in 1966, the Cultural Revolution had promoted “revolutionary model plays (*geming yangban xi*)” as the exemplary art of the proletariat in order to eliminate the possibility of any other forms of literature and art. Perhaps in no other time did theater exert such a powerful impact on the nation. As a radical reaction to this period, post-Maoist theater launched a popular political agenda against Maoist ideology and saw artistic experiments in the production of both Western and Chinese plays.

This anthology introduces six plays drawn from Chinese indigenous theater, proletarian theater, women’s theater, history plays, and experimental theater in contemporary China. They are introduced with several different audiences in mind. For general readers, I present and situate six contemporary plays, five of which have never been translated into English, in the political and cultural history of modern China in order to demonstrate the interrelationship between theater, history, society, and our everyday experiences. For students of literature and culture, I focus on one set of critical issues in each play to suggest its intercultural and theoretical implications for studies of other genres and other cultures to introduce modern Chinese drama to Western classrooms as part of a curriculum on multiculturalism and non-Western literary and cultural studies. Such an enterprise requires an introduction that would portray the reception of each play while tracing its historical and critical connections between past and present, text and intertexts, and Chinese traditions and their counterparts in other cultures.

In terms of methodology, I attempt to analyze Chinese culture in different ways from those found in contemporary Western literature. Some critics in the U.S. take challenging the canon as their central task. They ask, for instance, whether authors who were not upper-class, white, or male, were indeed excluded from the Western canon. These issues become complicated and problematic in the Chinese context. One might note that in the U.S. the issue of class in cultural studies receives far less attention than issues of race and gender politics. In the Chinese context, however, it would be difficult to talk about literature and culture without at least referring to class politics, which has significantly affected millions of people. Mao's championing of the Chinese revolution as fundamentally a peasant's revolution--and hence the principle that literature and art should serve the interests of the proletariat politics—largely determined literary production, canon formation, and literary reception. By the same token, the “nonwhite” issue in China became a question of perspective: to the predominantly white U.S., China is yellow and colored; to other ethnic minority groups within China, “nonwhite,” as a category, may indicate non-Han minority groups and/or non-Mandarin-speaking peoples within the Han majority. Furthermore, in contrast to the U.S., where race became an issue of sustained scholarly concern only with the civil-rights movement, attention to ethnicity was part of Maoist state ideology from the beginning. The PRC granted ethnic groups financial support and special rights, such as exemptions from the one-child policy to allow increases in the minority population. Similarly, as to the issue of gender, Chinese scholars in various disciplines have already pointed out that official feminism, despite its radical promotion of women's rights and equality, illustrated by Mao's adage that “women can hold up half of the sky,” merely validated the existing socialist ideology. Simply put, the representation of women as key players in socialist China was always part of the Maoist official culture. Thus what constitutes “opening the canon” for some Western

critics would in China mean returning to the Maoist canon, or to the Maoist principle of creating and preserving literary texts. Ultimately, then, what is politically correct in the West may be politically incorrect in post-Maoist China, which rejected many aspects of Maoist ideology years ago. Bearing such distinctions in mind, the reader may learn from the following discussion of theatrical representations in contemporary Chinese theater which shed light on the social and institutional histories of canon formation in cross-cultural contexts.

### ***1) The Dead Visiting the Living: The Dynamics of Form and Content***

Although the post-Maoist play *The Dead Visiting the Living* (*Yige sizhe dui shengzhe de fangwen*) premiered as late as 1985, it belongs to a well-established repertory in modern drama that sometimes skillfully combined such seemingly opposing elements as East and West, modern and traditional, and Brechtian and illusionist theater. Indeed, it crystallizes the century-old effort by the Chinese dramatists to seek an equilibrium between artistic form and political content.

The first such attempt can be detected in Hu Shi's 1919 play *The Main Event of One's Life* (*Zhongshen dashi*), which used Ibsen (for the first time) as the quintessential Western model for writing about individualism and free love against the expected Confucian content and traditional form of old theater.<sup>7</sup> Although primitive in terms of dramaturgy, Hu's play depicts a brave young woman rejecting her parents' wishes that she submit to an arranged marriage and instead eloping with her Japan-educated lover. With this play, Hu Shi pioneered a long tradition of exploring Western dramatic forms as a way of giving expression to the antitraditional agenda of the May Fourth intellectuals to further political and social reforms. The father in Hu's play, an apparently modern, educated man who lives in a house decorated in Chinese and Western styles, and yet adheres to clan-centered old values, seems to symbolize the desire of Chinese

intellectuals to borrow from the West while simultaneously preserving Chinese traditions. This ambiguous attachment to Western theater found its most telling example in Wang Youyou's expensive yet unsuccessful Shanghai performance, in October 1920, of Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (*Hualun Furen zhi zhiye*), which had been endorsed in the radical periodical *New Youth* as a laudable realistic drama from the West. The indifferent reception convinced Wang that he had no choice but to adapt to the popular taste of Chinese audiences, many of whom were still accustomed to the familiar features of operatic theater.

The ensuing development of "amateur theater (*aimeiju*)" in Beijing illustrates the dual-fold emphasis of theater as both an educational and artistic experience. Whereas "amateur," the English term, refers to noncommercial performances by unpaid actors, the Chinese translation, "*aimei*," which literally means "love of beauty," emphasizes "art for art's sake." The best achievement of amateur theater was the April 1924 production by Hong Shen of Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* (*Shaonainai de shanzi*), an event that drama historians viewed as the beginning of a tradition of realistic performing art on the Chinese stage. It highlighted stage design, the role of the director, and the use of local flavor drawn from Shanghai life, while still adhering to the spirit of the foreign original.

Only with the creation of Cao Yu's watershed play, *Thunderstorm* (*Leiyu*) in 1933 did Chinese encounter a more vibrant combination of Western Aristotelian form with May Fourth content.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, *Thunderstorm* perfected an Aristotelian theater (characterized by a closed form, or the so-called three unities of time, plot, and place) as opposed to Shakespearean theater (characterized by an open form, with several places, multiple plots, and various time frames). Echoing Western traditions such as Greek theater and the plays of Shakespeare, Ibsen, O'Neill, and Chekhov, as well as Chinese classics, *Thunderstorm* is a well-structured play of four acts and



two scenes that center around the dramatic conflicts of two families with a secret, sordid thirty-year history, which unfolds and finds resolution within twenty-four hours. Deviating, however, from the purely Aristotelian “three unities,” the play’s setting shifts between the two families of Lu and Zhou. When Lu Ma arrives at the Zhou’s household, where her daughter works as a maid, it is revealed (to Lu Ma's horror) that her daughter is in love with the first young master, who is her own son whom she had left behind with the Zhou family thirty years before. Thus Lu Ma sees her daughter reenacting her tragic history when she as a maid also fell in love with the old master, who rejected her and drove her from his house after she had given birth to his two children. Complicating this tale of incest is another misalliance. The first young master earlier had an affair with Zhou Fanyi, his stepmother, who married the old master after Lu Ma’s departure but was nevertheless alienated by her husband’s indifference and cruelty. By the play's end, Lu Ma’s daughter and the two young masters are dead, Zhou Fanyi is mentally ill, and a grief-stricken Lu Ma feels she has nothing left to live for. Like Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, the play concludes with the lonely patriarch on an empty stage, signifying the emptiness of a broken home, which was in fact never a “home.” However, the two plays differ in a vital respect: where Ibsen's play celebrates Nora's leaving home as a courageous act, Cao Yu's play illustrates that for Chinese women the lure of leaving home is only a trap. Lu Ma’s departure from home thirty years before and her determination “never to see the Zhous again” merely ends with the dreadful realization that, despite her best efforts, her daughter has succumbed to the same pitfalls and become trapped in the same home. As for Zhou Fanyi, leaving her parents’ home thirty years earlier in quest of true love only delivered her back into a prisonlike house, with no opportunities for further escape.

Cao Yu’s *Thunderstorm* was among the most frequently performed plays in the Chinese

theater, especially in the Maoist period, when it was canonized as one of the works that best depict the evils of a "big family" in the "old society" before 1949. On various occasions, Cao Yu echoed this official interpretation, despite his earlier statement about being motivated by a Greek-like emotional force, a longing for an explanation of the many mysterious forces in the universe that had captivated him. In the PRC revision of the play, moreover, Cao Yu changed Lu Ma and her second son Lu Dahai as oppressed characters with class consciousness, thereby highlighting the theme of class struggle.<sup>9</sup> Thus a work that had begun life as a well-made play was later rewritten and its political content changed to accord with prevailing ideologies.<sup>10</sup> Cao Yu, who as president of the Beijing People's Art Theater represented the party's policies on literature, typifies the predicament of Chinese dramatists. Theater can never be an art-for-art's sake enterprise for them, despite their original artistic orientations.

Developed simultaneously in China with the Aristotelian form of theater, Shakespearean theater found its example in Hong Shen's *Yama Zhao* (*Zhao Yanwang*). In imitation of Eugene O'Neill's *Emperor Jones*, the play revolves around a military deserter lost in a forest, where he addresses imagined ghosts of enemies and friends and vents his grievances over past tragedies.<sup>11</sup> Although some criticized Hong Shen's adaptation of the open form as a superficial imitation of Western masterpieces, the play deserves mention for its expression of early dramatists' concern with such social problems as corruption, poverty, and a weak national government confronted by foreign aggression. This direction reached its apex with Xia Yan's *Under Shanghai Eaves* (*Shanghai wuyan xia*), a play whose innovative structure has only one setting: a cross-section of a typical house in Shanghai occupied by five poor families struggling to survive, with each family acting in one of the five distinct spaces on stage and several story lines going on concurrently.<sup>12</sup> The open structure proves ideal for a narrative about the discontents of these

ordinary people—an unwilling prostitute, an impoverished primary-school teacher, an eccentric old newspaper vendor with dreams about the homecoming of his son, who has already been killed in the war. All these subplots seem to hinge on the return of Kuang Fu, a revolutionary who, after a brief reunion, leaves his family again upon realizing that his wife and daughter lived with his best friend during the eight years of his imprisonment.

Both the Aristotelian close form and the Shakespearean open form found their fullest expression in the subsequent texts of “defense drama” during the War of Resistance against Japan, the Civil War period, and the PRC period, both in plays reflecting on contemporary realities and on historical myth and figures. This tension between pursuing artistic innovation and political orientation peaked during the Cultural Revolution, when all "undesirable" forms of literature and art were denounced as harmful to the socialist state, and the model revolutionary theater, touted as the only proper proletariat genre, explored artistic forms from traditions that deliberately excluded all feudal and bourgeois influences. Of the eight model works promoted at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, five are Peking operas and three draw from Western forms of ballet and symphonic music. Modern Chinese drama, together many other forms of literature and art, did not really exist during the Cultural Revolution, although some of the model operatic pieces such as *The Red Lantern (Hongdeng ji)* and *The Azalea Mountain (Dujuanshan)* were earlier performed as modern Chinese drama.<sup>13</sup> In reaction to such neglect, post-Maoist theater revived artistic traditions from East and West alike and modern as well as traditional plays. Both artistically and politically oriented plays (or a combination of the two) flourished in the dramatic renaissance of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

One example is Liu Shugang’s *The Dead Visiting the Living*, which blends Brechtian theater with the socialist-realist tradition. Based on the real lives of two national heroes extolled

by the post-Maoist regime, the play recounts the aftermath of Ye Xiaoxiao's murder by two thieves on a bus as other passengers look on passively. Throughout the rest of the play, the dead Ye comes back to visit the living, to confront the indifferent passengers, and to reconnect with his two best childhood friends: Tang Tiantian, the woman he loved, and Liu Feng, his rival in work and love.

The play relies on the illusionist-theater techniques of presenting realistic slices of life and highlighting social problems via the actions of the uninvolved passengers. As a visitor come back from the dead, Ye gradually understands and forgives onlookers whose preoccupation with their own problems inhibited them from aiding him. For example, a father was impatient to get to the hospital to see his wife and their new baby; a party official was trying to think of ways to earn a promotion to provide better care for his blind daughter. After all, life was difficult for everyone after the Cultural Revolution. Ye's acceptance of people indirectly responsible for his death lends him the aura of a socialist hero, who gives without expecting anything in return. In this respect, the *The Dead* could please both the authorities and the public: the crime scene in a crowded bus full of worrying people could be seen as a timely critique against the old regime of Cultural Revolutionary China. The unrewarded hero, Ye, who rises above everyone in moral stature, points out the emptiness of adhering to the socialist spirit and being heedless of past difficulties, a spirit promoted by the post-Maoist ideology of the 1980s.

Celebrated by many critics as an apt combination of socialist-realist, Western absurdist, stream of consciousness, and symbolist techniques, *The Dead* experimented with the Brechtian "alienation effect," along with the echoes of Greek tragedy obtained by the use of masks and a chorus. Drawing on Brecht's concept of an episodic plot with epic overtones that can effectively address social concerns, *The Dead* consistently "alienates" its audiences from the immediate

events by connecting the past with the present, the dead with the living, and the actors with the audience, who, as observers, are supposed to offer rational alternatives to the dramatic action. Most of these dramatic effects are achieved through the ingenious use of the chorus, whose members greet the audience at the beginning of the play, to help them realize that they are watching the play along with them. Besides commenting on the action and becoming part of the setting, with their symbolic costumes and props, the chorus members also used masks to step in and out of other dramatic roles, such as those of the passengers and the criminals on the bus, the detective, the corrupt party official, Ye's employer, and the doorman at the funeral home.

These dramatic techniques are meant to prompt audiences to reflect upon the dramatic action while Ye reflects on his journey through life. For example, Tang Tiantian, in her belated effort to demonstrate her love for Ye, kisses and embraces the ghost of Ye in front of a bewildered, jealous Liu Feng. The sight tortures Liu, because he is uncertain if Tang and Ye were intimate before his death, as Tang now claims, despite the adamant denial of the ghost Ye. In the middle of this confusion of sense, vision, and experience, the audience is encouraged to continue to mull over the question Tang has posed for Liu: "As the living, can't you tolerate my feelings for and intimate acts with the dead Ye?"<sup>14</sup> This question forces the audiences to consider the lingering influence in socialist China of the Confucian moral code of chastity and virginity, which demands that women remain faithful to their husbands or betrothed whatever the circumstances. The kissing on stage and the dramatic conflict surrounding it also reflected the new vogue on early post-Mao stage which highlighted love stories after years of their absence during the Cultural Revolutionary period. At the end of the play, when Ye is about to be cremated, Liu surprises everyone by confessing that he is the person Ye has been seeking--the passenger with a sense of justice to insist that the bus be immediately driven to the police station

so the criminals might be apprehended but remains too intimidated to incriminate them. Liu's additional admission that he wrote the play to allay his guilt turns the audiences' attention to the meaning of theater and of this play.

By presenting himself as one of the indifferent onlookers partially to blame for Ye's death, Liu actually situates himself above this undifferentiated crowd. His dramatic skills allow him, in a way denied to the others, to argue his own case in a privileged theatrical space. In this sense, the play is a meta-commentary on the problematic relationship between drama and life, between Chinese intellectuals and the people they claim to represent, and between what one aspires to be and what one is capable of being. This surprising ending dissolves the idealistic image of the dramatist as embodied in the stage character of Liu, a successful director who sought to communicate the spiritual, inner beauty of "one's heart" in his play. However, his alter ego, Ye, laments his failure as an actor early in his career and his subsequent struggle to succeed as a costume designer, when he was entirely devoted to creating "the outward appearance" of human beings.<sup>15</sup> Members of the audience are prompted to ask: Who is the truthful man? The one who claims to be "spiritual" and whom society views as successful but was too intimidated by the criminals to act? Or the one who admits to failing to be "spiritual" and yet was committed by a sense of justice to act when it mattered? In a similar juxtaposition, the dead (or the unsuccessful one when he was alive) is the one to be honored rather than the living (the successful one whose spirit is nearly dead). This image of the self-conscious dramatist, however, can also be read as symbolizing the ambiguities surrounding the position of Chinese playwrights. They are accustomed to learning from and serving the interests of the ordinary people, as Mao demanded, while being aware that it is they who hold the power to write and represent reality on stage.

