



MAN HE

**BACKSTAGING MODERN
CHINESE THEATRE**

**Intellectuals, Amateurs, and Cultural
Entrepreneurs, 1910s–1940s**

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Man He

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Dedicated to my parents,

Wang Sufang 王素芳

and He Lianqiu 何连秋

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Acknowledgments

A theatre production demands many collective endeavors, some of which stand illuminated while others remain hidden. The process of making a book is strikingly similar. Here, as the author, I would like to acknowledge the “backstage” inspiration and help necessary for the completion of this work.

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Introduction

Before the Covid pandemic, when global travel and physical mobility were both taken for granted, China's National Center for the Performing Arts (Guojia daju yuan 国家大剧院), commonly known as the "Gigantic Egg," received thousands of domestic and international visitors daily. The spectacular yet controversial architectural space, located immediately to the west of Tiananmen Square, functioned as a fun, accessible, and postmodern Beijing landmark. While many were drawn to the variety of performing arts staged there, the most difficult-to-book ticket for this cultural hotspot was in fact the forty-minute backstage tour that was scheduled four times per day. Such tours, led by either a Chinese- or English-speaking guide and costing fifteen and thirty US dollars respectively, clustered together curious tourists, passionate fans, and theatre professionals and directed the selected group to explore the backstage spaces of different productions via narrow and dimly lit pathways. It seemed that everyone wanted a peek "behind the curtain," to glimpse the place where rules and practices were made manifest, and where props and stage directions were invested with symbolic significance. When stepping onto the backstage, visitors gained access to the secrets of Chinese theatre, a performative genre encompassing both traditional and modern components. They were also exposed to a carefully constructed narrative that sought to position "China" on the world stage.

Despite being a standard feature of performance centers worldwide, every "backstage tour" carries with it culturally specific priorities. For instance, tour guides in national theatres in Europe such as the Royal National Theatre in London and the Palais Garnier in Paris focus on mapping out the physical nature of the backstage and explaining the technologies that make illusions possible. Such emphasis reflects the influence of "backstage" books, often illustrated, that first arose in the 1870s to satisfy theatregoers' curiosities regarding the tricks of the trade.¹ While the Gigantic Egg backstage tour also contains technical components, a more sub-

stantial portion lies in detailing the taboos, rituals, and structured hierarchy to which traditional operatic actors adhered. Many of these practices have become irrelevant to contemporary productions, yet the aura of these archaic rules remains captivating: no women, umbrellas, or chess games allowed backstage; actors who play different types of role each have their designated sitting areas; actors are required to carefully observe the fixed order of putting on makeup, and so on.² These “secrets” are further revealed by mass-market publications designed to enlighten intended tourists/readers about the esoteric practices.³ Notably, what the postmodern Gigantic Egg highlights most is China’s traditional theatre. Performative features that were decried by avant-garde playwrights in the early twentieth century as “backward” or “feudal” are celebrated in the twenty-first. This aesthetic turnaround is not a rejection of modernist goals or teleological notions of progress. Rather, it is meant to suggest not only that contemporary China draws heavily from its past but also that the cultural treasures that have contributed to China’s success carry weight for a global audience. “Modernity” and “tradition,” once in opposition, are united in a higher level of synthesis. The Gigantic Egg subtly alerts its visitors that dominant understandings of China, and of Chinese theatre, are always evolving, emerging from hidden, backstage struggles.

The backstage often appears, particularly among ordinary theatre-goers, as a mystifying and sacred space. But while the importance of the backstage is intuitively grasped, its precise role in playmaking is not. More than just a physical location, the backstage is the nebulous realm through which an idea manifests, makes its first steps toward actualization, gains institutional support, and ultimately secures hegemonic power. What is the significance of the backstage for both Chinese and global audiences? How does this hidden area govern the ways in which “China” is repeatedly staged? In what ways do backstage practices not only discipline practitioners but shape the response of the viewing public? Finally, what did the *backstage* mean for Chinese theatre, particularly modern Chinese theatre, after it had gone through repetitive, at times frustrating, rounds of professionalization, popularization, and politicization?

Chinese Dramatists in Post-World War I America

I have personal experience with the backstage. I still remember, around nine o’clock on the night of November 17, 2013, tiptoeing through the narrow, pitch-black path extending from the backstage to the corner of the Roy Bowen Theatre in Columbus, Ohio, so that I could stand by the audi-

ence to watch the Ohio State University (OSU) student revival of *The Wedded Husband: A Realistic Chinese Play* (*Wei zhi youshi* 為之有室, hereafter *TWH*). Written by Hong Shen (洪深 1894–1955)—a pioneering figure in modern Chinese drama and film—and originally staged in the OSU Chapel in April 1919 while Hong was an undergraduate student, *TWH* had the distinction of being not only the first English-language play written by a Chinese national, but also the catalyst for Hong’s future career. Because I was the producer of the 2013 revival, I could not help but focus during the performance on details on- and offstage that remained unknown to others. I looked at the multiracial and mixed-gendered group of student performers, chosen after two rounds of casting, and recalled how I had unexpectedly found the Chinese garments that they were wearing at a store nearby the Shenyang Imperial Palace, and how these clothes were later carefully fitted by the student costume designer, an Ohio native who had never been to China. Listening to the cast’s delivery of the English dialogues, I thought of the revisions the director and I had made to Hong’s original text for the new production, but also marveled over how much of the script, which Hong had written in a second language, remained unchanged. I also noted surprising similarities between the audience—made up of OSU students, the local Chinese community, and invited scholars from America, Canada, and the United Kingdom—and the cosmopolitan spectatorship that greeted Hong’s 1919 production. In the darkness, the transnational origin and the contemporary scene of modern Chinese theatre conflated to provide me with a broader understanding of “playmaking,” encompassing textual, performative, and metanarrative levels.

While the path connecting the backstage to the audience seating area is only about one hundred feet long and should take less than a minute to walk, it took me seventeen months to complete. Between June 2012 and November 2013, I brought a forgotten play into contemporary scholarly attention by first broaching the idea of a live performance; becoming involved in budgeting and applying for a grant for the production; reading through and revising the script with the director; conducting actor casting; seeking appropriate theatre space; devising marketing strategies; and researching the fascinating cosmopolitan tenor of the play when it was first written and staged. This long and often-delayed process, in addition to transforming me from a doctoral student specializing in modern Chinese theatre to an (amateur) producer who revived a show that ran for four performances and drew over seven hundred audience members, forced me to broaden and redefine my understanding of my research field. Balancing artistic concerns with the play’s historical importance, alongside budgeting

and marketing issues, gave me greater empathy with the dramatists I studied who made plays that crossed continents, cultural and language barriers, and front and back stages.

Hong Shen witnessed the rise of post-World War I cosmopolitanism from the vantage point of Columbus, Ohio, where he majored in ceramic engineering at OSU but more fully expressed his talents making modern Chinese theatre. Embracing and digesting the “cultural shocks” between China (then a declining political entity) and America (the frontier of global modernity) with an optimistic spirit, Hong in staging *TWH* was determined to challenge Chinese overseas students’ identities as a class “superior” to Chinese immigrant laborers and at the same time as a race “inferior” to their Western classmates. Assisted by a mixed-gender and mixed-race student cast, Hong put on a “realistic Chinese play” that both problematized the tradition of arranged marriage in China and proclaimed the enlightening power of Confucian ethical norms to post-world-war America. Modern Chinese theatre, thus, was not only a tool by which “modern” Chinese could reclaim their national, cultural, and racial dignity *vis-à-vis* a “feudal” past and a “hostile” West. More importantly, *TWH* (and modern Chinese theatre in general) served as a “democratic institution” where “voices” from Confucian China, alongside the scientific and rational West, communicated on an equal footing; and where “bodies” of Chinese men and Caucasian women performed romantic intimacy in the play and fraternal intimacy while making the play.

In winter 1924, five years after Hong Shen introduced *TWH* to an audience made up of Columbus locals and “Oriental Study” scholars from New York, Maryland, and Washington, DC, another overseas Chinese student theatre production, *Yang Guifei*, received a hearty welcome from its cosmopolitan audience when it was staged in the auditorium of the newly opened International House (aka I-House) of New York.⁴ According to the student-actor Huang Renlin (黃仁霖 1901–1983), the play delighted the audience with its touching love story, splendid costumes, and symbolic use of lighting and set designs.⁵ Although *Yang Guifei*, similar to *TWH*, was delivered in English and did not contain the musical and acrobatic elements featured in the Chinese operatic tradition, it differed from Hong’s 1919 OSU production significantly. Unlike *TWH*, which asserted the value of Chinese tradition in the contemporary world, *Yang Guifei* was a faithful adaptation of the historical *chuanqi* 傳奇 play *The Palace of Eternal Life* (*Changsheng dian* 長生殿, 1688).⁶ It is also worth noting that *Yang Guifei* did not have a mixed-race cast. Yet, despite presenting a timeless “China” seemingly separate from the world, the play’s staging reflected the same cosmopolitan spirit that had previously inspired Hong.

The driving force behind *Yang Guifei* was a group of young Chinese students in New York, including Yu Shangyuan (余上沅 1897–1970) and Xiong Foxi (熊佛西 1900–1965), both of whom would go on to play leading roles in China’s modern theatre scene. Prior to staging *Yang Guifei*, these dramatists had already gained valuable experience “translating” Chinese folk culture into the modern theatre by privately staging *The Cowherd and the Weaving Maid* (*Niulang yu zhinü* 牛郎與織女) for students at the I-House.⁷ They built on this playmaking experience to adapt *The Palace of Eternal Life* into a modern drama suitable for an international audience while also carefully preserving the “presentational” (*xieyi* 寫意) timbre of the Chinese operatic tradition. As Huang Renlin recalls, Yu and Xiong often engaged in heated debates in Yu’s I-House apartment regarding issues of translation and the synthesis of performance, lighting, and stage set.⁸ The participants likely did not realize it at the time, but their late-night talks engaged issues at the heart of China’s modern theatre movement: what plays to stage, for whom, and for what purpose.

Specifically, they wondered whether Chinese playwrights’ imitation of Western theatre conventions could fulfill the goal first advocated by Liang Qichao (梁啟超 1873–1929): to renovate the masses via traditional theatre reform (*xiqu gaoliang* 戲曲改良) in order to foster the growth of Chinese nationalism. In 1902, Liang Qichao had published a new *chuanqi* play, *New Rome* (*Xin Luoma* 新羅馬).⁹ Liang stated that he wrote his play to raise the “heroic spirit” of the Chinese people in the face of foreign aggression. In Liang’s view, theatre was a tool for transforming the passive Chinese masses into “new citizens” (*xinmin* 新民) who would take an active role in national affairs. Following Liang’s proposal, modern dramatists had become similarly motivated by their belief that the sentimental unity felt by an audience while watching theatre was in fact a prototype for the future shared sentiments that would bind together the “new citizens” of a “modern” China. Such a rejuvenated China would then be a vital player in a rejuvenated world. This fervent belief and its implication are the focus of my study. *Backstaging Modern Chinese Theatre* examines a loose network of cosmopolitan intellectuals, a peasant mass audience, student actors, government bureaucrats, and cultural entrepreneurs who participated in building a modern China by means of playmaking. Ironically, it was their very success in this endeavor that led to their subsequent marginalization in scholarship. Hegemonic (or “frontstage”) narratives leave little room for backstage trial and error.

Huaju's Unsatisfying Creation Myth

“Modern Chinese theatre” once entailed a variety of forms, but now it chiefly refers to spoken drama or *huaju* 話劇, commonly understood to have been first staged by Chinese intellectual youth in imitation of Western realist theatres in the early twentieth century.¹⁰ Due to *huaju's* new stylistic emphasis on *hua* (話 speech)—delivered in the vernacular (*baihua* 白話) rather than in classical Chinese (*wenyan wen* 文言文)—the standard narrative presents *huaju* as a modern alternative to traditional operatic theatres that synthesized singing, dancing, and acrobatics. The dominance of vernacular spoken language in *huaju* and its promise of an entirely new repertoire centered on contemporary themes echoed the spirit of the New Culture Movement (1915–1925), which similarly sought to overturn established norms and influence a mass audience. Understandably, when *huaju* was canonized by former New Culture Movement activists in the late 1920s, the genre's modern, Western, and iconoclastic natures were fully unfolded. Unfortunately, the rather complex connotation of *hua* and the various aesthetic, ideological, and institutional experiments embedded in early *huaju* were either overlooked or simplified. As a result, the standard narrative of *huaju* history, in both Chinese and English scholarship, offers a “creation myth” that is too neat to be true.

Siyuan Liu, in his efforts to uncover the transnational and hybrid roots of modern Chinese theatre(s), traces and then questions the process of constructing the standard narrative of *huaju*.¹¹ The genre's “creation myth,” Liu reads, rests on an intricate link between the vision and practices of new drama (*xinju* 新劇) and three “pioneers” who actively engaged in amateur theatre activities while they studied abroad: Tian Han (田漢 1898–1968) and Ouyang Yuqian (歐陽予倩 1889–1962), who both wrote and acted in Chinese-language spoken theatres in Japan; and Hong Shen, who staged student theatres about China in English while in America. Between the late 1910s and the early 1920s, these three cosmopolitan intellectuals relocated to Shanghai, where they joined and sometimes vied with players active in new drama who, like them, aspired to reform Chinese performative and theatre cultures.

“New drama” pointed to a new spoken theatrical form created by Chinese students influenced by Western and Japanese theatrical trends. Under the umbrella of “new drama,” heterogeneous theatre visions, practices, and actions emerged, were negotiated, and evolved in Shanghai, Beijing, and other metropolitan centers, staking out aesthetic standards in contrast to indigenous Chinese theatres, or “old drama” (*jiuju* 舊劇). Facilitated by the

new technologies of footlights, revolving stage devices, and mirrors, new drama elaborated the novelties in elaborate scenographies, props, and costumes, along with improvised speeches, to either compete with or share joint programs with indigenous Chinese theatres and the newly introduced “Western shadow plays” (*xiyang yingxi* 西洋影戲), or film.¹² The flood of advertisements for new dramas in *Shenbao* (申報 Shanghai News) serves as testimony for the urban vogue of renovating theatre stages in the 1910s.¹³

“New drama” at this time was often interchangeable with another neologism—*wenmingxi* (文明戲 civilized drama). *Wenmingxi* derived from a variety of theatrical experiments: the Western-style spoken theatre that was performed in the mid-nineteenth century by Western compatriots in Shanghai; Chinese students’ extracurricular drama activities in Christian and Chinese schools by the turn of the twentieth century; and “modern” theatre practices taking place in Japan. After fulfilling a significant mass mobilization role in the 1911 revolution, *wenmingxi* briefly achieved “a spectacular commercial boom through domestic melodrama.”¹⁴ The foci of attraction in *wenmingxi*, accordingly, shifted from improvised political speeches against Manchurian rule to hyperrealistic spectacles centered on pyrotechnics, splashing water, and other visual extravaganzas that catered to urbanites’ sensorial curiosities.¹⁵

In response to *wenmingxi*’s arresting theatre stages and sensory stimulations, indigenous “old drama” performers, joined by intellectual youth, further reformed traditional drama with new technologies. In the 1910s, a variety of experimental “old drama,” ranging from reformed Peking opera (*gailiang jingju* 改良京劇) to contemporary costume new opera (*shizhuang xinju* 時裝新劇), came to occupy urbanites’ attention through their innovative synthesis of modern (visual) technologies and indigenous performance traditions. By the 1920s, such hybrid experiments on “old drama” were eclipsed by the *xieyi* (presentational) aesthetic advocated by Qi Rushan (齊如山 1877–1962), the May Fourth intellectual who later promoted Mei Lanfang (梅蘭芳 1894–1961) to celebrity status and elevated Peking opera to become China’s national theatre.¹⁶ While the urban audience did not make an exclusive choice between *wenmingxi* and indigenous theatres, the latter gained increasing visibility in public discourse and newspaper advertisements.

Chen Dabe (陳大悲 1887–1944), a *wenmingxi* veteran, attributed the relative downturn of *wenmingxi* in the late 1910s to its blind pursuit of market share. Chen therefore advocated for an “amateur drama” (*aimei ju* 愛美劇) that prioritized aesthetic experiments over box-office returns.¹⁷ Amateur drama represented a progressive alternative to the commercially tainted *wenmingxi*. Its experimental spirit and aesthetic pursuits particu-

larly attracted students attending Western-style colleges and universities in China. Beyond the literary taste and skilled wordplay embedded in some amateur drama exercises,¹⁸ the genre's resolution to "boycott" *wenmingxi's* sensorial stimuli and to instead cultivate appreciation for public speaking attracted intellectual youth who were seeing themselves as future leaders of a new China.¹⁹

Thus, when the three pioneers came back to Shanghai, they cast their own experiences and theories of theatrical modernity into a creative pond that was anything but stagnant. Despite several rounds of substitutions between "old dramas" and experimental old theatres, both remained visible legacies within the field of "new drama." Moreover, even those highly commercialized and thus "corrupted" *wenmingxi* theatres did not completely vanish. Rather, they survived in other metropolitan cities, such as Tianjin and Hankou, after losing the theatre market to Peking opera's revitalization and the critical interest in amateur drama. The cultures adjacent to Chinese spoken theatre in the first two decades of the twentieth century were boisterous and productively chaotic.

However, when Tian, Ouyang, and Hong "took control of the *huaju* discourse and the narrative of its history"²⁰ in the mid-1930s, their places in the formulating theatre field expanded from occupying one corner to becoming the main territory. Hong Shen's ninety-nine-page introduction to the 1935 drama volume of the *Compendium of New Chinese Literature* (*Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi* 中國新文學大系) is the first milestone in creating the orthodox legacy of *huaju*. Here the three pioneers become the three great founders who finalized the term *huaju* and implemented a series of modern theatre practices, such as gender-aligned casting, the regular rehearsal system, and director-centered theatre cultures, which then became the norm.²¹ Hong identified the Spring Willow Society (Chunliu she 春柳社), a Chinese student amateur drama club founded in Japan in 1906 in which Ouyang Yuqian participated, as marking the official "prehistory" of *huaju*. To further consolidate the orthodox status and legacy of Spring Willow productions, both in Japan and later in Shanghai, Hong and his peers preferred using the term *xinju* over *wenmingxi* to emphasize the "purely" intellectual nature of this troupe. Along with this rectification were two intentional denials: first, the Spring Willow group was said to have departed from the "regressive" practices of commercial *wenmingxi* theatres, including "scripts mixed with scenarios and improvisation, speech mixed with singing, female impersonation mixed with performances by actresses."²² Second, the other forms of *xinju* that preceded, competed with, or thrived after the Spring Willow's Shanghai productions in the 1910s and early 1920s disappeared.