## 2) *The World's Top Restaurant: The Paradox of the Local and the Global*

While acknowledging its Western inspiration, PRC literary historians have also argued that modern Chinese drama sinicized Western dramaturgy. They maintain that Xia Yan and Cao Yu employed appropriate formalist features from the Chinese and Western traditions to best convey the sentiments, feelings, and a sense of the daily lives of Chinese people in specific locales. Any given local culture of China was influenced by people's changing perceptions of the global context, but "local" in Xia Yan's dramas (which paradoxically depict a urban Shanghai in the 1930s) embraces another dynamic, which casts the urban as the central and the rural as the marginal. Several characters, such as the Huang family in Xia's *Under Shanghai Eaves* represent the rural folk who after migrating to Shanghai were victimized by the urban decadence. Xia Yan's Shanghai-flavored drama contrasts with Beijing-flavored plays in the PRC. These two schools helped shape the unique, indigenous genre known as local-flavored plays. In Lao She's plays, for instance, Beijing people act out their identities as either urban residents with rural roots or as longtime city dwellers from different classes confronting the challenges of life in a modern city. On the PRC stage, moreover, Beijing was depicted, in local terms, as the site of distressed people who were casualties of the old society. At the same time, the city was proclaimed, in global terms, as the center for world revolution, to be waged by suffering people who were invited to look to China for inspiration in their own national and regional movements for freedom and independence.

Usually cited as one of the earliest successful productions of Beijing-flavored plays, Lao She's *Dragon Beard Ditch* (*Longxugou*, 1951) capitalized on local dialects and expressions of the old Beijing culture to portray poor Beijing citizens who live around Dragon Beard Ditch,

such as the story-teller, the rickshaw driver, and the bricklayer. The play also depicted their living conditions, such as the stinking slum that for generations had trapped poor people and the government efforts to rebuild the neighborhood after liberation.<sup>16</sup> The play earned Lao She the title of "people's artist," awarded by the Beijing People's Government. It was the only time any artist received such an honor in China throughout the entire Maoist period.

In 1958 Lao She's second Beijing-flavored play, *Teahouse (Chaguan)*, premiered to equal acclaim.<sup>17</sup> This time the drama presents more than sixty vivid characters, old Beijing citizens ranging from an imperial wrestler, a eunuch, a prostitute, a pimp, a bird lover, a fortuneteller, two KMT secret agents, two deserters, an industrialist, a property owner. Characters meet at a teahouse during the time span between 1898, following the failure of a political reform under the Qing dynasty, and 1945, after the defeat of the Japanese under the rule of the KMT. Despite the allusions to many historical events, the play focuses on the rise and fall of the teahouse and the struggles of the shopkeeper's family and friends. Lao She intended to commend the "new society" by satirizing the three declining political regimes and their failure to bring about a decent life for Beijing citizens. *Teahouse*, written and published at the height of the antirightist movement (1957), was still deemed controversial because it was interpreted as conveying sympathy for the property owner in the old society, rather than focusing on the "heroic deeds" of the common people as they worked to build the socialist state. Deeply rooted in the old culture of Beijing, however, one could also detect a resistance to change, no matter how frequently political regimes changed hands and claimed victory.

Consequently, the Cultural Revolution condemned Lao She and his well-received Beijing-flavored plays. However, his legacy was dramatized on Beijing's stage during the post-Maoist period, in Shu Shuyang's *Taiping Lake (Taipinghu)*, written in 1986 to commemorate the



twentieth anniversary of Lao She's death and premiered in 1988 after numerous revisions. The play depicts the day, August 24, 1966, when Lao She drowned himself to protest the brutal beating and humiliation he suffered at the hands of the Red Guards. Before the suicide, Lao She wanders around Taiping Lake for a day and night, meditating on the paradox of his past devotion to the party and the charges of antiparty activities it has now pressed against him. Heart-broken and confused, he engages in conversations with the living (Beijing citizens who still fondly remember his plays) and also with the dead (dramatic characters of his who committed suicide to decry the miserable pre-1949 society). Beijing-flavored plays, which had followed Lao She's lead and criticized the old society for marginalizing local people, now offered up a much harsher judgment of Maoist China's unfair treatment of artists.

The watershed 1979 revival of *Tea House* by the Beijing People's Art Theater epitomized the entire history of modern Chinese drama for how it pitted "real-life" theater against the status quo in a national arena, in which scene after scene of political drama was being rehearsed and reinvented on the smaller stage of the theater. *Tea House's* successful tours in Germany, France, Switzerland, Japan, Canada, and Hong Kong in the 1980s proved to be the culminating act of this theater in the broader sense and marked the first time that modern Chinese spoken drama was exported to the global stage, thereby gaining an entry to the world repertory. This voyage by *Teahouse* simultaneously completes the "journey back home," which was undertaken at the very beginning of the twentieth century when the first generation of Chinese dramatists traveled to Japan and to the West. Thus the most indigenous and most local of plays, as some critics have happily pointed out, became the most universal and global, by virtue of its artistic appeal and its faithful reflection of the spectrum of the Chinese people's experience. The further development of Beijing-flavored plays in post-Maoist China, as represented by Guo Xingshi's *Birdman*

(*Niaoren*),<sup>18</sup> dramatized events and characters in the quiet lanes and neglected corners of 1990s Beijing, where the citizens struggled to cope with the commercialized economy and transnational capital.

To provide another glimpse of the Beijing-flavored play, this anthology includes *The World's Top Restaurant (Tianxia diyilou)*, written by the woman playwright He Jiping and performed for the first time by Beijing People's Art Theater in May 1988. Set in Beijing between 1917 and 1928, the play deals with the rise and fall of a legendary Beijing Roast Duck Restaurant, brought to greatness by hardworking managers, waiters, and chefs, only to be ruined later by the two young owners who for years lived off the restaurant without learning how to run it. The play depicted a Lu Mengshi, a manager hired by the previous owner of the restaurant at his death bed to continue the latter's wish to revive the restaurant. Three years later in a period of great financial hardship, Lu Mengshi fends off interference by creditors and troublemakers as he expands his business by constructing a new building. Lu then tricks the two sons into giving up their remaining interest in the business's management so that he might, by dint of his efficient management and creative abilities, restore the restaurant to its former greatness. Eight years have elapsed between Act I and Act III, in the course of which the restaurant, while enjoying its golden age, became known as "the best one under heaven." To audiences' great dismay, however, the two heartless sons suddenly return to reclaim the fruits of Lu's hard work. In the epilogue, after his departure, Lu has a couplet sent to the restaurant. Asking "Who is the owner and who is the guest?" the couplet concludes the play in a suspenseful climax that has both characters and the audience pondering the meaning of this message, which proves central to the thematic concerns of the play.<sup>19</sup> It is the guests, the outsiders of the family, who have shown themselves to be the genuine owners of the restaurant; those who were the owners in name actually were the outsiders.

The reception of *The World's Top Restaurant* centered around the performing aspects of the play as perfected by Beijing People's Art Theater, known as the only institution capable of producing real Beijing-flavored plays. Much credit was given the directors and actors for their "second creation," which turned the script into a theatrical event, bursting with vivid and diverse Beijing characters of more than seventy years ago. Without the older generation of directors and actors, who had spent years learning the dialect, mannerisms, customs, body movements, and life styles of the old Beijing people, one critic pointed out, we would never have been able to enjoy a first-rate Beijing-style play.<sup>20</sup> Reportedly, the directors attended every performance, to test the "authenticity" of the play in front of the Beijing audience and, depending on its effect, to modify the next performance.<sup>21</sup> All these factors contributed to making *The World's Top Restaurant* an unusually popular play, as demonstrated by the continuing strong ticket sales after more than 58 performances in only two months,<sup>22</sup> a record high during the lean years of Chinese theater when critics were discussing little except how to solve "the drama crisis."

Other critics, however, criticized *The World's Top Restaurant* as being inferior to *Tea House*, because the former's time span of 1917 to 1928 was not regarded as being as instructive as that of *Tea House*. With the first act set in 1898 (the end of the reform movement), and the second act in 1918 (the transitional period between the Qing Dynasty and the Republican China), and the third act 1945 (following the defeat of the Japanese), *Teahouse* was perceived as indicating the historical necessity of the decline of the previous political regimes. In *The World's Top Restaurant*, however, the rise and fall of a particular business seems irrelevant to the direction of historical events;<sup>23</sup> it could even be associated with an unhealthy nostalgic longing for the past at a time of economic and political reform in the 1980s China.<sup>24</sup> Such views were

rebutted by other critics, who insisted that precisely because of its historical neutrality, *The World's Top Restaurant* surpassed the earlier play. Its appeal, they claimed, was attributable to its own internal conflicts and logic, thus avoiding the danger of contamination by political and ideological contingencies and interpretations.<sup>25</sup> In effect, the play was accorded the typical treatment meted out to contemporary Chinese drama: no matter how salient the aesthetic values of a particular play in the eyes of one group of critics, it was bound to be looked at as a forum for political texts by other critics, whose educational and personal experiences dictated a different approach.

He Jiping, the playwright, however, provided her own explanation for what she called the “universal appeal” of the play. While spending two years and a half “delving into life” in a Beijing roast duck restaurant, she had been deeply touched by the intelligence and dedication of the managers, chefs, and waiters, who had been looked down on as belonging to the lowest rung in the social strata. Part of her intention had been to demonstrate that the rich, the leisured, and so-called “cultivated” elite class excelled only at eating, drinking, and playing around, whereas the hardworking laboring people were the creators of Chinese culinary art, which should be deemed a form of high art on a par with classical music, poetry, and painting. By asking at the end of the play “who is the owner and who is the guest?” she felt she was restoring the status of the “guests” as equivalent to that of the “owners,” or “the makers of history.”<sup>26</sup>

One also needs to be aware of the complex, paradoxical problems entailed in ethnic representation: while Beijing-flavored plays can be seen as local natives challenging the mainstream tradition inherited from the Western dramatic canon, they also, for the most part, represent the theater of the Han people. In this capacity they stress the history, culture, customs, and life style of mandarin-speaking Chinese that make up the majority of the population and of

the officials in the state and party apparatus, based in the national capital of Beijing. As for the 150 or so ethnic groups and traditions that are not visible in Beijing-flavored plays, they are indeed the real locals in their geographical areas, whose regional and cultural traditions need to be taken seriously in terms of their relationship with the mainstream culture. Indeed, the dramatic world of *Teahouse* itself provided a glimpse of the complex picture of multi-ethnic China. As a Manchu who grew up in Beijing, Lao She expressed his ambivalence with his own identities by dramatizing an eunuch and an imperial wrestler as diehards from the Manchu court that had conquered and ruled the Han people. On the other hand, however, Lao She created another upright Manchu man who would rather sell vegetables to make his own living than depending on the stipends awarded only to the Manchus. Although class struggle and the inevitable victory of Communist ideology as implicit themes remained the focus of its reception, *Tea House* has nevertheless offered us a valuable text imbedded with complex issues of personal, ethnic, and national identities.

### **3) *Jiang Qing and Her Husbands: History, Revolution, and Political Theater***

In *Acting the Right Part*, I discuss the relationship between street theater in Tiananmen Square, such as state parades and student demonstrations, and the “theater of the street” that represented street theater in real life. Indeed, theater of the street in early post-Mao China consisted one of the three golden periods in modern spoken drama. It first rose as one of the most popular genre during the War of Resistance to Japan, when spoken drama raised the morale of the Chinese people. The second boom stretched from late 1950s to mid-1960s in the PRC, when a strong socialist state promoted realist theater that educated mass audiences with collective values and common goals. The third boom arrived soon after the arrest of the Gang of Four in

1976 when dramatists were among the first to respond to the post-Mao regime's call to narrate "bitter stories" of the Cultural Revolution. The so-called "anti-Gang of Four plays" attracted many people to theater, where audiences watched the downfall of traitors of the nation on stage while celebrating the nation's "second liberation." Some of them even re-enacted on stage the Tiananmen protest of April 5, 1976 against Chinese authorities during the Cultural Revolution. Rarely before had "one play shock the entire city," as seen in the simultaneous staging of 40 performances *In a Land of Silence* (*Yuwu shengchu*) in Beijing alone in 1978.<sup>27</sup>

*Jiang Qing and her Husbands* (*Jiang Qing he tade zhangfumen*) was written in 1990, when drama had lost considerable ground to film and television. It nevertheless is one of the best political plays. As I have pointed out elsewhere,<sup>28</sup> *Jiang Qing and her Husbands* can be read as a "trial drama" in which a former "First Lady," after having been imprisoned in Mao's "doll's house" for 40 years, presents her side of the story. That story showcases a frustrated Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, which she performed in 1935 and spent the rest of her years imitating her spirit of an independent woman. The trial drama reenacts the 1980 public trial of the Gang of Four, in which Jiang Qing was sentenced to death, but received a two-year stay of execution. In the process it points up the different judicial approaches of China and the United States. In the latter case, the trial is governed by the element of suspense, as the defense lawyer and prosecution vie for the jury's favorable verdict. The trial of the Gang of Four, however, was merely a show, with the prosecution enumerating 47 counts of indictment for Jiang Qing, and the accused either refusing to cooperate or totally admitting guilt without submitting an effective defense. The Chinese people's denunciation of Jiang Qing for her destructive role during the Cultural Revolution can also be seen as one of the few options available, because Mao could not be directly challenged. On another level, it illustrates the formation of a political discourse on

Jiang Qing, which draws from traditional culture's misogynist view of the seductive woman. For centuries, this view scapegoated Yang Guifei, the beautiful concubine in the Tang Dynasty, for having presumably brought down an emperor. The resentment against Jiang Qing also obscures the issue of Chinese official feminism, which was manipulated and abused by Jiang Qing as she promoted her image as a public woman with an acting career while claiming to be the “banner woman” for all oppressed classes.

*Jaing Qing and her Husbands* offers diverse interpretations that cut across the problematic relationship between gender (embodied in Jiang Qing as a strong-willed, independent woman) and nation/state (embodied in an even stronger male counterpart who was patriarch of both family and state). The play was written in 1990 at the request of a Hong Kong actress interested in playing Jiang Qing, and the playwright, Sha Yexin, seized the unusual opportunity of writing a play that would not be subjected to official Chinese censorship. He did his utmost, however, to follow closely the official and nonofficial documents at his disposal. At the same time, he exercised his playwright's prerogative of selecting the episodes that would best suit his construction of Jiang Qing. In terms of formalistic features, Sha Yexin smoothly combined a Brechtian structure (which distances audiences from the dramatic action, thereby reminding them that what they are watching is only a play) with illusionist theater (which draws audiences in, convincing them that they are watching real-life events). Originally intended as a movie script, the play also adapted a fluidity of time and space in which Jiang Qing travels between the past and the present, and between her inner world and the outer reality.

The illusionist dimension was adapted by the socialist-realist tradition to evoke the “revolutionary history play,” that is, the theatrical dramatization of historical events according to official history. On the other hand, the Brechtian structure highlighted Jiang Qing’s self-

reflections, which had been buried in post-Mao official history, providing a subversive version of the “revolutionary history play,” if not the revolutionary history itself. Thus *Jiang Qing and her Husbands* could be appreciated both as imitating and reacting to its precursor texts. Although revolutionary history play decisively shaped other subgenres during the early post-Maoist period, this subgenre has received scant scholarly attention, and no translations of the plays or critical studies in the English language are available. As a consequence, I will discuss some of the popular revolutionary history plays and their reception in order to provide readers with a clear sense of their roles in constructing a new nation/state in the late 1970s and early 1980s. *Jiang Qing and her Husbands* provides the best example of this subgenre, albeit a belated and seditious one.