Huaju's standard historical narrative, formulated by the three founders, focuses primarily on *huaju*'s role in promoting a May Fourth iconoclastic agenda against traditional Confucian culture and ideology. After Hu Shi's (胡適 1891–1962) 1918 introduction of Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) and *A Doll's House* (1879) through both an essay on Ibsenism and his one-act play *The Most Important Event* (*Zhongshen dashi* 終身大事), Chinese intellectual youth were inspired to read and write similar plays with Nora-like characters engaged in the act of leaving home. *Huaju*, upon its arrival in metropolitan centers, mesmerized intellectual youth, developing its own stable reading public and audience during the 1920s. Yet such popularity was noticeably circumscribed—the genre attracted liberal intellectuals but remained alien to the rural masses and lowbrow urban audiences. This impasse changed in the 1930s with simultaneous movement in two directions: Some dramatists experimented with introducing *huaju* to rural communities, while others brought *huaju* from amateur and makeshift stages to modern playhouses, making large-scale *huaju* productions that both overlapped with and competed with film. In order to recognize these past achievements and foresee future *huaju* developments, the three founders proclaimed 1937 the “year of theatre” (*xiju nian* 戲劇年). Such optimism was perhaps premature, as the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) forced *huaju*-makers to embark on another drastic change, relocating from cities to rural areas and leaving cultural centers for the periphery.

The strategic and institutionalized “choices” that Hong and his followers asserted, while still enjoying scholarly dominance, have in the past two decades drawn increasing scrutiny. The first inquiry that this “creation myth” fails to explain is the canonization of the term *huaju*. Hong Shen, in his introduction to the *Compendium* volume and elsewhere, claims that the term was designated the official name of modern Chinese theatre at the suggestion of Hong himself and with the endorsement of Tian Han and Ouyang Yuqian in April 1928.²³ This uncontested narrative, in which using *huaju* to refer to modern Chinese theatre is presented as a historical inevitability, overlooks the variety of alternative terms that also proclaimed their new and modern features. Likewise brushed aside is the creative energy and excitement that other playwrights, beyond these three founders, brought to the field. Hu Ningrong and Annelise Finegan Wasmoen have effectively questioned the “myth” of coining the term *huaju* and have revealed messier yet more dynamic histories. Hu traces the early use of the term *huaju* back to Chen Dabei in Beijing in 1922.²⁴ Wasmoen discovers the circulation of terms like *baihua ju* (白話劇 vernacular theatre) in the early 1920s along with *huaju*. She postulates that “the origin of the term *huaju* may be a receding

horizon.”²⁵ Given the frequency of coining neologisms in early twentieth-century China, their scope of usage in the theatre field goes far beyond what we can currently chart.

Scholarly interest in the “prehistory” of *huaju* is also driven by changing understandings of modernity. In standard narratives, a pair of interlinked connotations for *hua*—speech and the vernacular written language—is upheld as the essential marker for modernizing Chinese theatre. *Huaju* thus becomes the teleological goal to replace indigenous theatre cultures. A series of fixed binaries between new and old, modern and traditional, Western and Chinese are thereafter configured and perpetuated. However, when *huaju* is reimagined as but one of a variety of terms that represented respective ideas of modernity, these binaries become relaxed and fluid, allowing modern Chinese theatre cultures to unfold their own transnational features.

Revising *Huaju* History

When Xiaomei Chen raised the rhetorical question “Why not modern Chinese drama?” at the turn of the twenty-first century, she challenged the lukewarm scholarly attention in the Anglosphere given to all forms of modern Chinese theatre.²⁶ The dearth of book-length studies in English, Chen maintains, is due to the problematic discourse embedded in standard narratives. Instead of delving into potentially productive negotiations among the many transnational theatre traditions that modern Chinese drama inherited, scholarship tended to render modern Chinese drama’s hybridity into either impurity or inferiority, or “neither Chinese nor Western.”²⁷ Modern Chinese theatre was, therefore, placed outside the scope of postcolonial and revisionist efforts.

Chen’s urgent inquiry to revise the discourse and methodologies of studying modern Chinese drama was soon joined by scholars who work on traditional theatres, early films, and cultural histories of twentieth-century China. These studies have initiated a new wave of critical inquiry to examine the canonization, technologies, and institutional force of each art form. Siyuan Liu constructs and expands the transnational milieu where modern Chinese theatre started in the form of *wenmingxi*. Rather than viewing *wenmingxi* as experimental rehearsals that merely prepared for the arrival and maturity of *huaju*, Liu places *wenmingxi* within the emerging spoken theatre trend that developed across Asia between the 1900s and the 1910s and finds in *wenmingxi* a hybrid modernity that responded to Western realist and naturalist theatres, Chinese domestic operatic traditions, and Japanese

shinpa (新派 new theatre).²⁸ *Wenmingxi*, while having an intricate relationship with *huaju*, thus maintains its distinctiveness. Further, Liu's scrutiny of the emergence of a national theatrical discourse in Meiji Japan (1868–1912) attests that Japan's cultural mediation is crucial to understanding *wenmingxi* and the transnational modernity of Chinese theatre.

Further overlap between Chinese and Japanese modern theatre cultures can be found in the engagement of “individual genius dramatists” with Shanghai's intermedial urban scenes. Tracing the tight connection between Tian Han and Ouyang Yuqian with Japanese (left-wing) theatre and film culture, studies by Liang Luo and Megan Ammirati complicate the genesis and developments of these signature playwrights' artistic (and political) awakenings.²⁹ Likewise, studies on the visual, aesthetic, and technological reforms in Peking opera and Yue opera, conducted by Joshua Goldstein and Jin Jiang respectively, reveal how traditional theatre reforms, inspired in part by Japanese efforts, both relied on and then facilitated the development of *huaju*.³⁰ Finally, another group of scholars have focused on “mobile theatre” (*yidong yanchu* 移動演出), one of the many new art forms that flourished in the early stages of the Second Sino-Japanese War.³¹ Xiaobing Tang emphasizes the avant-garde script and performance experiments employed in mobile theatres, noting how the young practitioners “often proudly compare themselves to an expedient guerrilla force in the war effort.”³² In all these works, modern Chinese drama's so-called hybrid nature, which used to signify its marginality, becomes the site for its effectiveness.

Revisionist readings of modern Chinese theatre's “other” colonial others—European and American theatres—similarly explore the dynamic negotiations between Western theatre canons and their non-Anglophone “site-specific” translations in China. The influence of William Shakespeare (1564–1616) and Henrik Ibsen in China are two main foci for this new round of investigation.³³ Finally, seeking to expand and complicate the process of playmaking, Siyuan Liu, Weihong Bao, and Tarryn Li-min Chun analyze the techniques and technologies that cosmopolitan dramatists with Western backgrounds employed in their adaptations, directorship, stagecraft, and acting.³⁴

These studies have broadened the scope of addressing the relationships between modern Chinese theatre and its counterparts in Japan and the West, have uncovered the genre's intricate connections with other theatre forms, media, and cultures and have corrected biases that prioritize plays over productions, final theatre presentations over the techniques of theatre-making, and genius dramatists' talents over theatre's institutionalization. Yet, despite these achievements, Xiaomei Chen's rhetorical question still

stands. Most of these readings remain episodic, if not fragmented. Consequently, when situating these studies in tandem with the still problematic historical narrative of modern Chinese theatre, particularly *huaju*, one may wonder how specific instances of artistic and political avant-gardism repeatedly appeared. We see that *huaju* experienced “several rounds of aesthetic and ideological disavowals and realignments.”³⁵ As for what these realignments entailed and how they unfolded, we are still left uninformed.

Turning to the Backstage

Backstaging Modern Chinese Theatre is the first monograph on *huaju* history covering the 1910s to the 1940s, the period when *huaju* gained canonical status. By focusing on the “backstage,” I look into and beyond play scripts to examine the theatrical components of visibility (scenography, costume, and lighting), acoustics (actors’ elocution), and performance (training on improvisation and mime). This shift from literary to theatrical detail entails a study that focuses on the collective work done by established dramatists and amateur actors rather than individual celebrities alone. Examining the process of making modern Chinese theatre thus productively challenges dominant understandings of modernism that are often Eurocentric and colonial in nature. Joining the growing scholarly interest in Chinese theatres in the late imperial, republican, Maoist, and postsocialist eras, my book not only completes the history of Chinese theatres and performance cultures but also, more crucially, brings “China” to the center of discussions on transnational modernities and world theatres.

To further expand and complete *huaju*’s entangled origins, I focus on so-called foreign-style (*yangpai* 洋派) dramatists, that is, Hong Shen, Yu Shangyuan, and Xiong Foxi, who obtained their formative knowledge and experiences of theatre modernities in the United States. Rather than merely examining the signature scripts and theatre productions of these individual “genius” dramatists, I reveal how this cohort collectively contributed to *huaju*’s development. I first examine Chinese students’ amateur theatre activities in 1910s and 1920s America that staged Confucian ethics, Chinese folklore, and ethnographic realism for cosmopolitan intellectuals. Early *huaju* was not a mere imitation of Western realist theatre, but a cultural space to bring China to the world. Furthermore, these transnational theatre cultures soon merged with the metropolitan intermedial culture of 1920s China. When these student playwrights returned home, they exerted a synthesis of Western realism, modernism, and traditional Chinese theatrical presentation of reality to envision a Chinese realist theatre.

These “realist” *huaaju* practices exercised dramaturgical and scenographic technologies to cultivate a diverse audience that engaged realism by means of vision and visuality rather than just progressive ideology. Then, in the early 1930s when these celebrity dramatists actively took part in the rural reconstruction movement, they explored the possibilities of reconstructing the rural environment within *huaaju*'s expansive theatrical space. Following the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, *huaaju*'s professionalization, popularization, and politicization continued to develop in small towns and remote areas. The National Drama School (Guoli xiju xuexiao 國立戲劇學校), which relocated to Jiang'an between 1939 and 1945 was a center for such growth. Finally, after examining how *huaaju* contributed to national defense, I turn to a five-act metatheatrical play, *Annals of Theatre* (*Xiju chunqiu* 戲劇春秋, 1943), to see how *huaaju*-makers used *huaaju* to stage their own recent histories. My inquiry sheds light onto “backstage” *huaaju* spaces, operating beyond the centers of Shanghai and Beijing, which bridged distinctions between “professional” and “amateur,” as well as “traditional” and “modern.” It was in these rhizomatic points of contact where *huaaju* gained its maturity.

Backstaging argues that cosmopolitan dramatists and grassroots amateurs, two theatre-making groups who were often polarized, together translated the realm of senses—newly shaped by their experiences of seeing, hearing, and feeling the changing world around them—into the modern aesthetic norms for spoken drama. Their playmaking activities also cultivated a variety of social groups (intellectuals, peasants, students, and workers) as participatory citizens, thus fulfilling the original goal for modern theatre put forward by Liang Qichao. The “backstage,” under my construction, expands from being a physical place offstage to a culturally and historically constructed social network that encompasses theatre networks, academies, and cultural institutions across China and the United States. Likewise, backstage practices cover a wide range of activities, including transforming published scripts into performative texts, training actors and theatre technicians, and developing the self-referential discourse of spoken drama. A focus on the backstage, therefore, provides more than just a behind-the-scenes peek at the aesthetic creations and political maneuverings of dramatists. Such a focus unfolds the multilayered process of making *huaaju* in the textual, performative, and metanarrative senses. Because *Backstaging* prioritizes offstage preparations over onstage presentations and examines theatre subjects' intersecting identities and affinities cultivated via theatre-making but not by theatre productions, it directs scholarly and popular attention from *what* to stage to *how* to stage, and thereby broadens

the scope of Chinese theatre studies from dramaturge and performance to encompass pedagogical and institutional domains.

Backstaging revolves around three themes that are essential to understanding the modernities of Chinese theatre culture during the first half of the twentieth century. The first is to thoroughly investigate the collisions and negotiations between the transnational cultural milieu of *huaju* and its ideological role in the New Culture / May Fourth projects of mass enlightenment and nationalism. Previous scholarship has examined how a network of Chinese and Japanese intellectuals and performers formed *wenmingxi*;³⁶ how Peking opera was reinvented from a popular entertainment to a national theatre;³⁷ and how Yue opera transformed from a crude to a respectable genre.³⁸ These works brought forth alternative conceptions of theatre modernity grounded in culturally specific locations and times across East Asia. However, their endeavors to uncouple modern Chinese theatre from a Eurocentric diagram by linking it with Japanese modernity nevertheless repeated the cultural conflation of “self versus other = China versus West.” To break free from this dichotomy, this book expands the “backstage” of reforming and reinvigorating modern Chinese theatre culture by mapping out the equally important, but unduly neglected, China-US theatre traffic. Influenced by Wilsonian cosmopolitanism, modern Chinese theatres at their origin aspired to give China equal standing in the post-World War I democratic world. Subsequent playmaking activities enrolled men and women, liberal intellectuals, left-wing sympathizers, right-wing cultural policymakers, peasants and war refugees, amateur drama troupes, and state-sponsored institutions as essential *huaju* players.

The second theme is to highlight the intricate threads between the evolving aesthetic norms of *huaju* and the modern sensory mechanism shaped by concomitant media. I trace how *huaju*'s creative trajectory was driven by sights, sounds, and feelings of theatre space that were shared by playmakers and audiences. Previous scholarship has focused on the intermediality employed by Tian Han,³⁹ as well as the intramediality between film and other media.⁴⁰ In order to dialogue with both of these poles, this book grounds itself in the backstage stratagems of *huaju*-making. It departs from reading canonical dramas to instead focus on “unpolished” plays that served as aesthetic manifestos for theatre movements or performative texts for amateurs' training. Likewise, when coming to the specific analysis of plays, this book does not simply examine plots but investigates how these plays mobilized the audience to see, hear, and feel specific theatrical realities in their constructions of characters' relationships, scenographic designs, and other components. I expose how *huaju* enhanced or

challenged theatrical subjects' sensibilities, which in turn further affected or even altered their political stances. *Backstaging* reclaims for *huaju* plays their dramaturgical nature; for playwrights and audiences their identities as sensory subjects; and for *huaju* theatre its modern aesthetic and political demands.

The third theme is to foreground the self-referential consciousness embedded in *huaju* texts and the actions of playwrights. The intimacy between *huaju* and Chinese national and literary developments influenced many versions of *huaju* histories, politicized or canonized. However, the sustained efforts of staging and writing *huaju* history from the perspective of playwrights are sadly overlooked. Only a few examples of "backstage spoken drama" (*houtai huaju* 後台話劇), or plays that focused on theatre actors' performing life, have been studied.⁴¹ This book employs systematic and historical thinking about such "backstage spoken drama," reading self-referential *huaju* in tandem with actual backstage practices (training, networking, and performance rituals). By delivering the perspectives and voices of playwrights—both cosmopolitan dramatists and grassroots amateurs—this work challenges existing historical narratives that prioritize script over performance and contributes a new profile to *huaju* history: one that was articulated *backstage* by both over- and underrepresented voices.

Overview

Backstaging consists of five chapters. As the book unfolds, its narrative moves westward, from America to China's coastal cities and then to its rural hinterland, while also expanding in scope, from individuals to theatre troupes to state-sponsored institutions, before culminating with *huaju*-makers' early attempts at canonization. Chapter 1 focuses on Chinese overseas students' theatre activities in the United States, which served as a geopolitical "backstage" for reforming and reenvisioning modern Chinese theatre. I discuss how Chinese "Noras," inspired by Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, were dramatized and staged on Chinese and American campuses. Differing from May Fourth men of letters' (*wusi wenren* 五四文人) anxious employment of Nora to express their own iconoclastic gestures against Confucian moral codes in China, Chinese overseas students demonstrated striking feelings of cultural attachment alongside their determination to pursue modernization. A close analysis of Hong Shen's *The Wedded Husband* and *Rainbow* (*Dongfang ming xi* 東方明兮, 1919), the earliest modern Chinese plays written and staged in America by a Chinese national, sheds light on the complexity

of the transnational cultural milieu before and just after May Fourth was officially launched in Beijing. With a mixed-gender and interracial student cast, Hong's plays challenged mainstream theatre conventions in China (same-gender cast) and America (yellowface). The playmaking activities of Hong and his cohort served as the medium to claim individual and communal identities different from the "superior class and inferior race" complex that typically defined Chinese students abroad.

Chapter 2 uncouples Chinese realist theatre experiments of the 1920s from both their post-nineteenth-century Western definitions and the May Fourth conflation of realist theatre with "social problem plays" (*she-hui wenti ju* 社會問題劇). These two associations, repeatedly perpetuated, are misleading. They either deny the presence of an indigenous Chinese aestheticism of representing reality in the modern imagination of realist theatre or they reduce the creative endeavors of modern Chinese theatre to their political motivations. This chapter analyzes Yu Shangyuan's early drama works *Mutiny* (*Bingbian* 兵變, 1924) and *Statue* (*Suxiang* 塑像, 1928) in tandem with his visions and theories of realist theatre made while he was a student in the United States. Rather than presenting Chinese realism as a mere copy of a Western Other, I consider alternative conceptions of realism grounded in culturally specific locations and times. I argue that Yu centered his realist theatre activities on sight, formulating an innate connection between the neo-Confucian tradition of *gewu* (格物 investigating things) and Ibsenesque "ocular realism." This hybrid perspective challenges the stock conflict between tradition and modernity, and between Confucian and scientific interpretive systems. Yu's cosmopolitan experiences and indigenous understanding of representation fueled his creative energies and allowed him to connect sight, reality, and theatricality. In the 1920s, Chinese urbanites were enticed, shaped, and disciplined by a variety of visual stimulations, including new painting techniques, film, and entertainment complexes. Sight, perhaps the cleverest sense in the acquisition of knowledge, became the sensory mechanism most difficult to satisfy. This chapter answers a key, yet much-neglected, question regarding the aesthetics of spoken drama: What occurred when *eyes*—of characters, dramatists, and spectators—became the principal *subject* of modern Chinese theatre?

Chapter 3 examines spoken drama's participation in a pair of intellectual projects to reimagine and reform rural China: the "going to the people" and rural reconstruction movement(s). I compare the spoken drama made by cosmopolitan dramatists—Tian Han, Hong Shen, and Xiong

Foxi—after they returned to China from Japan and America and turned their creative gaze from the urban environment to the countryside. Moving between analyses of dramaturgic details and historical contexts, I identify three models of constructing “rural China” on various makeshift stages: (1) presenting a romanticized rural space via lengthy monologues meant to highlight characters’ inner psychologies in the mid-1920s; (2) writing about a human-created landmark (e.g., a bridge or an irrigation system) that was deemed essential to building a modern rural republic and then pivoting the plot to the simulated building of such a landmark on stage in the early 1930s; and (3) inviting peasants to the “backstage” of making *huaju* in their selected rural communities as the 1930s progressed. Through these successive endeavors, the local rural community transformed from an indifferent audience to a participatory playmaker. “Outside” of the play, rural laborers designed and engaged in reconstruction projects such as building theatres that changed their home landscape. “Inside” the play, these same laborers became amateur *huaju* actors who performed the rural reconstruction movement. Such participatory experiences overcame the resentful and even hostile sentiments that confronted other urban *huaju* troupes when they intermittently visited rural communities. What was most promising for *huaju*’s popularization lay not in constructing a rural China on *huaju* stages but in inviting peasants to the immersive backstage of making *huaju*.