Revolutionary leader plays can be traced back to history plays in the May Fourth period. Guo Moruo’s *A Trilogy of Women* (*Sange panni de nüxing*), written in the 1920s, reinterpreted the legend of three ancient women rebelling against the three-fold Confucian obligations which bound women to their fathers, husbands, and sons. During the War of Resistance to Japan, the history play became the most popular theater form, since many plays (such as Yang Hansheng’s *The Death of Li Xiucheng* [*Li Xiucheng zhi si*, 1937]<sup>29</sup> and Guo Moruo’s *Qu Yuan* [1942])<sup>30</sup> depicted patriotic historical figures who perished in the battle against corruption and treason--clear allusions, according to PRC literary history, to the KMT government, which was described as resisting the Japanese invaders only reluctantly. After the Ant-Rightist movement of 1957, the history play saw a resurgence in popularity. For some playwrights, the history play served as an escape from the demanding task of depicting the contemporary life, which could be easily criticized as critiquing against the status quo. Even the presumably politically safe “masterpieces” among the history plays, such as Guo Moruo’s *Cai Wenji* (1959)<sup>31</sup> and Tian



Han's *Guan Hanqing* (1958),<sup>32</sup> were criticized during the Cultural Revolution for having voiced discontent with socialist China through dramatic characters who lived in ancient times. They were reprimanded for having been obsessed by stories from the "old culture" about feudal "emperors, empresses, generals, and ministers (*di wang jiang xiang*)" or about "talented scholars and beautiful women (*caizi jiaren*)."

The significance of the history play as played out on the Chinese stage resided in its dual, temporal position between the past and the present. While characters from the past could be lauded on their own terms according to their place in history, they were also inevitably judged by an audience that might see them as resembling familiar figures in contemporary times. The defense of history against excessive fictionality or innovative contemporary interpretations became a discursive strategy in the critical debate on the history play. Dramatists and critics could sometimes explain away questionable events by claiming that they were merely reenacted history, without reference to the politics of the present day. Their opponents, in turn, could argue against what they saw as excessive fictionality--or a disregard for historical fact--which pointed to evidence of deliberate allusions to and, hence, subversive activities against the ruling ideology. All these elements could prove to create serious political problems for dramatists. The best known case is Wu Han's "historically accurate" Peking opera, *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* (*Hai Rui baguan*, 1961).<sup>33</sup> Responding to Mao's call to write about Hai Rui, a legendary official of the Ming Dynasty (in order to encourage Chinese people to speak out), Wu Han, the mayor of Beijing and a reputable historian, portrayed an incorruptible Hai Rui who was dismissed from his official post for having challenged the emperor. Wu's Peking opera was absurdly interpreted as having used the drama to challenge Mao's dismissal of General Peng Dehuai, who questioned Mao's radical economic policies of the late 1950s. Wu's history play, which was based on

thorough research, designed to address a contemporary issue, and written by Mao's own request, was first publicly criticized on November 10, 1965, in *Wenhui Newspaper* in Shanghai. It became the first shot in the Cultural Revolution.

Well-versed in the complex navigation of past and present in relation to the historical play, Chinese dramatists by the late seventies seemed to know exactly how to play the game. They answered the official call against the Gang-of-Four, and many playwrights explored to the hilt a thriving new genre known as the "revolutionary historical drama" or "revolutionary leader's play," which reenacted episodes in the lives of Communist leaders. Both *Newspaper Boys* (Baotong, 1978)<sup>34</sup> and *Turning Point* (Zhuanzhe, 1977),<sup>35</sup> for example, depict Premier Zhou Enlai's military career during the war period, while *A Generation of Heroes* (*Yidai yinghao*) recounts Zhou's heroic leadership during three Shanghai workers' uprisings and the August 1 Nanchang uprisings in 1927, which were celebrated events in early CCP history.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, *Eastward March* (*Dongjin! Dongjin!*, 1978)<sup>37</sup> and *Chen Yi from the Mountains* (*Chen Yi chushan*, 1979)<sup>38</sup> describe the war legends surrounding the generals and vice premiers of He Long and Chen Yi, both of whom were persecuted to death during the Cultural Revolution.

At first sight, the central theme of these "leader's plays" might seem comparable to that of the Elizabethan history play, which Northrop Fyre links to "the unifying of the nation and the binding of the audiences into the myth as the inheritors of that unity, set over against the disasters of civil war and weak leadership."<sup>39</sup> The great difference of the leader's play, however, is that by depicting past glories, it highlighted the leader's tragic death during the Cultural Revolution, thus ensuring "the simultaneous presence of irony" through questioning of the very myth of Chinese revolution.<sup>40</sup> Leader's plays were particularly popular from 1978 to 1981 because they functioned as effective weapons for exposing the Gang-of-Four's crimes and for voicing Chinese dramatists'

challenge to Communist historiography, which had victimized not only its people, but its own leaders, the “pillars of Chinese revolution.”

A typical example is *Morning Light (Shuguang)*, one of the first leader’s plays to be performed after the death of Mao.<sup>41</sup> Premiered in 1977, this six-act play relates Marshal He Long's early military career in Honghu rural soviets from 1931 to 1934, at the low ebb of Chinese revolution when the Central Committee of the CCP was said “to be dominated by Wang Ming's leftist putschism.”<sup>42</sup> Foregrounding the “two-lines struggle” within the central leadership of the CCP, the play gives an account of how the followers of Wang Ming's leftist line persecuted, arrested, and even executed faithful defenders of Mao's “correct revolutionary line.” For example, Feng Dajian, the director of the Soviet Security Bureau, awed and terrified his enemies by frequently venturing into their headquarters in disguise to collect intelligence and defeating them in numerous battles with his invincible troops. Yet, however heroic, he still could not survive the purge within his own party, which executed him as an enemy spy.

Thus *Morning Light* actually comes off as a conspiracy play, another subgenre of the history play, which, according to Herbert Linderberger, provides “the central fable shaping the vast majority of historical dramas.”<sup>43</sup> As a conspiracy play concerned with “the transfer of power from one force to another,” *Morning Light* suggests at least four different conspiracies within and outside the party's hierarchy.<sup>44</sup> The first conspiracy against Feng Dajian is followed by the second conspiracy, against Yue Minghua, a division commander in the Red Army who had been wrongfully accused of having protected Feng. Yue is condemned to death by Lin Han, the party representative of the CCP Central Committee whose main task is to put into effect Wang Ming's leftist line. In the nick of time, however, Yue is rescued by He Long, then Army Commander of the Third and Second Troops of the Red Army, which, had already lost 90 percent of its territory

and troops owing to Wang Ming's "incorrect policies."<sup>45</sup> Because of his challenge to Lin Han, He Long's party loyalty was naturally questioned. His ensuing persecution and death undoubtedly touched a chord in audience members, who had been victims of conspiracies in their own lives, which lent the play a sense of urgency and realism. When Yue Minghua on stage warned the Chinese audiences in 1977 to be on the lookout against conspirators within the party especially when victory would have been won for the Chinese revolution, many audience members (myself included) would have understood its allusions to the Gang of Four. This message led to a fourth conspiracy: the Gang of Four itself had fallen prey to a coup d'état, without which the post-Maoist regime would never have taken power. Party history was one conspiracy after another. The subversive theme of the play was so blatant that it alienated some conservatives. After *Morning Light* was published in 1977, several readers wrote to the editor to express their concern: it was depressing to see so many negative characters, who necessarily overshadowed the positive Communist heroes. If the incorrect party line prevailed so easily, they argued, how could one sufficiently account for the inevitable victory of the Chinese revolution?<sup>46</sup> Others, however, seemed eager to connect conspiracies on stage with real stories, in order to validate the historical "truth," which, in their view, was reflected in the play. Tao Hanzhang, a Red Army veteran, testified that the character of Yue Minghua was based on the true story of a Duan Dechang, a division commander in the Red Army who was executed by the leftist opportunists within the party.<sup>47</sup> Xue Baikun went further, suggesting that the play be revised so that Yue will have just been executed at the point when He Long arrives on horseback. Although Xue admitted that some audiences would find this bleak outcome too hard to swallow, he maintained that the deaths of both Yue and Feng would arouse a more profound sense of pathos suitable to tragic theater.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, the audiences would be provided with a more vivid lesson of the price of

revolution when it pursues incorrect party lines; in fact, they were familiar with the most costly example, as seen in the recent struggle “between Mao's revolutionary line and that of the counter-revolutionary Gang-of-Four.”<sup>49</sup> These reactions indicate that 1977 captured a historical moment when a subversive discourse against the party apparatus, including that of the new post-Maoist regime, overlapped with the official call to discredit the regime's predecessors. A leader’s play could help vent one’s resentment against the Gang of Four. Alternatively, it could disturb one by presenting the past heroic narrative as an illusion.

The leader's plays that dealt with Mao understandably aroused the most debate. The first such play, *Autumn Thunder (Qiushou pili)*, was questioned for its hagiographic treatment of Mao, which ran counter to the Marxist view that the people, and not individual leaders, were the driving force of history. One critic pointed out that the character of Mao appeared only twice in the play's 1977 premiere: first, to declare the start of the autumn harvest uprisings; second, to announce the beginning of the peasant army's march toward the Jinggang Mountains, where the first rural soviet was to be established in 1927. This insufficient dramatization of Mao, which was said to have turned him into an isolated idol, was addressed in the 1979 script, which portrayed Mao as "one of us"--that is, participating in and organizing peasant uprisings and even coming to the assistance of a poor peasant grandmother, carrying her hay for her on a shoulder pole.<sup>50</sup> Although at the cost of the fictionalization of some plot details, the creation of the "typical and beautiful" characters brought the revolutionary leader play closer to the “essence of historical truth”: now, one critic stressed, Mao was accurately sketched as a real flesh-and-blood human being, not a Godlike figure with a halo.<sup>51</sup>

Other critics believed that the leader play must simply function as another form of party history. They argued that it should be presented as factually as possible to provide proper

education in cultural and revolutionary history through a theater experience. This view was most tellingly illustrated in the controversy over the production of *Yang Kaihui*, which dramatized Mao's loving relationship with his first wife. While received warmly by critics and audience, *Yang Kaihui* was nevertheless criticized for having "lost its power of conviction" by presenting Yang Kaihui as a guerrilla warrior. According to historical fact, Lu Bai argued, Yang was a gentle wife and true comrade who had always been supportive of Mao's career and had never participated in any warfare.<sup>52</sup> Overfictionalization and exaggeration, Lu concluded, revealed an unhealthy trend in the leader play toward creating the kind of "tall, grand, and perfect" characters that had been favored in the Cultural-Revolutionary model theater. Because of this controversy, post-Mao dramatists were thrown into a situation of irresolvable tension: they were called on to memorialize an epoch-making history and its leaders in order to justify CCP events. At the same time they were asked to take down from his pedestal the individual leader so that he could become "one of us." "His" history was to be appreciated as "our history," but, in another twist, the masses had to overlook their history to honor "his" history.

Owing to this dilemma, some commended *Yang Kaihui* in 1978 as a breakthrough for its focus on Mao's private life--his love, emotions, and sorrows as a husband and father. Presented as a gentle and supportive wife and mother, Yang Kaihui was extremely popular among many early post-Maoist audiences, who saw in her Mao's ideal wife, never to be replaced by Jiang Qing, his third wife.<sup>53</sup> Such sentiments brought about a flourishing subgenre known as "Yang Kaihui plays," which included the folk opera *Proud Yang (Jiaoyang)* and the Peking opera *Ode to my Beloved (Dielianhua)*.<sup>54</sup> *Yang Kaihui* was especially lauded for its romantic ending, when Mao and Yang, dressed as students, stride hand in hand toward the audiences from back stage among plum blossoms, white clouds, fresh evergreen, and red flags. By this finish, the directors

intended to convey that Yang and Mao would "always live in the hearts of the millions of people"--that in real life, Mao, in his heart of hearts, had reserved his love for his first wife.<sup>55</sup> Audiences might then let this more personal message infuse Mao's poetic lines, as Yang imagines them in the last scene before her execution: "Kaihui, your life is pure because you have given it up selflessly for your people. You are brave and heroic because you have fearlessly confronted your enemy. Your life is precious and magnificent because it is combined with the ideals of Communism."<sup>56</sup> Speaking passionately from backstage, Mao declared that Yang did not just belong to him; above all, she was identified with the glorious course of the Chinese revolution. With one final, dramatic stroke, Yang's sexual love was thus transformed into a greater love put at the disposal of a great leader for the creation of his new nation/state.

To audience members aware of the historical facts, however, these episodes could deconstruct the very spirit of Yang's myth. When Yang was being tortured in prison (from October to November 1930) and refusing to yield to the authorities' demand that she renounce her legal status as Mao's wife, Mao had already married He Zizhen, "the most beautiful woman" in the Soviet area of the Jingguang Mountains, to quote from *Jiang Qing and her Husbands* and various biographies. Thus the portrayal of Mao's imperishable love for Yang, as she imagined it in her prison cell before her execution, was farfetched, and one wonders, would Yang still have refused the authorities' offer of freedom in exchange for denunciation had she been aware of Mao's infidelity? It is in this regard that the reception of Yang Kaihui seems particularly ironic. Yang's ennobling selflessness in prison--originally viewed as a means of softening the overly heroic image of Mao--can now be seen as a thoroughly meaningless sacrifice for a man she imagined to be faithful. A so-called true representation of a past love story in a leader play could, on the other hand, become an archaeological search for knowledge, in the Foucauldian sense of

that term, with the object of recovering an episode buried in official history.

The issue of motherhood in the first family was tackled head-on in a 1985 leader play entitled *The Son of the World* (*Shijie zhi zi*), which depicts the life of Mao Anqing, the Chairman's first-born son by Yang Kaihui. The play focuses on the war years in the Soviet Union when Mao Anying fought valiantly as a Red Army soldier, and his heroic death as a volunteer soldier in the Korean War in 1950. An important subplot details the hardships endured by He Zizhen after she left China in 1938. During her brief appearance onstage she is characterized as a caring and loving stepmother who tends to the needs of Mao Anying and his ailing brothers. In the years of famine, He Zizhen struggled to obtain medical treatment for Jiaojiao, the only daughter to survive of the six children she bore Mao during the war; for her pains she was rewarded with confinement in a Soviet asylum for almost five years. In the first act when news of her unfair treatment is conveyed to Moscow, Stalin refuses to help, since she is not Mao's current spouse. By refusing to rescue He Zizhen, Stalin believed he was helping Mao consolidate his absolute power at home as "a helmsman" for the army, party, and the country.<sup>57</sup> Unlike to the earlier *Yang Kaihui*, this play questions Mao's unfair treatment of his former spouse and contrasts it with the privileges given his first-born son. He Zizhen half-jokingly tells Mao Anying that as the "crown prince," he must never neglect to meet his father's great expectations. The son, however, is less concerned with power than with his search for a mother and father. Having lost his biological mother, he vainly urges his father to come to the aid of his stepmother. After exhibiting great valor in the war, Anying is warmly congratulated by Stalin, whom he worships both as a world leader and as a surrogate father. This father of the revolutionary world, we nevertheless learn, dispatches his own son to the battlefield and orders the arrest of his daughter-in-law as soon as he hears of his son's capture by the German army. Stalin asserts that his rule of



punishing prisoners of war (and thus possible traitors) as well as their relations should be enforced even if it means imprisoning a family member.