Chapter 4 examines the theories and pedagogical practices of cultivating *huaju* actors and theatre personnel orchestrated by the National Drama School (NDS), the only modern theatre academy sponsored by the Nationalist party-state. NDS held its grand opening in Nanjing, the Republican capital, in 1935, just as *huaju* was leaving its elitist circle to compete with film, Peking opera, and other mass media. This “golden age” was quickly interrupted by World War II, however, and suddenly the existence of both *huaju* and China itself was placed in doubt. Unpacking never-used archival materials (acting curricula, teaching prompts, and script notes), this chapter examines the “backstage”—the theatre academy—that made spoken drama’s survival possible. Specifically, it examines three keynotes in the discourse of *huaju* acting: (1) the theoretical debates between Tian Han and Hong Shen regarding the techniques of acting during a time of national crisis; (2) the curriculum adopted by the National Drama School after it joined with war refugees and relocated to Jiang’an; and (3) a patriotic play, *Joy of Joining the Army* (*Congjun le* 從軍樂), which was performed in Jiang’an’s Confucian temple in late 1939 and serves as a representative example of NDS’s pedagogical and patriotic endeavors. The collective efforts of script-

ing and staging this play by the faculty and student actors at NDS reveal how backstage training activities shaped onstage performance and offstage reception while also attempting to consolidate a modern China.

Chapter 5 analyzes *Annals of Theatre*, a play that dramatizes the history of *huaju*-making in the first half of the twentieth century. It compares this work with other endeavors of making self-referential *huaju* narratives, such as books by Zhu Shuangyun (朱雙雲 1889–1942) and archives compiled by Song Chunfang (宋春舫 1892–1938) and Shu Weiqing (舒蔚青 1908–1942), and thereby illuminates the shared perspective of “men and women of theatre” (*juren* 劇人) when writing their self-histories. Specifically, I focus on three significant yet controversial “episodes” in *huaju*-making history: (1) the substitution of “gender-aligned casting” in place of men playing women, which was *huaju*’s performance norm in the 1920s; (2) the divergence between bohemian-cum-revolutionary left-wing dramatists and professional actors and cultural entrepreneurs that arose in 1930s Shanghai; and (3) the uniting of the modern drama field in 1937 for the goal of national defense. By examining how *Annals* depicts and canonizes these episodes on stage, I illustrate how playwrights perceived their own endeavors of professionalizing, popularizing, and politicizing *huaju* theatre. The final chapter of *Backstaging*, thus, resonates with key issues addressed in the previous chapters and completes my revisionist examination of *huaju* history. I show that it was the backstage, rather than the writing desk or the performance space, where modern Chinese theatre was primarily invested and practiced, and where “modern China” was collectively born.

1: When S/he Is Not Nora

Chinese Theatres and Cosmopolitan Students in Post–World War I America

On April 11 and 12, 1919, in Columbus, Ohio, Hong Shen, then a student majoring in ceramic engineering at Ohio State University (OSU), staged *The Wedded Husband* (*TWH*), a “realistic Chinese play” he had written for a graduate-level English seminar, at the campus chapel before a receptive audience of thirteen hundred.¹ After garnering positive reviews from the OSU and Columbus communities, as well as arousing academic curiosity from established scholars of “Oriental” studies, Hong gained the confidence to forgo his original goal of “saving the nation by means of a substantial industry” (*shiyè jiùguó* 實業救國)—that is, ceramic engineering—for a career in drama. In May 1919, Hong Shen included *TWH* as part of his successful application to Harvard’s first and most prestigious playwrights’ program, the Forty-Seven Workshop, taught by George P. Baker (1866–1935). Finally, *Poet Lore*, an American literary journal that adopted a global scope in its coverage of drama works, published *TWH* in 1921. In the space of three years, *TWH* thus went from a seminar project to a fully realized dramatic work, and in the process became the first multiact English play written, staged, and published by a Chinese national.²

Hong Shen’s successful endeavor to stage a “realistic” Chinese play in America distinguished *TWH* from the well-known “debuts” of modern Chinese drama and theatre that took place in Shanghai, Tokyo, and Beijing during the first decades of the twentieth century. Rebecca Karl argues that *Departing Poland* (*Guazhong lanyin* 瓜種蘭因), the 1904 debut of new-style Peking opera in Shanghai, employed “an opera about the partition of Poland” to indicate “how China’s late Qing crisis-ridden situation came to be linked to a geographically far-off yet conceptually proximate imaginary of others.”³ Similarly, the 1907 production of *The Black Slave’s Cry to Heaven* (*Heinu yutian lu* 黑奴籲天錄) by the Spring Willow Society (Chunliu she) of Chinese students in Tokyo—typically considered the beginning of modern Chinese theatre—dramatized Black people’s struggle against discrimina-

tion in America to stimulate concerns about the survival of the “yellow people” in China. Finally, Hu Shi’s *The Most Important Event* (*Zhongshen dashi*, hereafter *Event*), published in Beijing’s *New Youth* (*Xin qingnian* 新青年) in March 1919 as the first Chinese vernacular play, appropriates the theme of Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* to address issues of relevance to May Fourth men of letters. By contrast, in staging “China” to the world (America), *TWH* offered a mirror image of its contemporaries’ “staging the world” for a Chinese audience and contributed to a rising discourse of cosmopolitanism.

Despite the unique perspective that *TWH* offers on the development of modern Chinese theatre and *huaju* specifically, discussions of the play, until recently, have remained curiously absent from scholarship. The first English-language work to address the trajectory of Hong Shen’s career as a key figure in the world of modern Chinese theatre was an essay written by Walter and Ruth Meserve in 1979, in which they included *TWH* among Hong’s English works and provided a brief discussion of the play’s plot and performances in 1919.⁴ *TWH* also appeared in Dave Williams’s 1997 drama collection, albeit with the misreading that the play pandered to American stereotypes about the “Chinese other.”⁵ Several years later, Weili Ye, in her study of Chinese students in America in the early twentieth century, made an explicit request to the field of modern Chinese drama and literature to treat Chinese students’ (including Hong Shen’s) theatrical activities as an integral part of the early history of modern Chinese theatre.⁶ Unfortunately, Ye did not herself offer any analysis of the literary and performative background of *TWH*.

The play’s overlooked status began to change in November 2013, when Siyuan Liu directed the first revival of *The Wedded Husband*, fittingly staged at OSU. The accompanying Hong Shen Symposium brought together scholars from across the field to discuss and reinterpret Hong Shen’s oeuvre within the context of early twentieth-century Chinese and American mediaspheres. Xiaomei Chen, building from this symposium, proposed reading Hong Shen’s life and career as “stories of theatricality in the broader sense of the word” that can “map out a new drama history.”⁷ After nearly a century of neglect, the time is ripe for the (re)introduction of *TWH* to Chinese modern theatre studies.

What happens when we include *TWH* in our scholarly accounts of the formation of *huaju*? How would such inclusion challenge, complicate, and revise understandings of modern Chinese theatre’s formative phase? To answer these questions, I present in this chapter an expanded reading of *TWH* on its textual, performative, and metatextual levels. Seeking to uncover Hong’s inspiration for this play, I begin by tying together the

significant textual borrowings that exist between *TWH* and three earlier works from the late Qing (1644–1912) and early Republic (1912–1949), and whose ties with *TWH* have, until now, escaped scholarly scrutiny: a prose piece by Bao Tianxiao (包天笑 1876–1973), a “contemporary costume new drama” (*shizhuang xinju*) orchestrated by Qi Rushan and Mei Lanfang, and a “civilized drama” (*wenmingxi*) staged by Ouyang Yuqian and Lu Jingruo (陸鏡若 1885–1915). By constructing the textual connection between these key figures of Mandarin Duck and Butterfly literature, reformed Peking opera, *wenmingxi*, and amateur drama (*aimei ju*), my reading of *TWH* confirms that the “conservative,” “reformist,” and “radical” labels so often applied by scholars to describe writers and dramatists during the Qing-Republican transition fit poorly in practice. Rather than being bound within a conservative/radical binary, “progressives” espoused “traditional” beliefs just as readily as popular/commercial troupes imbued their productions with “radical” or “reformist” goals.

In the published script, Hong identified *TWH* as a “realistic” Chinese play, yet he never explained what “realistic” entails. Noting Hong’s choice to embed the play’s dramatic conflicts within the danger of a spreading plague, I inquire into the twofold discourse of “illness” that Hong and his cohort directly experienced: the 1918–1919 influenza pandemic and Americans’ racist depiction of Chinese (and Asians) with the trope of “yellow peril.” Doing so reveals Hong’s efforts to use theatre to critique xenophobic narratives and revise them into a cosmopolitan cultural matrix where Confucian ethics became the “cure” for multiple “plagues.” Next, I turn to the performative aspect of *TWH* and examine how the play’s gender-aligned and racially mixed cast empowered Hong and his fellow Chinese overseas students to modify their “inferior” racial identities and ease the fear of interracial intimacy between Chinese and Americans. I argue that Hong Shen made “realistic” plays in America to influence opinion and garner support for a unique Chinese contribution to restructuring the post-World War I world.

After the success of *TWH*, Hong continued to make Chinese theatre in America, becoming active in the Cambridge and New York areas. Among four more Chinese plays staged and/or written in English, *Rainbow* (*Dongfang ming xi*, 1919) distinguishes itself with its unique perspective and controversial commentary on the political side of the May Fourth Movement. Overcoming the dearth of written records of this play, I place *Rainbow* in its international and national contexts to reveal the expansion of Hong Shen’s early theatrics from the personal to the political realm. Influenced by the recent execution of his father, Hong presented a cautious, skeptical reading

of May Fourth, where the dangers of mass protest are clearly felt. *TWH* and *Rainbow* offer a counterpoint to canonical narratives about not only modern Chinese drama but also May Fourth.