Mao Anying probably ended by seeing in his surrogate father something of his own father, whose indifference might be justified on the basis of the noble course he was steering for the country. Upon Mao Anying's return to China, Mao Zedong flatly rejects his son's request for a command position in the army and orders him to go down to the countryside to be reeducated by the local peasants. Mao Anying pleads with Mao as a son eager to live his own life, not as an imperial heir waiting for his royal orders; he tells his father of the heartbreaking farewell in prison with his mother, whose last wish was that he grow up to equal his father on the battlefield. "I am your father," Mao still insists. "Although there is much that you learned in the Soviet Union, you have no idea how drastically different are the social realities of our two countries!" Dispirited, Mao Anying continues to plead that Mao make it possible for his stepmother to return home: "Aunt He has been shut up in an asylum for almost five years. Isn't it about time we get her back home?" Regarded from this vantage point, the play might be characterized as falling between what Herbert Linderberger defined as a "tyrant play" and a "martyr play," because it depicts Mao Anying and his stepmother as two martyrs who sacrificed their lives for Mao, the father figure, and were tyrannized by him in the process.<sup>58</sup> The characterization of He Zizhen as an angry Nora who slammed the door in the face of an indifferent Mao in *Jiang Qing and her Husbands* perhaps presented as well the perspective of Jiang Qing, who had cast herself as yet another Nora, most recently imprisoned in Mao's doll house.

Never staged, *Jiang Qing and her Husbands* did not have to brave scrutiny for its possible effect on a culture's reception of its revolutionary leaders. This was probably fortunate, for Mao in this play is more "human" than in any other leader play before and after it. Mao is shown in his

private life as a rustic peasant leader who craves unhealthy fatty pork, dances awkwardly, does not enjoy kissing women on the lips, and cannot even say the words "I love you." In fact, the stark contrast between a peasant-like Mao and a "sophisticated," Westernized Jiang Qing can be construed as the symbolic, unceasing power struggle between Chinese intellectuals and the laboring people they tried to please, only to be rejected by the latter for not really being one of them. The dichotomies between countryside and city, man and woman, society and individual, tradition and modernity, and East and West constantly shift position and ultimately propel the development of the dramatic conflicts in the play. The characterization of Mao as a patriarch who was cut from the same cloth as his Chinese and Western forefathers, and the display of his helplessness and frustration in dealing with Jiang Qing, also present a dynamic interplay between revolutionary history, disruptive drama, and rebellious women, which might be resorted to as strategies for cultural suppression and cultural liberation. Thus the playwright's world can be studied as a crucial arena for political theater, in which history was written and rewritten according to the latest transmission of knowledge and power. It is in this sense that we can truly redeem early post-Mao revolutionary leader plays, which were soon deemed as too political to be worth studying. Indeed, one could read them as precursor texts to *Jiang Qing and her Husbands*. The Yang Kaihui plays, for instance, can be seen as earlier acts in a sequence of the revolutionary history plays of the first family in the PRC. When one woman replaces another in Mao's doll's house, she brought upon herself merely the invitation to stand in trial for her man's past.

#### **4) *Black Stones: The Politics of Representing the Proletariat***

As seen in the above discussion, Chinese drama, especially in the PRC period, has often been characterized as too politically laden to warrant serious study. The politics of representation

on the Chinese stage, however, evokes ideological critiques in other cultures such as Plato's politically centered criticism of theater. According to Plato, the proper battle for theater consists in the ancient debate between the philosophical king, devoted to serving the interests and values of the ideal state, and the immoral poet, whose appeal to and expression of unhealthy emotions supposedly invalidate it. As did ancient Athens, the Chinese socialist state has also banished questionable dramatists who were considered dangerous for conducting an anti-official discourse against the moral values of the ideal state.

Derived from Marx's sociopolitical theories, "ideal drama" is understood to depict the inevitable historical process in which the proletarian heroes, as George Lukács later saw it, express typical class struggle contradictions that are apparent in the typical circumstances of their time.<sup>59</sup> Drama's most important verisimilitude draws from the social reality as seen from the perspective of the proletariat, while exposing the evils of contemporary society and expressing the oppressed classes' lofty ideals. If the proletariat's cause is to be advanced, the language and artistic style of drama must not cater to the pleasures and tastes of the elite but be fashioned so as to be comprehensible and accessible to the multitude. Ideally, the representational triangular relationship should be such that it always favors the representation *of* the proletariat, *by* artists who understand them, and *for* the additional benefit of readers who uphold and appreciate their values.

In becoming one of the most important categories of Chinese drama, proletariat theater was further subdivided into the "worker play," the "peasant play," and the "soldier play," or together known as "worker-peasant-soldier play (*gong-nong-bing xiju*). Because it both illustrated the Maoist theory of socialist realism and a continuous theatrical tradition, PRC literary historians interpreted Tian Han's one-act play, *The Raining Season (Meiyu)*, as one of the

earliest plays in Republican China.<sup>60</sup> In depicting the woes of a poor worker's family, Tian was said to have represented the darkness of the old society and the workers' inevitable insurrection against those in power.<sup>61</sup> Such stories became popular in the early years of the PRC, as demonstrated in *Number Six Gate (Liuhaomen)* written in 1950.<sup>62</sup> The play painted the miserable life of the porters in the Tianjin train station before 1949 and then showed their new life after liberation, when they became masters of their own lives and country under CCP leadership. The play greatly appealed to audiences and was later adapted into a film and a Peking opera. *A Wish of Forty Years (Sishinian de yuanwang)* produced in 1953 departed the simple conflict between poor workers and their oppressors before liberation and presented the more complex confrontation between an engineer and workers in the PRC. Supported by the party and army representatives, workers criticized the engineer for being too conservative in his blueprints for building the Chengdu-Chongqing railroad. With the help of the experts from the Soviet Union, the workers succeeded in completing the railroad in two years, in time to present it as a gift to celebrate an anniversary of the CCP founding and to fulfill the long-held wishes of people in Sichuan.

This play reflects the new theme of re-educating intellectuals whose pre-Liberation trainings became a liability in the new society. This theme found its best expression in another worker's play, *Braving the Torrent (Jiliu yongjin)* in 1963, in which a former worker became a steel factory vice president after having been trained as a new intellectual, at once politically trustworthy and technologically up-to-date. Despite its dogmatism, the play, directed by Huang Zuolin and premiered by Shanghai People's Art Theater in 1963, occupied a special place in the theater history as one of the very few Brechtian productions in the 1949-1966 period.<sup>63</sup> In addition to using a narrator to introduce the background of different characters, Huang employed

multiple scenes on stage to dramatize various events occurring at the same time. The most memorable scenes includes the one where the protagonist rushes home in a roaring train in the background while his fellow workers wait for his homecoming in the center stage. In another scene, the protagonist tested the probability of a new plan in front of a steel furnace while others discussed it at a meeting. Such a fluid use of theatrical space attempted to create a new image of a worker leader, at once practical and knowledgeable.

While *Braving the Torrent* experimented with dramatic techniques to represent new workers in socialist China, other worker's plays reminded their audiences of the heroic pre-Liberation history before 1949. *Red Storm* (*Hongse fengbao*, 1958), for instance, dramatized the famous 1923 Beijing-Hankou railroad strikes, organized by the workers' union with CCP underground party members and brutally suppressed by warlords and their foreign supporters.<sup>64</sup> The class conflict between haves and have-nots pointed to the anti-imperialist theme still found on the PRC stage. Premiered in 1958, *Red Storm* ran for 273 shows, as an unparalleled hit with record-breaking ticket sales. Nevertheless the play was later attacked during the Cultural Revolution for failing to represent workers exclusively. Its characters included a lawyer who provided legal advice to workers, but he was still considered a member of the petty bourgeois. It also hindered a dramatization of the typical contradictions of the time through the class struggle between workers and their oppressors, with a typical hero of the proletariat to lead the masses in circumstances typifying the Republican China.

In the 1960s, on the eve of the Cultural Revolution, the focus in worker's plays shifted to alert the younger generation of workers to "never forget" their revolutionary history. Specifically, this means "never to forget class struggle" is socialist China as expressed in the title of Cong Shen's play *Never Forget* (*Qianwan buyao wangji*).<sup>65</sup> First performed by Harbin Theater in 1964

and frequently produced throughout the country, *Never Forget* concerns the dilemma of a young worker, whose marriage to a beautiful woman introduced him to a “bourgeois life style” under the influence of his mother-in-law. Such a “corrupt” life style saw him purchase a new wool suit, which cost 148 *yuan* and was paid through the money raised in the course of hunting for wild ducks in his spare time. The class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeois persisted even in a worker’s family. The link between the revolutionary heritage and one’s own family played an even larger role in *Three Generations (Sandai ren)*, performed by the China Youth Art Theater in 1963. During the Cultural Revolution in 1970, it became better known in its model Peking opera version as *The Red Lantern (Hongdeng ji)*.<sup>66</sup> Set during the War of Resistance to Japan, *The Red Lantern* narrates the story of Li Yuhe, a poor railway worker who adopts a mother and an orphan girl, whose family members had been murdered during the Beijing-Hankou railway workers' strikes. In contrast to *Red Storm*, with its masses of striking workers, *The Red Lantern* focuses on the fortunes of a single family. Li Yuhe and his adopted mother are captured, tortured, and finally executed by a Japanese police chief. Carrying out the last wishes of her father and grandmother, Li Tiemei, Li Yuhe's adopted daughter, succeeds in sending secret codes to the CCP guerrillas. With this simple story line, *The Red Lantern* ingeniously denied blood relationships—the basis of families in all cultures--while extending their hierarchical and cohesive structure to the creation of "one big revolutionary family," whose members share class interests as they struggle against their common enemies.

Using a similar strategy, other model plays constructed a global discourse of "world revolution." Peking opera *On the Docks (Haigang, 1972)* portrayed the working class in 1960s Shanghai, where the daily loading and unloading of rice seeds on ships to the outside world was said to have greatly aided the liberation of Third World peoples oppressed by Western

imperialism and colonialism.<sup>67</sup> The opera claimed that Western imperialists had attempted to stop African peoples from experimenting with growing rice, thus making them dependent on Western foreign aid. The heroes and heroines in these model plays were held up as role models for the "revolutionary masses" during the height of the Cultural Revolution, which was said to have world revolution as its ultimate goal.

While Maoist theater presented a teleological view of history perpetrated by inevitable class struggle, post-Maoist theater challenged this paradigm. An important example is *Winter Jasmine* (*Baochunhua*, 1979), an early and popular anti-Gang of Four plays.<sup>68</sup> It recounts the class discrimination endured by Bai Jie, a young female textile-factory worker, because of her politically incorrect family origins. Her father had been declared a counterrevolutionary for having worked for the KMT government before 1949, and her mother was condemned as a rightist for having challenged in 1957 the CCP's radical policies. The introduction of a Bai Jie to the Chinese stage signaled a historic turn, for even before the Cultural Revolution, when the party's policies were less rigid and dogmatic, postrevolutionary plays seldom had protagonists from questionable class backgrounds. The ban had extended to all works of literature and art, in order, it was said, to best serve the interests of the party, the working people, and the proletarian revolutionary cause.

If *Winter Jasmine* redeems a model worker from a politically incorrect family to denounce the extreme class politics that peaked during the Cultural Revolution, *Fashionable Red Skirts in the Street* (*Jieshang liuxing hongqunzi*, 1986) questions the very value of the "model worker" system in the Mao era. Tao Xing'er, a model worker just like Bai Jie, is confused by her title. Although expected to love her factory as her own home, she spends her precious time preparing for a university entry examination. She also purchases a "fashionable" red skirt, which

leads her boss to chastise her for displaying “bourgeois taste.” When her father, after years of separation, finds her through a newspaper story on her model worker’s deeds, her image embarrasses her and she rejects his love. The play dramatizes a divided self who struggles to free herself from the “glorious” tradition of the working class to become a woman true to her own desires. The play exposes the hypocrisy of the class issues in Maoist and post-Maoist China. In a socialist country where there was no significant gap between the wealthy and the poor, class issues seldom revolved around economic circumstances but centered on the discourse of power to promote the political agenda of the ruling class.

The problematic nature of the representation of the workers is best illustrated in Yang Limin's *Black Stones* (*Heise de shitou*, 1986),<sup>69</sup> one of the best-received dramas of the late 1980s. Labeled as a "neorealistic" play, *Black Stones* reworks the Maoist claim of protecting the welfare of the workers. Premiered by Daqing Theatre (Daqing shi huanjutuan) in 1987, the play depicts the hardships and suffering of petroleum workers, no longer portrayed as proud masters of socialist China. In spite of the dark view of the workers’ lives, however, *Black Stones* was unanimously applauded by cultural officials, drama critics, and the audiences of various background.

*Black Stones* is best appreciated when set against PRC literary tradition, which stressed the heroic spirit of the working class. Many Chinese people in the early 1960s were familiar with the stories of legendary petroleum workers who forged China's first proletarian industry in the wilderness known as Daqing. *Black Stones* astonished post-Maoist audiences with its bleak description of workers and their daily fatigue in the "most barbarous" wilderness.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, the very image of black color in the title of the play contrasts sharply with that of red color in *Red Storm* and *The Red Lantern*, allusions to revolutionary zeal and heroic heritage for a lofty course.



Rarely could one find the familiar characters who had combated nature and class enemies. In a messy camp cabin, one hears the sad story of Veteran, an oil-rig builder who nine years before left behind his wife in his remote hometown, because he had no idea how to manage the red tape that would have approved her transfer. It should be noted that although the play is set in contemporary times, Veteran is depicted as a typical model worker of the 1960s--disciplined, diligent, and uncomplaining.

Veteran's basic honesty is ironically pointed out when he spends the greater part of a day wandering fruitlessly around the administrative building, not knowing which door to enter to deliver his gifts. At a subsequent meeting called to criticize his unlawful act, he apologizes wholeheartedly for his “terribly shameful” behavior, whereby he failed to live up to the expectations the party had of him as a veteran. Although a victim of the system, he still is loyal to it, blaming himself for letting it down and not even contemplating that it might have let *him* down. This story, of course, typifies that of many nameless veterans who fought in the war for the CCP and was sent, after 1949, to reclaim the virgin land in the remote Northeast, far away from his hometown. Like Veteran in the play, many of these men volunteered to relocate to the wilderness without knowing what was in store for them and what they stood to lose.

To drive home what Maoist history meant for the workers, *Black Stones* has another character, a Captain Qin, who personifies the revolutionary heritage that Daqing workers helped to create in the 1960s. For him, opposing this heritage would discredit his life-long sacrifices and his stories of a glorious past. Holding on to his heritage allows Captain Qin to make sense of his past. He is prepared to die, forever faithful, at his post--the drilling ground where he belongs—rather than ever violate his tradition. Belatedly identifying with him, they commemorate him most meaningfully perhaps by erecting a national monument to the veteran workers, who were

victims of socialist history. For this play to be accepted on a still socialist stage in 1987 and bypass censorship required the help of a character, Lin Jian, the new secretary of the Party Committee of the Exploration Corporation. He represents the party's new policy in post-Maoist China of seeing to workers' welfare, which the previous regime had neglected, and his ploy of living and working among the workers without revealing his identity until the end suggests what they might hope for from the next generation of leadership. This device of creating a new party secretary to protect a play from being branded harmful to the regime in power was employed in several post-Maoist plays.