This chapter concludes by investigating how Hong Shen, in envisioning theatre as a democratic space, created the grammar for the development of *huaju*. Hong's playmaking activities in America provided him the means to realize three interlocking goals: to "morally transform" (*jiaohua* 教化) Americans via an authentic and sincere display of sentiment (*qing* 情) infused with Confucian ethical norms; to present Chinese culture and men as equal players on the world stage; and to at once explore and discipline the rules of modern Chinese theatre to bring it into line with global trends. When we return Hong Shen's early playmaking activities to their rightful place in the landscape of Chinese theatre in the early twentieth century, an important but heretofore unknown chapter in the history of modern Chinese drama is illuminated, a chapter in which She, the protagonist, and He, the playwright, were both *not* Nora.

Why Not *The Wedded Husband*?

A likely reason for *TWH*'s absence within the field of Chinese studies is because the textual (written in 1918 and published in 1921) and performative (staged in 1919) presentations of the play were in English. However, this language barrier is not the only reason, nor does it adequately explain why Hong Shen himself barely mentions *TWH* in his ninety-nine-page introduction to the 1935 drama volume in *The Compendium of New Chinese Literature* (*Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi*), a work intended to carve out a canon of modern Chinese theatre.⁸ The more determinate factor for scholarly neglect of *TWH* is, I believe, the fact that *TWH* does not fit well into post-May Fourth canonized narratives about the effects of the Nora legacy on the development of modern Chinese drama, on the one hand, or the trajectory of modern Chinese intellectual history, on the other.

By including a brief contextualization of Hu Shi's *Event* in his seminal introduction, Hong Shen provides a clear starting point for the development of modern Chinese theatre. Hong points out that the play was written in English for a Beijing-held reunion of Chinese students who had studied in the United States. Later, at the request of several female students in Beijing who hoped to stage the play as a student production, Hu Shi translated *Event* into Chinese. The hopes of these female students for staging the play were soon dashed, however, because none among them dared to take the leading role of Miss Tian (Nora). Nor did their unnamed women's

school believe it suitable to stage such “a morally corrupt” play. Hong Shen contrasts Miss Tian’s “home-leaving” in the play with the female students’ reluctance to perform such a controversial work. By highlighting the difficulties of *acting* like Nora in late-1910s China, Hong read *Event* as a “social drama” (*shehui ju* 社會劇) that “reflected social realities.”⁹ Although primitive and crude in terms of dramaturgy and not staged in public, *Event* was still significant for its catalytic role in forming the hereafter expanding repertoire of “Nora plays” in which male playwrights, as Xiaomei Chen puts it, “sought inspiration for their anti-official discourse against the established Confucian traditional culture and its implied truth.”¹⁰

Hong in his introduction fully credits Hu Shi for his bold attempt to employ the first Chinese Nora in a vernacular play to underscore the existing tension between May Fourth men of letters’ collective ideological exploration and the troubled realities of China. With his inauguration of *Event* as the canonical beginning of spoken drama’s history, Hong Shen initiated the standard narrative of modern Chinese drama, where She, the female protagonist, and He, the playwright, are both Nora.

TWH, staged only one month after the publication of *Event*, presents an alternative reading of the Nora story. Hong’s work was not a “social problem play” but a melodrama in which gentry men and women willingly bow to the sacred tradition of “once wedded one may never marry again.”¹¹ Rather than advancing the trope of “home-leaving” (with “home” signifying tradition in general), *TWH* affirmed the sanctity of Confucian values. Expectedly, this “regressive slant” has led scholars to categorize *TWH* as a piece of cultural conservatism, which has contributed to the play’s marginality in the canonical *huaju* narrative. Yet it is precisely *TWH*’s unorthodox perspective that makes its marginality unwarranted.

TWH provides us with a unique lens to investigate the origins of modern Chinese theatre and gives us the privilege of adding Hong’s counterexample to the legacy of Nora plays in the canonization of *huaju*. Just as *Event*’s iconoclastic “home-leaving” theme made it too controversial to be staged in Beijing, *TWH*, with its “home-affirming” message, was successfully performed in Columbus, Ohio. Furthermore, with Hong’s insistence, *TWH* was staged with a gender-aligned and racially mixed cast. Five male Chinese overseas students, including Hong Shen, and two female American students performed the play in a move that boldly challenged performative traditions in China, where single-sex performances were the norm, and America, where Asian characters were depicted by white actors in yellowface. This interracial and heterosocial encounter, framed within the melodramatic theatricality of *TWH*, presented a positive image of Chinese intellectuals’ gender

and racial identities in 1910s America, and it stands in contrast to the formative but bitter experiences of other “Chinamen abroad,” such as Lu Xun (魯迅 1881–1936) and Wen Yiduo (聞一多 1899–1946). The canonized narrative of Chinese overseas students features Chinese (male) intellectuals’ inferior racial identity and troubled gender identification—the powerful “failures” that “gave rise to nationalism, race, and literary modernity,”¹² as Jing Tsu puts it. In contrast, Hong’s staging of *TWH* suggests an experience abroad that was far less oppressive. Rather than being driven to intellectual fervor out of alienated despair, Hong was empowered to find his dramatic voice by the cosmopolitan ethos of post–World War I America. While Hong Shen’s “conservative” response to Nora and the “cosmopolitan” environment of *TWH*’s staging have led to its exclusion from the canonical narrative of modern Chinese theatre history, it is precisely these features that can help us realize a fuller picture of *huaju*’s development.

Reconsidering Conservative, Reformist, and Radical: From *A Strand of Hemp* to *The Wedded Husband*

Bao Tianxiao and A Strand of Hemp

One year before his 1935 introduction to the drama volume in the *Compendium*, Hong Shen published his own self-canonization: the personal history narrative “A Life of Drama” (Xiju de rensheng 戲劇的人生).¹³ Here Hong delivers a detailed plot summary of *TWH* and explicitly states that the inspiration for the play was Bao Tianxiao’s short story “A Strand of Hemp” (Yilü ma 一縷麻, hereafter “Hemp”), which Hong claimed to have heard about from other Chinese students but never read. Although the close similarities in plot between *TWH* and “Hemp” render Hong’s claim of not having read Bao’s version suspect, I find his treatment of *TWH* in “A Life of Drama” questionable for yet another reason: he fails to mention that before *TWH*, there had been at least two other theatrical adaptations of “Hemp,” staged by Mei Lanfang and by the Spring Willow Theatre (Chunliu juchang 春柳劇場), respectively, in the mid-1910s. Considering that Hong was then a student in Tsinghua and heavily involved with student drama,¹⁴ it seems unlikely that he would have not been aware of Mei’s version, which enjoyed critical and commercial success in Beijing. Consequently, in this section, I trace the genealogy of *TWH* by first examining the creation and structure of Bao’s “Hemp.” I then question how Mei Lanfang, traditionally labeled “conservative” and an exponent of “tradition,” and the Spring Willow Theatre, usually depicted as “radical” or “modern,” each made “Hemp”

a vehicle to perform their political identities. Examining the story and its adaptations will call into question these labels and the very idea of modern Chinese theatre as an inherently “progressive” art form.

Bao Tianxiao was one of the most prolific writers in the late Qing and early Republic. Among other ventures, he contributed original short stories and translations of Western works to the *Eastern Times* (*Shibao* 時報) and regularly edited supplements for that paper.¹⁵ “Hemp” made its debut in 1909 as the lead story for one such supplement, *Fiction Times* (*Xiaoshuo shibao* 小說時報).¹⁶ Bao’s later writings suggest that he did not consider “Hemp” particularly significant. In his 1971 autobiography, Bao only recalls that he drew his inspiration for the piece from eavesdropping on a conversation between a servant and his female relatives that centered on an arranged marriage between two gentry families.¹⁷ Although the groom-to-be in the story was mentally unstable, the marriage took place as scheduled because both families felt duty-bound to keep their promises. Soon after the marriage, the bride suffered diphtheria and survived only because of her husband’s round-the-clock care. Then, after the husband became infected and died, the bride, no longer at risk of death but still in a coma, was dressed in a hemp gown as her mourning apparel. Bao acknowledged that what immediately drew him to this inner-chamber conversation was that it possessed a strong “*chuanqi* flavor,” which I take to mean the sentimentalism embedded in vernacular fiction and drama under what Haiyan Lee calls the “Confucian structure of *qing*.”¹⁸

The centrality of *qing* in literature dates to the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644), when, as Martin Huang argues, writers made *qing* “a central issue in fiction and drama by promoting it as a supreme human value.”¹⁹ Lee points out that the philosophy of Wang Yangming (王陽明 1472–1529) awarded *qing* the “foundational status previously reserved for *xing* (性 nature) and *li* (禮 ritual).”²⁰ As one of the major creative forces behind the growth of popular fiction during the early twentieth century, it stands to reason that Bao would write such a story to attract his readers, who tended to be moderately educated women (mostly housewives) from China’s urban areas. “Hemp” thus well represents the discourse of late-Qing and early Republican sentimentalism.

In Bao’s work, an unnamed gentry woman devotes herself to the cultivation of womanly virtue while at the same time being receptive to the insights of “new learning” (*xinxue* 新學). The female protagonist has her own “like-minded friend” (*zhiji* 知己), a man with whom she exchanges poems and develops a certain romantic sentiment, although this sentiment is not yet explicitly addressed by the time her father arranges for her

to marry a mentally troubled boy. Once the groom-to-be's shortcomings are known, the female protagonist understandably tries to persuade her father to renege on the marriage deal. In reaction, the father attempts to persuade his daughter to accept the match by referring to a story published in the *Eastern Times* that recounts how a certain European lady, Mary, kept her vow to marry her designated groom despite his developing a physical handicap.

Bao's "story within a story" detour is not only a clever way to promote the *Eastern Times*. His allusion to Western chastity effectively brings forth the first emotional conflict in "Hemp," in which the female protagonist, the patriarchal power figure, and the story's urban readers are each given space to make their own readings. The father, representing the archetypal figure of a gentry man struggling to adjust to the uneasy ethical and cultural transition of the late Qing, unexpectedly celebrates the womanly virtue of the European Mary. To his pleasant surprise, within the new and modern (i.e., Western) world, there is a model of the virtuous woman, ready to inspire wayward members of China's current generation who, in the father's eyes, aspire to subvert established ethical principles and the social order. Hence, while the father proclaims Mary to be a "chaste woman" (*zhenren* 真人), he also scorns what he considers to be the corrupted ethos of the contemporary age.

The female protagonist, however, has a different understanding of the Mary story. Confronted by her father, the gentry woman tearfully points out that he has overlooked, if not misunderstood completely, the true motivation for Mary's actions: the fundamental difference between her case and the sacrifice of the Western widow lies in the issue of an authentic and sincere sentiment, or *qing*. She sees that Mary's decision to wed derives from the couple's true feelings for each other, and not from the ethical obligations imposed on them by society. In other words, when conjugal bonds are "grounded within sentiment" and not merely "soldered together through ethical injunctions,"²¹ observing womanly virtue and defending the marriage pact become causes worth celebrating.

Despite the protagonist's eloquence, as well as the rather disturbing state of her groom-to-be, the marriage in "Hemp" goes on as planned. Then, after informing his readers how the groom nursed and saved the bride's life at the cost of his own, Bao skillfully reveals how the female protagonist develops authentic feelings for her late husband. After deep mournful private wailing, she comes to realize that he was her true *zhiji*, and then cries and bows publicly in front of her husband's tomb: "I let my husband down, I failed my husband!"²²

The emotional conflict that Bao expected would, in his own words, "give

readers a good cry” is not the injustice of the institution of arranged marriage but the sorrow that arises when one realizes that one has overlooked “a man of true sentiment.”²³ Bao directly addresses his readers to distinguish the protagonist’s sorrow, which is motivated by an authentic feeling of *qing*, from that of other widows whose cries are only a means of lamenting their own troubled fates. It is her willing subjugation to the power of *qing*, more than the tragic life of widowhood, that generates grief for her and Bao’s readers to share.

A Strand of Hemp Onstage: Mei Lanfang’s and the Spring Willow Theatre’s Adaptations

Besides being popular among urban housewives, the intense sentimentalism and succinct dramatic structure embedded in “Hemp” drew attention from those involved in various theatre experiments of the day. The most famous reincarnation of “Hemp” was Mei Lanfang’s contemporary costume new drama of the same name in 1916. *A Strand of Hemp* was Mei’s fourth such “new drama,” but the first to have its scenario outlined by Qi Rushan, and it marked the beginning of an intellectual-performative cooperation between the two that would last until the 1930s.²⁴ Their version of *Hemp* offered a “progressive” critique of China’s marriage customs. Given that Mei and Peking opera are usually depicted as “traditional,” this modern touch is indeed striking and reveals that the binary between “progressive” and “conservative” in early Republican theatre was porous.

Mei Lanfang reflects on *Hemp*’s transformation from page to stage in his 1952 memoir, *Forty Years of Life on Stage* (*Wutai shenghuo sishi nian* 舞台生活四十年). During a fateful dinner in 1916, Wu Zhenxiu (吳震修 1883–1966) brought a copy of *Fiction Times* to Mei and Qi, recommending that they adapt Bao’s short story. At that time, with the advent of the New Culture Movement, the tradition of arranged marriage was coming under increased attack. Wu therefore encouraged Mei and Qi to “perform the misery of the story” in order to “warn those cruel and ignorant parents.”²⁵ Quickly discerning the potential power of affect embedded in the story, the pair outlined *Hemp* in just two days. Their version, unlike Bao’s, was intended to provoke social change.

The most dramatic revision they made to the original story was to have the female protagonist perform a violent scene of self-destruction where she stabs her throat with a pair of scissors rather than join the “cult of chastity.” Explaining that he and Qi were dissatisfied with Bao’s decision to have the protagonist become a widow, Mei wrote:

We think the play structure [if we followed Bao's ending] would be rather loose [i.e., ineffective]. The widowhood [that Bao designated for the protagonist] is indeed very cruel. Thus, we changed it into a scene where Miss Lin commits suicide by piercing her throat after she was overcome by the contradictory and complicated situation and felt rather desolate, futureless, and lifeless. With our revision, the play structure is tightened, and the dramatic tension is heightened. Also, we emphasized the evil fruit of arranged marriage. Hopefully it will further alert the society [of the cruelty of arranged marriage].²⁶

Mei lamented in his memoir that even with this revision *Hemp* remained too cautious in its social critique, and he felt that a conclusion where the woman avoided both suicide and arranged marriage would have worked better.²⁷ Nevertheless, his depictions of the oppression of tradition and the protagonist's violent suicide in protest of her victimization themselves constituted a radical departure from Bao's story. Acting as the protagonist onstage, Mei vividly depicted how the female body was stabbed and pierced by tradition. Mei and Qi employed the power of sentiment to challenge custom and reveal the harm that traditional marriage still wrought in the early Republican years.

Hemp debuted on April 19, 1916, at the Auspicious Garden (Jixiang Yuan 吉祥園) in Beijing.²⁸ Mei's performance was a sensational success and viewers indeed shed tears. However, this "good cry" was not derived from their affinity for *qing* but by their aversion to *li* (ritual), indicating the Confucian sociomoral norms that reformers found suffocating. Mei and Qi thus reflected the May Fourth critique of tradition's violent subjugation of individuals, be they reluctant fathers or vulnerable women.

Later that year, Mei staged *Hemp* in Beijing's Three Celebration Garden (Sanqing Yuan 三慶園). This event, according to the educator and cultural critic Fu Sinian (傅斯年 1896–1950), attracted a crowd big enough to cause severe traffic congestion. Despite its popularity, when recalling the show nearly three years later, Fu criticized both Bao Tianxiao and Mei Lanfang, finding neither the story nor the performance impressive. Nevertheless, Fu believed that *Hemp*'s progressive message compensated for its faults, and he deemed the work to be a "transitional play" (*guodu xi* 過渡戲) that contributed to theatre reform. *Hemp*'s most praiseworthy quality, Fu believed, was that its content anticipated the new social problem plays then beginning to appear on urban stages. Fu wrote:

This play, after all, has the overtones of a "social problem drama." A careful analysis will reveal several layers of social problems: (1) Mar-

riage is decided not by individuals but by parents; why is this? (2) Parents make the marriage arrangement for their own sake, not for the sake of their children; why is this? (3) Once engaged, wedlock cannot be broken because of dignity and convention; why is this? (4) If a nominal husband dies for some uncanny reason, what life will the widow have? In today's society, the widow would receive significant [social] pressure and would just end her life with suicide.²⁹

Hence, what Fu found to be most striking about Mei and Qi's "conservative" work was its "radical" political commentary.

Evidence suggests, however, that *Hemp's* success was not due to its radical message alone. The play's impressive box-office run in Beijing and later Tianjin prompted Shanghai commercial theatres to invite Mei to stage *Hemp* there as well. On November 5, 1916, the Shanghai newspaper *Shenbao* published an advertisement promoting the play. It addressed both Mei's excellent performance and the play's power to "reform society," but not to the same degree:

This play is Mei Lanfang's famous and well-known play. Mei's natural beauty is further embellished by the contemporary costumes, [and thus is] very eye-catching. Moreover, Mei's performance, his expressions of joy, anger, sorrow, and happiness, are all shockingly vivid. The story is coherent and well structured. . . . The play has won national popularity, and audiences applaud the performance. Moreover, the play can also transform society. The [Shanghai] gentry merchants requested Mei's performance several times. . . . Mei [and *Hemp*] will finally perform at our [Heavenly Toad] stage.³⁰

Notably inverting Fu's mixed appraisal of *Hemp*, the Heavenly Toad Stage's (Tianchan da wutai 天蟾大舞台) advertisement emphasizes *Hemp's* performative, theatrical, and dramaturgic merits and only mentions its ability to evoke social change in passing.

Perhaps *Hemp's* story was not highlighted in the Shanghai press because city residents were already familiar with the play, which had been performed by the Spring Willow Theatre two years prior. The professional Spring Willow Theatre, led by Lu Jingruo and Ouyang Yuqian in Shanghai between 1914 and 1916, is nearly always depicted in drama history as inheriting the progressive crown worn by Ouyang and Lu's previous group, the Spring Willow Society, the student club that staged *The Black Slave's Cry to Heaven*, allegedly the very first modern Chinese drama, in 1907. Siyuan Liu argues that the two major canonizations of modern Chinese drama—

which occurred in 1935 and 1957, respectively³¹—successfully separated the Spring Willow from *wenmingxi*, the catchall phrase drama reformists used to describe “obscene” performances primarily motivated by commercial interests. Yet when the “enlightening” Spring Willow Theatre decided to adapt “Hemp” into the troupe’s repertoire, they maintained Bao’s “conservative” ending:

Miss Zhao deeply mourned after learning that young Master Shi [the groom] died because of nursing her. . . . Having received letters from Hua Junfu [Miss Zhao’s earlier *zhiji*], Miss Zhao at once ordered the letters to be returned. Even after she returns to her parents’ home, she still avoids meeting Hua. Now, people all comment that Zhao’s chastity is comparable to gold, rock, ice, and snow.³²

The Spring Willow Theatre’s loyalty to Bao’s melodramatic short story and its values contradicts canonical narratives of modern Chinese drama and literature.