It is fitting to recall here that in the 1960s, Chinese theatrical discourse denied any need for scripting tragedy, which was only required for plays depicting the deadly class struggle between workers and their oppressors in the pre-PRC period, when revolutionary setbacks could give temporary victory to the reactionaries and result in the tragic death of the proletarian heroes. During the post-Maoist theater debate, however, some critics rescued tragedy by pointing out that it was a legitimate form for current plays, which were now allowed to focus on the tragic flaws of individuals without referring to society as the cause of their fall.<sup>71</sup> To validate post-Maoist ideology, tragedy was also permitted to depict the Chinese people's struggles against the Gang of Four or other Maoist radicals, who, for a limited period of time, caused tragedy to overtake socialist China.

*Black Stones* seems to bestride this duality with great effectiveness. On the one hand, Captain Qin's death occasions tragic sublimity; on the other, it is blamed on the residual Gang-of-Four radical ideology, which ignored the workers' interests, a situation that Lin, as the new party leader, promises to redress. As we have seen, Lin does not reveal himself until very late in the play--when his official status is needed to authorize the order for a helicopter to save Captain

Qin's life. This type of official character holds out the promise of a new, more responsive regime and revalidates the idea of the "savior of the people" embodied in the old socialist system. In this case, however, the "savior" might have materialized too late. Not only had the audience already been exposed to Veteran's and Captain's disillusioning stories, but they were also likely to sympathize with Jubilee, another "little man," whose life exhibits even more marginalization than that of his peers. An orphan of a veteran roughneck killed in an accident in the 1960s, Jubilee thinks of the team as his home. Returning from a dangerous journey and in search of cigarettes and wine for his fellow workers, Jubilee cannot believe that Blackie, his master and trusted friend, has killed his pet--an injured wild goose Jubilee rescued. Blackie had gone after the animal in a fit of rage after being criticized by the authorities for loving Phoenix, a married woman from the nearby town. Knowing this does not console Jubilee, who cries out in desperation and anguish: "Why on earth can't you let live a little thing like this!" It is at this point that the meaning of "Jubilee" comes into full play: literally defined as "little celebration," the word pays tribute to numerous little men like Jubilee whose sacrifices and sorrow must be remembered. It also questions the image of "Daqing" (literally, "grand celebration"), which, after years of "painstaking and arduous effort," still is a godforsaken wilderness.

The play does not end with Lin's revelation, nor with Captain's Qin's death. Rather, it concludes with a denouement that leaves one uncertain as to what will happen to Blackie and his lover Phoenix, who has just joined him after having murdered the husband who brutally abused her. The team having departed on time for a new construction site with the new party secretary in the lead, Blackie and Phoenix are left alone on stage. Their embracing bodies appear deserted and vulnerable, as an insignificant couple barely surviving at the margin of a culture. Although the invention of the Lin character prevented the play from being attacked as an unhealthy tragedy,

many audience members might feel free to ask themselves: who is to blame for these tragic events that occur not just on stage, not just before the smashing of the Gang of Four, but now, every day? Thus protected by ambiguities and a double discourse, this desolate play was received as one of the most successful works of the post-Maoist theater.

After *Black Stones*, the worker's play in post-Maoist China almost disappeared. Indeed, the play could be seen as worker's theater's swan song, since this kind of drama no longer attracted much of an audience, as box office sales clearly showed. In a society that no longer cast class differences as the driving force for historical change, the stories of the working class had lost their power. The representation of workers in Maoist and post-Maoist theaters was problematic, despite its attempt to honor workers. Nevertheless a price is paid when theater no longer address contemporary issues in the lives of ordinary people. One wonders what Chinese contemporary theater would look like if it turned its attention to the stories of the urban poor who recently lost their jobs in government factories. One wonders, also, what contributions post-socialist societies could make to cultural production, especially to the dramatic genres, which cannot survive in local communities without making strong conscious effort to link with the mass audience.

##### **5) *Wild Grass*: The Space between the Country and the City**

If *Black Stones* is noteworthy for rewriting workers' history, *Wild Grass* (Yecao, 1995) should be credited for taking up the fate of the peasants. Chinese theater's fascination with rural life has a different dimension from that in the West, where some writers glorify it as the images of romantic exile, Mao saw the countryside as the most important site of revolution, which would eventually surround and overwhelm the cities. In postrevolutionary days, Lin Biao, Mao's chosen

successor during the Cultural Revolution, promoted the idea that the exploited and colonized nations of the Third World were the “countryside of the world.” When they united, they could eventually surround and conquer the evil “cities of the world,” the United States and the Soviet Union. By this construct, the economic poverty of the Third World was equated with the fate of the Chinese peasants and assigned the term *rural*, if not *primitive*, in the world arena. This concept imputed that the countries in question possessed enormous capacity, motivation, and desire for revolutionary changes to these nations when confronted by their highly industrialized “others.”

This exploitation of the image of an impoverished rural life also served the May Fourth playwrights' agenda of constructing a suffering people in need of a new nation. A case in point is Tian Han's play *The Night a Tiger Was Captured* (*Huohu zhi ye*), which depicts a peasant girl's entrapment by her patriarchal family where Confucian doctrines demand total obedience to parental will.<sup>72</sup> The peasant girl is told that if a tiger is captured that night, it will be claimed for her dowry so she can be married off to a well-to-do family. However, the seriously wounded “tiger” in the mountain trap is found to be the young girl's secret lover, who kills himself later in the play to protest her father's actions. The fierce tiger in the play, symbolizing wild territories far from civilization, evokes the ghost-haunted house in *Breaking out of Ghost Pagoda* (*Dachu Youlingta*), written in 1928 by the female playwright Bai Wei.<sup>73</sup> Bai's play suggests that the large home of a rich landlord is like an evil-filled pagoda, from which a brave, Nora-like concubine breaks out in search of freedom. It also relates to a much more devastating story: a mother returning “home” from afar and a daughter trapped at home wage a fierce battle against patriarchal society, represented by a domineering, lustful father in his country home and by a new-nationalist “father” already corrupted by the revolution that was intended to eliminate the

Confucian father. The death of the daughter in her mother's arms at the conclusion of Bai Wei's play signifies how any escape from the traditions presiding over both the country and the city is practically impossible.

Critiqued as possibly countering the spirit of the May Fourth tradition, Ouyang Yuqian's *Homecoming* (*Huijia yihou*) expanded the binary oppositions between the country and the city to those between the Chinese tradition and Western influence.<sup>74</sup> Upon returning home after years of education abroad, a Chinese student finds himself more attracted to the virtuous wife obtained through an arranged marriage than to the nagging mistress brought back from America. This portrayal of rural Hunan province as a haven of domestic happiness and spiritual replenishment marks a turning point for Chinese dramatists: they were reflecting on the negative impact of the Western experience while trying to come to terms with some of the traditional values in rural life. In *Homecoming*, China has been transformed into a sort of peaceful utopia with no sense of urgency about surrounding the evil cities of the world, as Lin Biao would prescribe later on. It is a "peach blossom spring," an idyllic landscape free of warfare, worldly concerns, and unfulfilled missions.

Before and during the War of Resistance to Japan, the Chinese countryside also served as an essential backdrop for drama. It did so, in this case, for the wartime drama that was promoted and reached its peak in August 1937 when twelve National Salvation Drama Troupes traveled throughout the country to perform. Chen Liting and others' *Put Down Your Whip* (*Fangxia nide bianzi*),<sup>75</sup> one of the best-known wartime plays, presents a starving daughter being whipped by her helpless, tearful father, while others urge him to put down his whip and join in the national effort against the Japanese invaders. The play then relates their miserable journey on foot from the city of Shenyang to the countryside of the Northeast to escape the brutal occupying troops.

Some lines were meant to incite responses from the audience, and the play was frequently performed outdoors, which mark it as an important work in the tradition of Chinese street theater. The image of the country as an escape from the city, as well as the open space where dramatists and soldiers could unite to bolster resistance against foreign troops, became a familiar trope in subsequent plays. In this sense, Mao's conception of the countryside as the place for rallying revolutionary energies and the nationalist spirit at times of crisis found its best expression.

The idea of the country as an arena for revolution received further elaboration on stage in the "liberated area" occupied by the CCP, especially in Yan'an, the party headquarters. Here dramatists, influenced by Mao Zedong's famous "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" (1942), attempted to create a "national form" of theater, drawing inspiration from the commoners' experiences and from folk dance and drama. This body of work culminated in the Yan'an drama *White-Haired Girl* (*Baimaoni*), a folk opera that premiered in April 1945.<sup>76</sup> In the play, the poor peasant girl Xi'er has escaped from a vicious landlord who had had her father beaten to death for failing to repay his debts. She survives in a mountain cave as a wild person whose hair has turned white. Only with the arrival of the CCP can she be rescued from her ghostly existence and take her revenge. Demonstrating how the old society turned a human being into a ghost and the new society turned a ghost back into a human being, *White-Haired Girl* reportedly met with great enthusiasm in the liberated areas during the 1940s. Consequently, it was often performed at mass meetings in rural regions in order to raise the peasants' "class consciousness" and set them against class enemies such as the vicious landlord. Xi'er's past, her suffering, and her aspirations constituted a potent aid in constructing a new Chinese nation and socialist state, which held out the promise of equality and freedom for peasants.

The Chinese countryside as an essential part of the world-revolutionary scheme reached

its climax with the revolutionary model theater to promote proletariat arts during the Cultural Revolution, as in *Song of the Dragon River (Longjiang song)*.<sup>77</sup> Set in 1963, this Peking opera depicts the dilemma of peasants from the Dragon River Brigade who must abide by the county party committee's decision to dam the Dragon River in order to save a drought-ridden area. When the peasants are asked to flood their own land so as to channel water onto the area, a dramatic conflict develops around the collective interest of one peripheral local community, whose members have repeatedly been asked to relinquish their personal aspirations for the good of the nation. The opera uses the narrative of a "bitterness story" about the "old society" to contrast the latter with the "loving and caring government" of socialist China, whose demand that one local community sacrifice to save another is shown to be justified. By such measures, the opera shows that China can become a powerful nation capable of championing revolutionary movements in Third World countries, where the remote "brothers and sisters" that make up the oppressed classes may draw inspiration from the Chinese revolution. Thus in this work, the most isolated and rural part of China have direct links to the outside world by dint of the local ideals of the Cultural Revolution. The opera could be said to function as the ultimate blueprint for Mao's theory of the relationship between the Chinese countryside and city.

If the peasant plays of Maoist China romanticized the socialist countryside for the purpose of constructing a utopia, post-Maoist theater presented a primitive place not unlike the oppressive mountain village and ghost house in the May Fourth plays. This subversive rewriting of history appears in *Sangshuping Chronicles (Sangshuping jishi)*, known for its successful experimentation with some of the conventions of Greek theater.<sup>78</sup> Set in Sangshuping, an isolated village in northwest China, it relates the tragic as well as commonplace which has remained unchanged for thousands of years in its poverty, ignorance, sexual suppression, and brutal



patriarchal structure. Nowhere is there a trace of any liberated peasants longing to participate in world revolution in socialist China. The play exemplified a literary and dramatic trend known as "meditation on the historical and cultural past," which sought to discover the roots of political upheavals such as the Cultural Revolution. The play attempted, in the words of its directors, to display a "living fossil," embodying the cultural and historical sediments of the past five thousand years, in order to call for real changes in contemporary China. Thus once more, Chinese intellectuals' writing and performing on the city stage, seemingly in the voice of the peasants, created a rural China that badly needed the cultural reforms first advocated in May Fourth theater.

The conflict between city and countryside was revived, to great effect, in the production of *Wild Grass*, written by Zhang Mingyuan, a woman playwright from northeast China. In a turnabout of the old literary theme of "braving the journey to the Northeast (*Chuang Guandong*)," which depicted the plight of countryside paupers before 1949 who traveled beyond the Shanhaiguan mountain pass to eke out a hardscrabble existence in the Northeast, the play presents woes endured during an era of economic reform, when greed in the modern city inevitably broke down traditional values. As a realist drama, it also depicted the radical changes occurred in the countryside in the 1980s, when, after having abolished the collective farming system, many peasants left their impoverished villages behind and migrated to the cities as temporary workers in search of a better life.

Zhang Mingyuan's theme is the growing alienation of Fourth, a poor man from the countryside who subsequently becomes a rich man in the city. He made his fortune by abandoning in his home village the woman he loved and seeking out a loveless match with a crippled woman, so he can trade favors with her uncle, who sets him up with important job

opportunities, a permanent urban residence, and a comfortable housing arrangement. Addicted to making money, Fourth is also drawn to other urban evils, such as prostitution, bribery, and corruption, which finally cause him to be sent to prison. By the end of the play, Erqin, the woman Fourth loves, is planning to marry another man, who ironically has taken over Fourth's job as overseer of a construction company. Furthermore, he will live in a bigger city and build a fancier hotel than did Lao Si. Overcome with loneliness, Erqin senses that as her new lover tries to enrich himself, he is bound to repeat the mistakes of Fourth, who sacrificed everything once meaningful to him in his determination to make a fortune. She foresees waiting another five years just to be deserted and victimized again by her second lover, thus, the end of her pointless journey from the country to the city in search of love.

The play shows how women's bodies are turned into commodities and men become alienated from their former selves. It also represents a dramatist's attempts to probe into the life and aspirations of the new millionaires while highlighting the marginalized status of art and artists in a commercialized society. The plaint of the artist comes through when Fourth, in his new role of famous "entrepreneur of peasant origin (*nongmin qiyejia*)," announces proudly at a press conference that his company has decided to earmark 70,000 *Yuan* for a television program to demonstrate his support of the arts.<sup>79</sup> In the process of depicting the nouveaux riches as art patrons, the dramatist avails herself of the opportunity to gain fame.

Yet the same situation, from another angle, conveys hope that perhaps art can somehow be salvaged, not by the empty promises of the state government but by the good offices of wealthy people with aspirations for gaining prestige as benefactors of the arts. Their craving for recognition in the realm of the spiritual and the artistic, now that they have mastered the materialistic world, is yet another important facet of life that realist-oriented illusionist theater

can skillfully represent. Furthermore, the fact that Fourth's donation goes to a television station, which can return the favor via TV commercials, rather than to a theater, where the ideal of “pure” art is still sometimes pursued, could also be seen as a commentary on the fragile attempts to save art by entrepreneurs whose materialism has often placed them in opposition to art.

With its contemporary setting in the Northeast and linear plot covering a time span of several months, this piece of theater attempts to isolate certain dramatic events for audiences who are lured into believing that they are watching the lives of other people as if through a keyhole-- that is, without the people knowing they are being observed. Besides its strong ties to the precepts of illusionist theater, *Wild Grass* has also (to a lesser degree) inherited some peculiarities of indigenous theater, which draws on local dialects and idioms of northeastern China in order to vividly and faithfully portray the people from a particular geographical region. In this regard, *Wild Grass* presents itself as a “sister play” to *Black Stones*, sharing with it a local setting and flavor of northeastern China, in addition to its “sisterhood” of a peasant play to its “relative” genre of the worker play *Black Stones*. Northeastern theater (*Dongbei xiju*) falls short when compared with the most influential indigenous theater, the Beijing-style plays. Nevertheless, *Wild Grass*'s urgent concern with the social problems accompanying a rapidly industrializing society has continued to be a magnet for modern audiences. Its converging space between the city and the countryside—and the inseparable fate of both workers and peasants as struggling victims—radically departs from Mao's theory of the Chinese countryside, Third World revolution, and their anticipated roles in the writing of human history.

## 6) *Green Barracks: Androgyny, Cross-Dressing, and Masquerade in Contemporary Chinese Theater*

Besides the worker and peasant plays, the modern Chinese stage also features the "soldier play." The earliest soldier play can be traced back to Hong Shen's *Yama Zhao* (*Zhao Yanwang*) an experimental theater from the Shakespearean open-form. Focus on the male leads had been called for during the war period, as illustrated in the theater productions of the Red Army's Soldier's Drama Troupe (*Zhanshi jushe*) in the Jiangxi Soviet. The plays that arose from this source include *August Uprising* (*Bayi Nachang qiye*) performed in 1933, and *The Snow on Lu Mountain* (*Lushan zhi xue*) in 1933. The latter play enlisted amateur actors and actresses to depict their own real-life roles of soldiers and commanders as a stratagem to raise the morale of their peers. Even more remarkably, high ranking Red Army commanders participated in the performance of this play, with Luo Ruiqing, a top CCP commander, playing the part of Chiang Kai-shek, the generalissimo of the KMT and arch-villain of wartime drama. This tradition of male leads persisted in PRC theater with Hu Ke's *Growing up in the Battlefield* (*Zhandou li chengzhang*).<sup>80</sup> It centered on a family reunion, brought about after son and father, who had been kept apart by a rich landlord's exploitation, discovered each other while fighting side by side in the same army unit. The characters' hard-won happiness intended to elucidate the necessity of the Chinese Communist revolution, which had supposedly liberated poor families from miserable circumstances. Illuminating a different angle of the same proposition, Chen Qitong's *Rivers and Mountains* (*Wanshui qianshan*) dramatized the epic Long March with its panoramic view of the hardships the Red Army had to overcome.<sup>81</sup> The Red Army unit became a symbolic family that exemplified how one might take care of one's comrades as though they were dearer than one's own flesh and blood.

Consisting of a preponderantly male cast, however, the revolutionary family—although newly constructed in contrast to the traditional family hierarchy—remained patriarchal, with the CCP party leader forming the head of the new “household.”

In spite of its predominant male cast, *Soldiers under Neon Light* (*Nihungdeng xia de shaobing*) represented a departure by virtue of its vivid female character.<sup>82</sup> Chunni is the loving spouse of a soldier from the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) stationed in early post-liberation Shanghai, where imperialist and bourgeois influence is considered rampant. Chunni comes to the aid of her husband who, faltering in his revolutionary ardor, doubts his rural identity and resents the simple lifestyle in which he once took pride. During a visit to his army unit in Shanghai, Chunni reminds her husband of his bitter past before he threw his lot in with the revolution, and she relays to him the great strides made in their home village toward building a new socialist countryside, to which she has enthusiastically devoted herself. In one of the most celebrated scenes of any PRC soldier’s play, her tender voice is heard off-stage reading the letter she has written his superior, in which she asks him to help her revive his revolutionary spirit. Her concern for her husband’s affection is seen as encompassing her unwavering faith in the revolutionary cause, thus rendering her at once a new, socialist woman with a broad vision and the “virtuous wife” mandated by the prerevolutionary Confucian tradition. Despite her revolutionary traits, a female character like Chunni serves to confirm the persistent patriarchal values of the society.

The female protagonists of dramas up to this point were mostly domestic caretakers. However, the film version of *The Red Detachment of Women* (*Hongse niangzijun*), which was the precursor for the “revolutionary model ballet” of the same title, presented a different picture. Promoted during the Cultural Revolution as the quintessential proletariat art, unlike the

bourgeois art said to have dominated the PRC stage even after 1949, *The Red Detachment of Women* became the most representative of the soldier's plays, thanks to its combination of the themes of military mobilization and women's liberation. But before proceeding to a close reading of this play and its parody, *Green Barracks*, we should ask why female leads began to be seen in soldier's plays. One could, of course, talk about the imperial roots in the traditional tale (and operatic repertoire) of *Mu Lan Joining the Army* (*Mu Lan cong jun*), the story of a filial daughter cross-dressing as a male soldier to fulfill her father's military duty. Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Women Warrior* and the Disney movie of *Mu Lan* represented the story's contemporary appeals to transnational audiences. What issues, however, within the context of modern Chinese culture having to do with gender relationships and nationalism could require the presence of women soldiers on the Chinese stage?

Among many reasons, one clue can be found in Lu Xun's critique of Mei Lanfang's performance tour in America in 1930.<sup>83</sup> At a time when modern Chinese writers were seeking efficient means of crafting a strong nation, Lu Xun was troubled by the warm reception given Mei's performances, in which he displayed his uncanny skill at acting female roles. Mei Lanfang was promoted as the most illustrious actor from Peking opera, and his work in his Western debut was felt to represent the national art of China (*guoju*). Mei's performance in America and Japan, Lu Xun believed, suggested not the spreading of Mei's fame, and by extension, of the "light" of Chinese tradition, but the ending of such a "glory."<sup>84</sup> As is well known, Mei won particular plaudits for *The Drunken Honored Consort* (*Guifei zuijiu*) and *Farewell my Concubine* (*Bawang bieji*). In the former, Mei played the tearful Yang Guifei, reduced to drowning her sorrows in solitary drinking after learning that the Tang emperor Xuanzong (r. 712-756) was disporting himself with another concubine in the Western Palace. The latter depicted the concubine Yu,

who, after dancing one last time for her defeated lord Xiang Yu, impaled herself on a sword to prove to him the depth of her love. Both works celebrate the Confucian ethics of “*zhongjun*,” or loyalty to one’s sovereign, while setting forth the stereotypical traits of courtly women: obedience, patience, selflessness, passivity, and, at times, a reflexive readiness to sacrifice for imperial father figures. *Farewell my Concubine* is also known for its misogynist view that women, the source of evil, lead men away from their proper duties.

Lu Xun’s remark that Mei Lanfang’s “fame” was redounding to the Chinese people’s shame is best understood in this context. In an earlier essay published in 1924, Lu Xun had already criticized the androgynous and cross-dressing features of Mei’s performance. What was it about a Chinese man playing an elegant woman that so entranced his audiences? How is it that “the most noble, most eternal, and most universal” art in China “is the art of men acting as women”?<sup>85</sup> Was it because Mei played a set of androgynous, hence, mediocre personages without firm principles, distinctive personalities, and even gender identities? Was it possible that Lu Xun viewed Mei’s theater art as expressing one of the chronic ills of the Chinese national character?<sup>86</sup>

Anxious to see the emergence of a strong China, Lu Xun might not have considered a feminized man a fitting symbol for the nation. Surely China should not be imagined as a passive woman, an object of desire without her own agency to be penetrated. Lu Xun could not have known, however, that Mei’s performance in Moscow in 1935 would inspire Brecht to form his theory of “alienation effect,” which challenged and reinvigorated Western dramatic art. Nor could he have predicted the success on Broadway of David Huang’s *M. Butterfly*, in which an actor from Peking opera cross-dressed as a woman in life as well as on stage, thus reversing the stereotype of a passive Oriental (Japanese) woman submitting to a strong Western man, as so

expressed in the familiar story of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. For Lu Xun, androgyny and cross-dressing were political acts evoking a nation without a will of its own. Most pertinently in the 1930s China, Lu Xun's critique against androgyny fit into his larger concerns of national salvation of China, endangered by foreign powers as well as by the Chinese people's own inability to break away from their traditional culture, represented in its most decadent guise by operatic theater.

Lu Xun's fear of a feminized China is echoed in the PRC soldier's plays in which women warriors come to the fore. In these plays not only can China not be feminized but neither can women themselves. As demonstrated in *The Red Detachment of Women*, the total mobilization of the Chinese nation necessarily drew on the energy of women, and in this setting androgyny and cross-dressing came into play. Based on an authentic account of a women's detachment that waged war against local despots, the model ballet highlighted the transformation of Wu Qinghua from ex-slave to woman warrior. It was in the film version, released before the Cultural Revolution, that the name Wu Qinghua (which means "pure and stainless China" and can apply to a man as well as a woman) replaced Wu Qionghua (the original, traditional woman's name meaning "fine jade flower"). More significantly, the implicit attraction one senses between Wu and Hong Changqing, the male party representative in this women's detachment in the earlier film version, was dropped in the ballet, thereby de-sexing Wu, the "model" woman warrior.

The name shift and the plot change alone, however, could not bring about Chinese official feminism, which always subsumes woman under the socialist agenda of Maoist China. Like many comparable revolutionary war stories, *The Red Detachment of Women* used the oppression of women before 1949 to symbolize exploitation of all other oppressed classes of both genders. The raising of Wu's class consciousness is accompanied by her quick acquisition of



soldier's skills, such as shooting targets and throwing grenades. But neither these skills nor physical strength can endow Wu with the same power as that of her male counterparts. The missing ingredient is supplied by Hong Changqing, whom the play portrays as an intellectual giant with political vision. He takes her under his wing when she is attempting to join the detachment, instructs her in revolutionary truth, and prepares her to succeed him as party secretary in the likely event of his death in battle. Most important, he convinces her to give up her obsession with wreaking revenge on the personal foe who had abused and imprisoned her. A woman warrior must first dedicate herself to liberating mankind before she can liberate herself, Hong tells Wu. Although Wu and Hong share the same poor-peasant background and thus presumably the same political status, it is the male central character, Hong, who is endowed with a discursive power that enables him to instruct the women soldiers in their duties in the public sphere. Consequently, he plays a pivotal (and patriarchal) role in their ideological transformation.

Although the play shows Wu taking on some male characteristics such as physical strength, it does not provide Hong with similar androgynous possibilities. Hong's pitching in to wash vegetables and fish with the cooks in the women's unit does not qualify, since, in the context of this soldier play, it would reflect the CCP directive that army officers integrate themselves in the ranks of ordinary soldiers by participating in the meanest of their chores. Thus Hong comes off as the ideal male model, a symbolic father figure who leads a women's detachment to victory.

What shall we make of this instance of one-sided androgyny in Chinese theater? At first sight, gender differences appear to disappear as women warriors take to the battlefield as ably and courageously as their male counterparts. But it then becomes evident--when we see that women are encouraged to be androgynous but that men's so-called male characteristics remain

inviolable--that the unequal power relationship between genders will persist.

As a critical response to the version of female liberation represented by the Maoist tradition, women playwrights like Zhang Lili rewrote the canonical soldier play. Zhang Lili's script, entitled *Green Barracks* (*Lüse yingdi*), is situated in post-Mao China when economic reforms and materialist pursuits adversely affected women's lives. It dramatizes the stories of new PLA recruits who had become disenchanted with such civilian occupations as fashion model, peasant wife, or college student. Earlier dramas by Zhang Lili and other women playwrights like Xu Yan had depicted women of a previous period of the Maoist era returning home after rejecting the public role of "liberated women" that had sometimes been imposed on them. But fulfillment tended to elude them in the materialistic climate of the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>87</sup> Like their Nora-like sisters who had left home during and after the May Fourth movement in search of new identities outside the domestic spheres, Zhang Lili's female protagonists chose to abandon the hearth in the 1990s, in order to recapture their power as women who could still "hold up half of the skies." *Green Barracks*, then, attempts to answer that same question of Lu Xun he had asked in 1924: "What happened after Nora left home?" Lu Xun wondered whether these Nora-like women who had courageously left patriarchal homes might not at some later point find themselves back home again, when they could not pursue a public career that brought economic independence.<sup>88</sup> However, although *The Red Detachment of Women* made the case for a collective soldier's career being more fulfilling than the individual search for happiness, it was left to *Green Barracks*--with its post-Mao cynicism, irony, and direct engagement with earlier traditions--to reconfirm the necessity of leaving home for Nora-like characters.

It must be said that Zhang's women warriors are no carbon copies of Bai Wei's Nora-like characters who left patriarchal homes for revolutionary careers in the 1920s.<sup>89</sup> Nor could they be

mistaken for that collective of Maoist “liberated” and “masculinized” women who contributed to advancing a single ideology before and after 1949. The location of a women's company next to a booming commercial area that has been accorded special privileges to promote a fledgling market economy discloses another aspect of the playwright's subject: the predicament of contemporary Chinese culture. For socialist ideology to demand of women that they sacrifice personal fulfillment to defend the nation makes little sense when that nation simultaneously advocates individualism and materialism to develop a capitalist economy. In this ambiguous and paradoxical milieu, Zhang's women soldiers attempt to balance their private and public roles as women and as citizens of a modern state. Not surprisingly, the transformative process into qualified women soldiers is accompanied by some frustration and disappointment. Some new recruits, for example, are censured for a weekend recreational outing to a nearby town where they hoped to relax as civilians after their strenuous basic training. Despite the hardships, the women succeed in emulating their political instructor and company commander, both of whom sacrificed motherhood and married life for military careers they believed to be more fulfilling and meaningful.

In a similar vein, Fang Xiaoshi, the female central character in *Green Barracks*, ends by renouncing her love for Sima Changjiang, the only male character in the play, so that no womanly desires will mar her as a model soldier. On the one hand, *Green Barracks* inherited the official Chinese feminist tradition depicted in *The Red Detachment of Woman*: we witness a similar object lesson of a woman who can—and should—be androgynous in service to her motherland, even in a time of peace. On the other hand, the story of frustrated love recounted in *Green Barracks* foregrounds what is absent in *The Red Detachment*. Moreover, Xiaoshi does not give Sima up without a fierce struggle. Her heated argument with her commander, in which she

asserts her right to love and to publicly express that love, can be viewed as a critique of the politics implicit in the representation of women on the Maoist stage. Unlike Wu Qinghua who blindly admires her CCP leader, Xiaoshi challenges army officials, questions their personal sacrifices, and insists on her prerogative to love a man, before finally accepting the values of her commanders.

Sima's rejection of Xiaoshi's love is an important factor in steering her away from a focus on personal happiness. In the end she is led to embrace a military career both by the example of her female superiors, who represent the demands of the culture and the public, and by the objection of her love object, whose view of women is still very much determined by the patriarchal society he lives in. Consequently, the gender politics play out differently in the two plays. In the *Red Detachment of Women*, Hong Changqing embodies both the CCP party ideal and--as the object of women's love--an implicit male ideal. In *Green Barracks*, Xiaoshi opts for a kind of heroic, patriotic love only after Sima has given her passionate love a cold shoulder. Perhaps disappointment in personal love left the female lead in the latter play no choice but to substitute a love for the collective experience, which may compensate, to some extent, for a less fulfilling private life. Thus *Green Barracks* complicates women warrior's choices and circumstances while at the same time affirming some aspects of the gender politics it inherits from *The Red Detachment of Women*.

In Zhang's play the theme of blurring gender roles can be traced in Sima Changjiang's character. At first glance, Sima seems to be made of the same cloth as Hong Changqing. Like Hong, he is respected and trusted by new female recruits; he acknowledges their frustrations, recognizes their potential, and is there to encourage them when they are beset by difficulties. At the play's outset, Sima is the only character who can approach and talk with Xiaoshi when she

runs away from the barracks into the forest in protest over her company commanders' harsh treatment. However, Sima, unlike Hong, is more than an inspirational mentor. He is also different from the two “manly” women commanders, for he is a “womanly” man, tender, soft and sensitive, and extremely skillful in communicating with his female colleagues. He is the proverbial “earth mother,” but in an updated incarnation of technology instructor and modern man of science and reason, who brings the fresh air of knowledge to the otherwise stale and old-fashioned environment of the barracks. In the sense of exhibiting some androgynous (or cross-sex) traits, Sima represent a progression from Hong in the *Red Detachment of Women*, and to that extent makes gender equality seem more plausible.

On the whole, however, it is the unequal gender relationship that prevails. A charming and charismatic man, Sima longs for Bai Yu, the platoon leader who is described as the most beautiful woman in the army unit. According to Sima, she possesses “the abundance and richness of a woman” as well as “the brilliance and the spiritedness of a man.” In this description are contained the essentialist binary oppositions of gender relations, which attribute to woman the beauty of the body and to man qualities of the mind. This reduction of Bai Yu to “ideal woman” preserves her traditional gender role of exemplifying female beauty while at the same time it allows her to continue the Maoist legacy of enacting the role of brilliant revolutionary man, such as Hong personified. In an ironic fashion, Bai Yu revives and replaces the Hong of Maoist theater, adding to that figure a feminine mystique and creating the illusion that this unlikely composite represents a more well-rounded post-Maoist woman than her predecessor. When Bai Yu ends by rejecting Sima for the sake of her warrior’s career, we see members of both genders (Xiaoshi and Sima) left with no choice but to compensate for failed attempts at personal happiness and meaningful relationships by rededicating themselves to their motherland. If neither

man nor woman can be feminized while defending the nation--as we have seen in the Maoist-era *The Red Detachment of Women* and the post-Maoist-era *Green Barracks*--a man like Sima can only be “feminized” to the extent of being anguished by the loss of a woman who chose the defense of the country over the pursuit of personal happiness.

It would nevertheless be a mistake to equate femininity with lack of ambition; it is rather a case of lack of opportunity. As with the *Caizi* (gifted scholar) in traditional romance who studied to pass a civil examination so that he would be in a position to win the best *jiaren* (beautiful lady), Sima in his role of technician has a more privileged position than is attainable by any woman. Thus Sima is actually a latter-day Hong: whereas Hong's power came from his elite party status, Sima derives his power from his command of privileged knowledge. His rejection by Bai Yu--the modern, “masculinized” version of a *jiaren* who retains her bodily beauty but without female agency--testifies to the futility, even in a post-Mao era, of seeking happiness outside the collective. As a final analysis of the play, we might observe that science, technology, and modernity, with which the May-Fourth writers had hoped to construct a strong China, did not entirely alter gender politics nor the ways of thinking of the nation. Lu Xun's espousal of improved conditions, which he considered essential to increasing career choices for women, paradoxically placed post-Mao women like Bai Yu in service to a new nationalist agenda, at the expense of their own subjectivity.

Additional factors point to the continuities and discontinuities between Maoist and Post-Mao drama. For example, the color “green” of *Green Barracks* evokes and plays against the quintessential Maoist color red, highlighted in the precursor text: Wu Qinghua's red shirt and pants in that earlier text symbolize her proletariat status as a slave girl eager to join the Red Army. On arriving at the revolutionary base, Wu is immediately drawn to the red flag, which, as

the much-photographed scene during the Cultural Revolution attests, she had held in her hands while tears streamed down her face and her face registered her strong emotions. By contrast, the green color suggests a neutral space between a commercial culture that is no longer “red” and a marginalized army camp that still demands utter loyalty from women warriors in times of war. Furthermore, green could suggest the proverbial “gray area,” that is, a perspective that can no longer be classified as either “black or white.” Post-Maoist women no longer experienced their situation as a “life-and death struggle” against evil landlords always dressed in black; in *The Red Detachment of Women* the women whom these landlords oppressed had no recourse but a warrior’s career if they wanted to survive. The green light that bathes the set of *Green Barracks* could be interpreted freely, according to the stage directions, as either “green barracks,” “green daughters” who wear green army uniforms, or “green life,” suggesting youth, vitality, and life itself.<sup>90</sup>

It is important to point out that after the mid-1980s, theater productions declined drastically, losing out to television, film, and other mass media. Gone were the days of early post-Maoist China when a play could draw large audiences with its pointed critique of contemporary society. Several influential plays raised the concern of the censors, who saw them as challenges to the ruling ideology and feared the negative impact they might have on the audience. Gone also were the “golden” times of the Cultural Revolution when dramas of model theater like *The Red Detachment of Women* were well familiar to the majority of the people—the elite and the masses, the rural and the urban, the young and the old. But by the time *Green Barracks* was published in 1992, much had changed and no theater could be found to mount the production, in spite of the favorable comments the text had garnered from some distinguished drama critics. Critics viewed the play as especially precious for having come into being in a

commercial climate that made theater an unprofitable commodity. One critic, Yu Qiuyu, fretted that Zhang Lili could not afford to continue writing dramas. One could not blame her, should she stop writing in the near future, Yu maintained, for she had already provided a valuable historic record of a woman playwright dreaming and working at a time when the theater had become one of the least popular medium for mass consumption.<sup>91</sup> However, Chen Baichen, another well-known drama historian, characterized Zhang as a “foolish woman” for persevering in efforts that were profitless and not appreciated. Under such circumstances, it was a wonder, Chen claimed, that she had gotten three of her plays performed--plays that were well received by the limited audience still attracted to theater. For Chen, the significance of these theatrical events were heightened by the fact that women playwrights appeared so rarely in the history of modern Chinese theater.<sup>92</sup> And indeed, it is this rare representation of women's viewpoint in theater that makes *Green Barracks*, despite its restricted outlook on gender politics, an invaluable preservation of women's experience in contemporary China. The inclusion of this text in our anthology also befits the long tradition in modern Chinese drama of regarding the reading of the text as important, if not more so, as seeing it enacted on stage. Moreover, on occasions when censorship caused the suspension of certain productions, curious readers lost no time in seeking out the published texts. In this respect, too, *Green Barracks* represented a departure from its most-watched precursor text, whose point of view it both inherited and rebelled against.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Susan Morgan, "Introduction," in Anna Leonowens, *The Romance of the Harem*, ed., Susan Morgan (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), ix-xxxix. This paragraph presents a brief summary of some of the key points of Morgan in her introduction.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Rodgers, *The King and I* (Winona, Minn.: H. Leonard Pub. Corp., 1951).

<sup>3</sup> Margaret Landon, *Anna and the King of Siam* (New York: Garden City Publishing Co., 1945), 182.

<sup>4</sup> Ge Yihong and others cited the staging of *Chahua nü* (La Dame aux Camélias) by Dumas fils as the first spoken drama produced by Chunliu she (Spring Willow Society) in Japan in February 1907. See Ge Yihong, et al. *Zhongguo huaju tongshi* (A history of modern Chinese drama), Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1990, 12. Since only two acts of *La Dame aux Camélias* were performed, other drama historians took the production of *Heinu yutianlu* (The black slaves cries out to heaven) in its entirety as the first Chinese spoken drama, premiered in June 1907 by Spring Willow Society. More importantly, *The Black Slaves Cries out to Heaven*, although based on the translated text of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, was recreated as a spoken drama by Zeng Xiaogu. It was thus regarded as the first "*chuangzuo juben* (original script)." See Chen Baichen and Dong Jian, *Zhongguo xiandai xiju shigao* (A draft history of modern Chinese drama), Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1989, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Bai Shurong and Liang Huaqun, "Lixiang zhihuo yongbu ximie (An idealist spirit will never die)," in Zhongguo yishu yanjiuyuan huaju yanjiusuo (The Research Institute of Modern Chinese Drama in the Chinese Academy of Art), ed., *Zhongguo huaju yishujia zhuan* (Biographies of modern Chinese dramatists), Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1984, 1:104-123, 111.

<sup>6</sup> Zuo Lai and Liang Huaqun, "Sun Weishi zhuanlüe (A biography of Sun Weishi)," in Zhongguo yishu yanjiuyuan huaju yanjiusuo, ed., *Zhongguo huaju yishujia zhuan*, Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1986, 3:71-104, 100.

<sup>7</sup> *Zhongshen dashi* (The main event of one's life) by Hu Shi was first published in *Xin qingnian* (New youth) 6:3 (March 1919): 311-319 and later collected in Hong Shen, ed., *Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi: xiju ji* (Compendium of modern Chinese literature, drama volume), Shanghai: Liangyou, 1935, 1-8. For an English translation, see Hu Shih (Hu Shi), *The greatest event in life*, trans. Edward M. Gunn, in Edward M. Gunn, ed., *Twentieth-Century Chinese Drama* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 1-9.

<sup>8</sup> *Leiyu* (Thunderstorm) by Cao Yu was first published in *Wenxue jikan* (Literature quarterly) 1:3 (July 1934): 161-244. It was later published as a book by Wenhua shenghuo chubanshe in Beijing, 1936. For an English translation, see Ts'ao Yü (Cao Yu), *Thunderstorm*, trans. Wang Tso-Liang and A. C. Barnes (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1978). *Thunderstorm* was premiered in April 1935 in Tokyo by Zhonghua huaju tonghao hui (Chinese Modern Drama Friendship Association) organized by Chinese students in Japan.

<sup>9</sup> Tian Benxiang, *Cao Yu zhuan* (A biography of Cao Yu). Beijing: Beijing shiyue wenyi chubanshe, 1988, 370.

<sup>10</sup> The PRC staging of Cao Yu's plays written before 1949 started in 1954, when Beijing renmin yishu juyuan (Beijing People's Art Theater) performed *Thunderstorm*. The performances of Cao Yu's plays reached a peak year around 1957, which witnessed the productions of *Thunderstorm*, *Richu* (Sunrise), *Beijing ren* (Peking man), and *Jia* (Family). See Tian Benxiang, *Cao Yu zhuan*,

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<sup>11</sup> *Zhao Yanwang* (Yama Zhao) by Hong Shen was first published in *Dongfang zaizhi* (Eastern miscellany) 20:1(10 January 1923):117-130 and 20:2 (25 January 1923):93-106. It was later collected in *Hong Shen xiqu ji* (Selected operas of Hong Shen), Shanghai: Xiandai shuju, 1933, and in Hong Shen, ed., *Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi: xiqu ji*, 137-163. For an English translation, see Hong Shen, *Yama Chao*, trans. Carolyn T. Brown, in Edward Gunn, ed., *Twentieth-Century Chinese Drama*, 10-40.

<sup>12</sup> *Shanghai wuyan xia* (Under Shanghai eaves) by Xia Yan was first published by Xiju shidai chubanshe in Shanghai, 1937 and later collected in Yu Ling, ed., “*Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi: xiqu ji 2, 1927-1937* (Compendium of modern Chinese literature, drama volume 2, 1927-1937), Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985, 839-903. Hsia Yen (Xia Yan), *Under Shanghai Eaves*, trans. George Hayden, in Edward Gunn, ed., *Twentieth-Century Chinese Drama*, 76-125.

<sup>13</sup> Zhongguo qingnian yishi juyuan (China Youth Art Theater) staged *Sandai ren* (Three generations) in 1963, with a similar story line as that in the Peking opera *Hongdeng ji* (The red lantern). The same theater also premiered *Dujuanshan* (Azalea Mountain) in July 1963, scripted by Wang Shuyuan.

<sup>14</sup> *Yige sizhe dui shengzhe de fangwen* (The dead visiting the living) by Liu Shugang was originally published in *Juben* (Drama script) 5 (1985): 8-37 and later collected in *Tansuo xiqu ji* (An anthology of experimental plays), Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1986, 365-445, 423. It was premiered by Zhongyang shiyan huanju yuan (Central Experimental Theater) on June 27, 1985.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 395.

<sup>16</sup> *Longxugou* (Dragon Beard Ditch) by Lao She first appeared in the supplemental issue (zengkan) of *Renmin xiqu* (People's drama) 3:1 (1951), which cited Lao She as the original scripwriter and Jiao Juyin as the one who revised it for stage performance. The play was published as a book by Renmin wenxue chubanshe in Beijing, 1958. It was premiered in 1951 by the Beijing People's Art Theater. For an English translation, see Lao She, *Dragon Beard Ditch*, trans. Liao Hung-ying (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1956).

<sup>17</sup> *Chaguan* (Tea house) by Lao She was first published in *Shouhuo* (Harvest) 7 (1957) and later published as a book by Zhongguo xiqu chubanshe in Beijing, 1958. It was premiered on March 29, 1958 by the Beijing People's Art Theater. For an English translation, see Lao She, *Tea House*, *Chinese Literature* 6 (1980): 16-93.

<sup>18</sup> *Niaoren* (Birdman) by Guo Shixing appeared in *Xin juzhuo* (New drama script) 3 (1993): 3-21. For an English translation, see Gao Shixing, *Birdmen*, trans. Jane C. C. Lai, in Martha P. Y. Cheung and Jane C. C. Lai, eds., *An Oxford Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Drama* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1997), 295-350.

<sup>19</sup> He Jiping, *Tianxia diyilou* (The world's top restaurant) appeared in *Shiyue* (October) 3 (1988): 47-75. For a more detailed reading of the play, see Xiaomei Chen, *Acting the Right Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 319-323. Another English translation entitled *The First House of Beijing Duck* by Shiao-Ling S. Yu can be found in her, ed. and intro., *Chinese Drama after the Cultural Revolution, 1979-1989*. (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1996), 423-484.

<sup>20</sup> Zhang Ziyang, “*Tianxia diyilou bian* (Debate on *The World's Top Restaurant*),” *Zhongguo xiqu* (Chinese drama) 11 (1988):10-12, 12.

<sup>21</sup> Gu Wei, “*Tianxia diyilou de qian he hou* (Before and after the production of *The World’s Top Restaurant*),” *Xiju yanjiu* (Drama studies) 2 (1989):53-54, 53.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>23</sup> Dou Xiaohong’s speech was recorded by a reporter and included in Zhang Ziyang, “*Tianxia diyilou bian*,” 11.

<sup>24</sup> Qu liuyi, “*Tianxia diyilou de lishi wenhua yishi* (Historical-cultural consciousness in *The World’s Top Restaurant*),” *Xiju pinglun (jing)* [Drama review (Beijing)] 5 (1988): 4-5, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Zhang Ziyang, “*Tianxia diyilou bian*,” 10. See also Tian Geng and Wu Linghua, “*Shuishi zhuren shuishi ke* (Who is the guest and who is the owner?)” *Xiju pinglu (jing)* 5 (1988): 7-8.

<sup>26</sup> He Jiping, “*Tianxia diyilou xiezhuo zhaji* (Afterthoughts on writing *The World’s Top Restaurant*),” *Zhongguo xiju* 9: (1988): 42-42.

<sup>27</sup> *Yuwu shengchu* (*In a land of silence*) by Zong Fuxian was first published in *Wenhui bao* (Wenhui newspaper) October, 28, 1978, and later published as a book by Renmin wenxue chubanshe in Beijing, 1978. It was collected in Li Moran, et al., eds., *Zhongguo haju wushi nian juzuo xuan, 1949.10--1999.10* (Selected plays of modern Chinese drama in 50 years, 1949.10--1999.10). Comp. Zhongguo haju yishu yanjiuhui (Research Association of the Dramatic Art of Modern Chinese Drama), Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2000. 8 vols. 4: 369-425. For an English translations, see Tsung Fu-hsien (Zong Fuxian), *In a Land of Silence*, trans. Shu-ying Tsau, in Edward Gunn, ed., *Twentieth-Century Chinese Drama*. 409-447. The play was premiered by the Shanghai shi gongren wenhuagong yeyu huajudui (Shanghai Worker’s Cultural Club Amateur Drama Team) in 1978.

<sup>28</sup> For historical contexts and a close reading of *Jiang Qing and her Husbands*, see Xiaomei Chen, *Acting the Right Part*, 215-229.

<sup>29</sup> *Li Xiucheng zhi si* (The death of Li Xiucheng) by Yang Hansheng was first published by Huazhong tushu gongsi in Hankou in 1938, and later collected in Yang Hansheng, *Yang Hansheng juzhuo ji* (Selected plays of Yang Hansheng), Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1982. 1:105-205. The play was premiered by Shanghai juyishe (Shanghai Dramatic Art Society) under the title of *Li Xiucheng xunguo* (Li Xiucheng dies for the country) in 1938 and performed by China Youth Art Theater in 1963 under the title of *Li Xiucheng*.

<sup>30</sup> *Qu Yuan* by Guo Muoruo was premiered by Zhonghua juyi she (China Drama Society) and first published by Wenlin chubanshe in Chongqing in 1942. It was later collected in Chen Baichen, ed., *Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi, xiju juan 2, 1937-1949* (Compendium of New Chinese literature, drama volume 2), Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1990, 3-77.

<sup>31</sup> *Cai Wenji* by Guo Moruo was first published in *Shouhuo* 3 (1959): 4-30, and as a book by Wenwu chubanshe in Beijing in 1959. It was premiered by Beijing People’s Art Theater in 1959. For an English translation, see Guo Moruo, *Cai Wenji*, trans. Peng Fumin and Bonnie S. McDougall, in Guo Moruo, *Selected Works of Guo Moruo: Five Historical Plays* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), 315-406.

<sup>32</sup> *Guan Hanqing* by Tian Han was premiered by Beijing People’s Art Theater and first published in *Juben* 5 (1958): 2-33. An expanded version was later published as a book by Zhongguo xiju chubanshe in Beijing in 1958. For an English translation, see T’ien Han (Tian Han), *Kuan Han-ch’ing* (*Guan Hanqing*), trans. Foreign Languages Press, in Edward Gunn, ed., *Twentieth-Century Chinese Drama*, 324-380.

<sup>33</sup> The public criticism of Wu Han’s *Hai Rui baguan* (Hai Rui dismissed from office) as a

quintessential example of using drama to attack Mao Zedong and the party marked the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, during which Wu Han was persecuted to death. For accounts of this episode and other similar plays popular in the early 1960's, see Rudolf G. Wagner, "The Politics of the Historical Drama," in his *The contemporary Chinese Historical Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 236-323. For an English translation, see Wu Han, *Hai Jui Dismissed From Office*, trans. C.C. Huang (Honolulu: Asian Studies Program, University of Hawaii, 1972).

<sup>34</sup> Shao Chongfei, Zhu Qi, Wang Zheng, and Lin Kehuan's *Baotong* (Newspaper boys) was first published in *Renmin xiju* 6 (1978): 8-44 and as a book by Henan renmin chubanshe in Zhengzhou, 1978. It was premiered by Zhongguo ertong yishu juyuan (China Children's Theater) in March, 1978, and the script was later collected in Li Moran, et al., eds., *Zhongguo hauju wushinian juzhuo xuan, 1949.10--1999.10*. 4:533-607.

<sup>35</sup> Written by Zhou Lai, Wang Bin, Lin Kehuan, and Zhao Yunsheng, *Zhuanzhe* (Turning point) was premiered by Zhongguo huajutuan (China Drama Troupe) in August, 1977. China Drama Troupe was established, during the later part of the Cultural Revolution, by combining three theaters into one: China Youth Art Theater, China Children's Art Theater, and Central Experimental Theater. After the Cultural Revolution, these three theaters resumed their separate status.

<sup>36</sup> Gao Wensheng, *Zhongguo dangdai xiju wenxue shi* (A history of dramatic literature of contemporary China). Nanning: Guangxi remin chubanshe, 1990, 255.

<sup>37</sup> Written by Suo Yunping and Shi Chao, *Dongjin! Dongjin!* (Advance to the east! Advance to the east!) was first published in *Renmin xiju* 4 (1978): 55-95, and was later collected in *Qingzhu Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo chengli sanshi zhounian xianli yan chu huo chuanguo yidengjiang juben xuanji* (Selected first-prize plays from the PRC thirtieth anniversary drama festival). 3 Vols. 1: 275-379 (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1980). It was premiered by Wuhan budui zhengzhibu huajutuan (Wuhan Garrison Political Bureau Drama Troupe) whose Beijing performances in April 1978 were warmly received.

<sup>38</sup> *Chen Yi chushan* (Chen Yi from the mountains) by Ding Yishan was first published in *Juben* 3 (1979): 2-33 and later collected in Li Moran, et al., eds., *Zhongguo hauju wushinian juzhuo xuan, 1949.10--1999.10*. 4:299-367. It was premiered by Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun kongjun zhengzhibu huajutuan (The PLA Air force Political Bureau Drama Troupe) in Beijing, 1979.

<sup>39</sup> Northrop Fyre, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), 283-4.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>41</sup> *Shuguang* (Morning light) by Bai Hua was first published in *Renmin xiju* 9 (1977): 27-65 and later collected in Li Moran, et al., eds., *Zhongguo hauju wushinian juzhuo xuan, 1949.10--1999.10*, 4:141-217. It was premiered in August 1977 by Wuhan Garrison Political Bureau Drama Troupe and China Drama Troupe.

<sup>42</sup> Chong Long, "Geming douzheng de zhenshi fanying (Faithful representations of revolutionary struggle)," *Renmin xiju* 9 (1978): 54-7. 55.

<sup>43</sup> Herbert Linderberger, *Historical Drama: The Relation of Literature and Reality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), 30.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>45</sup> Chong Long, "Geming douzheng de zhenshi fanying," 55.

- <sup>46</sup> Yuan Huawen, in his letter in the editor, summarized in "Xiju chuanguo fanying liantiao luxian douzheng de tantao (Discussion on the representation of the two-lines struggle within the party in dramatic literature)," *Renmin xiju* 1 (1978): 33-6, 35.
- <sup>47</sup> Tao Hanzhang, "Yige xie luxian douzheng de haoxi (An exemplary play on two-lines struggle)," *Renmin xiju* 10 (1977): 73-4.
- <sup>48</sup> Xue Baokun, "Beiju de liliang--kan *Shuguang* xiangdao de (The power of tragedy—afterthought on *Morning Light*)," *Renmin xiju* 3 (1978): 35-7. 36-7.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., 35.
- <sup>50</sup> Shu Yuan, "Kaijue lishide baozang (Exploring the gold mines of history)," *Xiju xuexi* (Dramatic studies) 4 (1983): 22-33. 23. The revised version of *Qiushou pili* (Autumn thunder) by Zhao Huan and Pang Jiaying appeared in *Juben* 1 (1979): 3-35.
- <sup>51</sup> Shu Yuan, "Kaijue lishide baozang," 26.
- <sup>52</sup> Lu Bai, "Dui huaju suozaolingxiu xingxiang de yidian yijian (Suggestions on the creation of revolutionary leaders in modern drama)," *Shanghai xiju* (Shanghai drama) 6 (1980): 60-1. 61.
- <sup>53</sup> Nominally Yang Kaihui was Mao's second wife. The first arranged marriage imposed by his parents was never consummated.
- <sup>54</sup> An Kui, "Bawo tedian tanqiu xinyi (Grasping the individual characteristics in order to explore new aspects)," *Renmin xiju* 3 (1978): 31-4. 31.
- <sup>55</sup> Zhang Qihong, Li Zibo, and Ma Huitian, "Changshi yu tansuo (Experiments and explorations)," *Renmin xiju* 10 (1978): 17-20, 20.
- <sup>56</sup> Written by Qiao Yu, Shu Yuan, and Li Zibo, *Yang Kaihui* was premiered by Zhongyang xiju xueyuan jiaoshi yanchutuan (The Teacher's Theatre of Central Drama College) in 1978. The script was published in *Renmin xiju* 7 (1978): 49-89. Quotations are from 88-9. The English translations are mine.
- <sup>57</sup> Zhang Guichi, *Shijie zhi zi* (The son of the world), *Juben* 11 (1985): 3-33, 8-9.
- <sup>58</sup> Herbert Linderberger, *Historical Drama: The Relation of Literature and Reality*, 38-53.
- <sup>59</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 424.
- <sup>60</sup> *Meiyu* (The raining season) by Tian Han was first published in *Dushu zazhi* (Reader's magazine) 2:1 (1931):1-50 and was later collected in his *Tian Han juzuo xuan* (Selected plays of Tian Han). Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1955, 169-204.
- <sup>61</sup> Chen Baichen and Dong Jian, *Zhongguo xiandai xiju shigao*, 260.
- <sup>62</sup> *Liuhaomen* (Number Six Gate) was created collectively and premiered by Tianjinshi banyun gongren wengongtuan (Tianjin City Porters Performing Troupe) with scripts by Wang Xuebo and Zhang Xuexin in 1950. It was published as a book by Beijing gongren chubanshe, 1951.
- <sup>63</sup> *Jilou yongjin* (Braving the torrent) was written by Hu Wanchun, Huang Zuolin, and Tong Luo and premiered by Shanghai renmin yishu juyuan huaju yituan (Shanghai Number One People's Art Theater). The play was published as a book by Shanghai wenhua chubanshe in 1964.
- <sup>64</sup> Jin Shan, *Hongse fengbao* (Red storm) was first published in *Juben* 6 (1958): 10-52, and as a book by Zhongguo xiju chubanshe in Beijing, 1959.
- <sup>65</sup> *Qianwan buyao wangqi* (Never to forget) by Cong Shen was first published under the title of *Zhuni jiankang* (Wish you good health) in *Juben* 10 & 11 (1963): 2-43, and as a book under of the title of *Qianwan buyao wangqi* by Zhongguo xiju chubanshe in Beijing, 1964. It was premiered by Harbin huajutuan (Harbin City Theater) in 1963 with the title of *Zhuni jiankang*.

<sup>66</sup> The 1972 model play version of the Peking opera *Hongdeng ji* (The red lantern) was published in *Hongqi* (Red flag) 5 (1970): 23-46. For an English translations, see *The Red Lantern, Chinese Literature* 8 (1970): 8-52.

<sup>67</sup> The 1972 model play version of the Peking opera *Haigang* (On the docks) was published in *Hongqi* 2 (1972): 22-48. For an English translation, see *On the Docks, Chinese Literature* 5 (1972): 52-98.

<sup>68</sup> Cui Dezhi's, *Baochunhua* (Winter jasmine) was first published in *Juben* 4 (1979): 2-40 and as a book by Zhongguo xiju chubanshe in Beijing, 1980. It was premiered by Liaoning renmin yishu juyuan (Liaoning People's Art Theater) in March 1979.

<sup>69</sup> Yang Limin's *Heise de shitou* (Black stones) was first published in *Juben* 2 (1988): 4-25, 36.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>71</sup> Gao Wensheng, *Zhongguo dangdai xiju wenxue shi*, 334-339.

<sup>72</sup> *Huohu zhi ye* (The night when a figure was captured) by Tian Han was written in 1922 and published partially in *Nanguo Banyuekan* (Nanguo biweekly) 2 (January 1924) and was collected in Hong Shen, ed., *Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi: xiju ji*, 9-26. For an English translation, see *The Night a Tiger Was Captured*, trans., and intro. Randy Barbara Kaplan. *Asian Theatre Journal* 2:1 (1994): 1-34.

<sup>73</sup> *Dachu Youlingta* (Breaking out of Ghost Pagoda) by Bai Wei was written in 1928 and first published by Hu Feng shuju (Shanghai, 1931). It was later collected in Yu Ling, ed., *Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi: xiju ji 2, 1927-1937*, 3-77.

<sup>74</sup> *Huijia yihou* (Homecoming) by Ouyang Yuqian was first published by Shangwu yinshuguan (Shanghai, 1928) and later collected in Hong Shen, ed., *Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi: xiju ji*, 197-216.

<sup>75</sup> After going through many changes, *Fangxia nide bianzi* (Put down your whip) by Chen Liting and others was first published in *Shenghuo zhishi* (Guide to everyday life) 2:9 (1936): 520-526. It was later collected in Shen Xiling, ed., *Jietou ju* (Street theater), vol. 1, Hankou: Xingxing chubanshe, 1938.

<sup>76</sup> The folk opera *Baimaonü* (White-haired girl) was collectively written by Yan'an Lu Xun yishu wenxueyuan (Yan'an Lu Xun Literature and Art Academy) with He Jingzhi, Ding Yi, and Wang Bin as script writers, and Ma Ke, Zhang Lu, and Huo Wei as composers. It premiered in 1945 in Yan'an. The first edition of the opera was published by Yan'an xinhua shudian in 1946 and a revised edition was later published by Beijing renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1952. For an English translation, see *White-Haired Girl*, trans. Gladys Yang and Yang Hsien-yi (Beijing: Beijing waiwen chubanshe, 1954).

<sup>77</sup> The model play version of *Longjiang song* (Song of the Dragon River) was first published in *Hongqi* 3:(1971): 36-256. For an English translation, see *Song of the Dragon River, Chinese Literature* 7 (1972): 3-52.

<sup>78</sup> Chen Zidu, Yang Jian, and Zhu Xiaoping, *Sangshuping jishi* (Sangshuping chronicles), *Juben* 4 (1988): 4-28. For an English translations, see *Sangshuping Chronicles*, trans. Cai Rong, in Haiping Yan, ed., and intro. *Literature and Society: An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Drama* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 123-261.

<sup>79</sup> *Yecao* (Wild grass) by Zhang Mingyuan premiered in Harbin in 1990 by Qiqiha'er shi huajutuan (Qiqiha'er City Drama Troupe). It was published under the title of *Duoyu de xiatian* (A rainy summer), *Juzuo jia* (Playwrights) 3 (1989): 4-27. 20.

<sup>80</sup> Hu Peng, et al., Hu Ke, rev., *Zhandou li chengzhang* (Growing up in the battlefield) (Beijing: Xinhua shudian), 1950.

<sup>81</sup> Chen Qitong, *Wanshui qianshan* (Rivers and mountains). *Juben* 11 (1954): 9-104.

<sup>82</sup> *Nihong dengxi de shaobing* (Soldiers under neon light) by Shen Ximeng, et al. was first published in *Juben* 2 (1963):2-41 and later as a book by Zhongguo xiju chubanshe in Beijing, 1964.

<sup>83</sup> Mei Lanfang performed in Seattle, New York, Chicago, Washington, D. C., San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, and Honolulu for six months in 1930.

<sup>84</sup> Lu Xun, “Lue lun Mei Lanfang ji qita, shang (On Mei Lanfang and other matters, part one)” in his *Lu Xun quanji* (Complete works of Lu Xun). Beijing: renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1989, vol. 5, 579-581, 580.

<sup>85</sup> Lu Xun, “Lun zhaoxiang zhi lei (On photography)” in his *Lu Xun quanji*, vol. 1, 181-190, 187. Quotation cited from Kirk A. Denton’s translation of “On Photography,” in his ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 196-203, 203.

<sup>86</sup> Chen Mingshu, “Shenmei de rentong yu yiqu (Similarity and differences in aesthetic views),” *Xiju yishu* (Dramatic art) 2 (1986): 31-36, 32.

<sup>87</sup> See Chapter Six of Xiaomei Chen’s *Acting the Right Part* for background of these texts.

<sup>88</sup> Lu Xun, “Nuola zou hou zengyang (What happened after Nora left home).” *Funü zazhi* (Women’s journal) 10:8 (1924), 1218-22.

<sup>89</sup> In Bai Wei’s *Breaking out of Ghost Pagoda*, Zheng Shaomei, a concubine in the household of Hu Rongsheng, left her patriarchal home with the help of Xiao Sen, Director of Women’s Federation. Xiao herself had left Hu’s house when she was only seventeen years old, after having been raped by Hu. The play ends in a tearful reunion of Xiao Se and Xiao Sen, her daughter, who protected her mother from the gunshot of her evil father. Bai’s revolutionary women can be seen as one of the earliest examples of Nora-like characters on Chinese stage.

<sup>90</sup> Zhang Lili, *Lüse yingdi* (Green barracks), in her *Zhang Lili juzuo xuan* (Selected plays of Zhang Lili), Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1992.

<sup>91</sup> Yu Qiuyu, “Xu” (Preface), in Zhang Lili, *Zhang Lili juzuo xuan*, 3-7. 7.

<sup>92</sup> Chen Baichen, “Dai xu” (Preface on behalf of the author),” in Zhang Lili, *Zhang Lili juzuo xuan*, 1-2. 2.