In fact, a careful examination of the Spring Willow Theatre’s productions reveals that textual borrowings from Western and Japanese political fictions and social problem plays constituted only a minor part of its repertoire, and that some of the Spring Willow Theatre’s “serious works” were only proposed but never staged. Succumbing to box-office pressure, most Spring Willow plays, both adapted and original works, were sentimentalist melodramas devoid of political intent. Accordingly, Spring Willow’s version of *Hemp* carefully preserved “the power of sympathetic tears” that Bao’s version had embodied, without attempting to tackle the “social problem” later explored by Mei and Qi. Like Bao, Ouyang and Lu employed *qing* for a conservative purpose.

In juxtaposing these two staged versions of *Hemp*, I have demonstrated the surprising “misplacement” that occurred between Mei Lanfang’s Beijing efforts at operatic reform and the Spring Willow Theatre’s intent to create a commercially viable stage production in Shanghai. Contrary to expectations, it was Mei’s contemporary costume new drama—a style later condemned by May Fourth iconoclasts as commercial and traditional theatre—that best predicted the social problem plays of the May Fourth era and its radical discourses of Westernization and modernization. By contrast, the Spring Willow Theatre, a group traditionally labeled as “progressive” in scholarship, produced a version of *Hemp* reflecting the “sentimentalism” that May Fourth thinkers strongly criticized. The tradition/modern binary used to explain the development of Chinese modern drama thus appears ill-suited to *Hemp*.

*Loyalty and Filial Piety: A May Fourth Man of Letters'
Conservative Take on Hemp*

These standard narratives become even more problematic when we turn to Hong Shen and *TWH*. In order to understand the politics of *TWH*, we must situate it within the discourses and literary interventions surrounding the Nora figure, which have typically been presented in terms of a series of progressive appropriations by Chinese authors. Scholars such as Shuei-may Chang have succinctly demonstrated how Nora's home-leaving theme—both the patriarchal home dominated by parents and the bureaucratic one staffed by husbands—became a core cultural and rhetorical source for male intellectuals' pursuit of iconoclasm and individualism in writing and/or performing “new women” during the New Culture / May Fourth era.³³ Yet scholarly discussions regarding the intellectual agents behind, and popular reaction to, Nora's domestication tend to fixate on a few appropriations that questioned the legitimacy of home-leaving.³⁴ It seems that in most cases, progressive intellectuals warmly embraced Nora and the individual freedom she reflected. In this hegemonic narrative of Nora's domestication, the Spring Willow Theatre's production of *A Doll's House* directed by Lu Jingruo in 1914, followed by Hu Shi's *Event*, written and published in 1919 as the first modern play in vernacular Chinese, mark Nora's theatrical and dramaturgical debuts in China. However, a careful contextualization of these “debuts” reveals that they were in fact failed or incomplete. In an interesting but covert manner, it was in fact Hong Shen's course of adapting “Hemp” that started and in turn finished the complicated process of domesticating Ibsen's most prominent female protagonist, Nora from *A Doll's House*.

Like Hu Shi's *Event*, which was unable to be staged in public, the Spring Willow Theatre's production of Nora, well known in canonical narratives, also remained a mere proposal. According to Xu Muyun (徐慕雲 1900–1974) and A Ying (阿英 1900–1977),³⁵ Lu Jingruo staged *A Doll's House* in 1914 when he and Ouyang Yuqian ran the Spring Willow Theatre in Shanghai. Lu Jingruo's essay “Ibsen's Plays” (Yipusheng zhi ju 易蒲生之劇), which was published in the first and only issue of *Actors' Magazine* (*Paiyou zazhi* 俳優雜誌) in 1914,³⁶ also enhanced the credibility of his early domestication of Nora. Calling Ibsen “Shakespeare's chief competitor” in terms of talent and the “leading figure of the drama revolution,”³⁷ Lu enthusiastically recommended eleven social dramas, including *A Doll's House*, which was translated from Japanese as *Ningyō no ie* 人形の家. However, the focus of Lu's short essay was on introducing Ibsen as an iconoclastic Western dramatist rather than examining the plots and details of his specific plays. Thus, *A*

Doll's House was presented to the limited readership of *Actors' Magazine* simply as an introduction to Ibsen's repertoire with no specific texts discussed with any substance. When it came to the civilized drama production, Lu Jingruo proposed staging Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and *The Wild Duck* (1884) to his Spring Willow comrades. However, Lu's proposal, according to Ouyang, was never realized:

First, we [the Spring Willow Theatre] did not have a stern resolution; second, we really did not have time because we needed to prepare new performances every night; and finally, many people were opposed to spending efforts on staging those [Western] plays because they were too difficult to understand. It would be in vain to put those plays onstage.³⁸

The first “domestication” of Nora was, thus, not brought about by Lu Jingruo and the Spring Willow Theatre, as is often asserted.

Nora's first significant reception in China came instead through an essay. In 1915, a certain Le Shui 樂水 published “European and American Signature Plays” (Oumei mingju 歐美名劇) in *Short Story* magazine (*Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小說月報), where a detailed synopsis and critical reading of *A Doll's House*, here titled *A Lovely Wife*, was introduced to the Chinese public.³⁹ This mysterious Le Shui was none other than Hong Shen. His conservative introduction of Nora complicates his own legacy as a progressive May Fourth man of letters, as well as the canonized biography of Nalei 娜累, the iconoclastic “new woman” who first “cast off the shackles” of family.

In this essay, Le Shui / Hong Shen juxtaposes *A Doll's House* with *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603) and *The Fair Maid of the West* (1631), both written by the Elizabethan playwright Thomas Heywood (1570–1641), and *L'avare* (1668) by Molière (1622–1673). Transposing the “hierarchy” that Lu Jingruo's article on Ibsen observed—namely, prioritizing the playwright over his plays—Le Shui focuses on the “innovative” plot twists centered on the domestic conflicts that *A Doll's House* and the other works commonly shared. After a quick summary of the play, Le Shui employs a commentary voice to highlight the themes of the work in which he reads Nora, who is referred to as “Nalei,” as a rather negative character. While showing sympathy for Nalei and further acknowledging that people should be able to understand a woman's opinions and actions by assuming her perspective, Le Shui does not glorify her determination to break away from the bourgeois family structure and maintain her independence. Rather, he

warns his readers to avoid following in the steps of Nalei and her husband, Haimoer.

Le Shui reads Nalei as a simple but naive woman who made a reckless and (self-)destructive decision to run away from her marriage obligations, and he criticizes both her and her husband for being unable to tolerate each other and for failing to defend their family virtue. His introduction of Nora suggests that the politics of the Chinese domestication of Nora is initiated not from an iconoclastic position but as a mindful warning against hasty transgressions of social norms.

Only a year later, Hong Shen embarked on his study abroad to the United States, where the aftereffects of his understanding of Nora and “Hemp” played out in unforeseen theatrical forms. Specifically, the cultural conservatism expressed in Le Shui’s reading of Nora is loudly echoed by the writing and staging of *The Wedded Husband*.

Hong Shen’s Version of Hemp: The Wedded Husband

Labeled by Hong Shen as a “realistic Chinese play,” *TWH* is set in the domestic space of a gentry family in Tianjin “just after the Revolution (1911), when nobles were still addressed by their titles and the people in general hesitated to break the old Chinese tradition.”⁴⁰ At a time when the city is suffering from scorching weather and is threatened by plague, two gentry families (the Wangs and the Chens) are preparing for a traditional betrothal. The patriarchal heads of these families, Lord Wang and Sir Chen, enjoy a good relationship as mutually faithful and responsible friends. Twenty years earlier, Lord Wang was a penniless student who benefited from Sir Chen’s protection and assistance. At the time of the play, however, their situations have reversed: Lord Wang has prospered, while Sir Chen has been beset by one misfortune after another. In addition to having fathered an abnormal (or “insane”) son, the once-prosperous Sir Chen has become “too kind” and “too weak” to prevent his family from experiencing financial ruin in the changing political and economic climate of the new Republic. Out of gratitude and a Confucian sense of duty, Lord Wang decides to save Sir Chen’s family by marrying his daughter, Miss Wang, a “responsible,” “dutiful,” and well-educated young gentry woman, to the deranged son, Master Chen.

Although Miss Wang’s heart is drawn to another man, the “independent and daring” Mr. Yang, who is versed in both traditional and Western learning, she consents to the marriage out of filial piety. Sensing the determina-

tion of Lord Wang and Miss Wang, Mr. Yang realizes that he is unable to change anyone's mind and decides to leave Tianjin for Inner Mongolia on the wedding day. But the agreed-upon wedding ceremony cannot be completed because on that night Miss Wang succumbs to the plague. Ignoring the risks, the insane boy does not observe the recommended quarantine and insists on nursing his bride back to health. After eight weeks of care, the bride recovers, just as her husband, having contracted plague himself, dies.

Having indirectly caused the death of his friend's only son as well as almost killing his own daughter, Lord Wang is tortured by guilt. He decides to go against the custom that "once [a woman] is wedded to a man, she can never marry again"⁴¹ and calls back Mr. Yang from the far desert of Inner Mongolia to arrange a new marriage for his daughter, one that will be based on love instead of obligation. At first, Miss Wang is enthralled by the news and wholeheartedly prepares for the upcoming ceremony. But when Miss Wang learns from her maid how Master Chen fulfilled his responsibility as a wedded husband to nurse her back to health, sacrificing his own life in the process, her mood changes. In a series of emotionally charged exchanges between Miss Wang and the Maid, Miss Wang decides to reject her father's plans for her second arranged marriage. Taking control of her own destiny, Miss Wang becomes a chaste widow.

Strikingly, the way that Miss Wang asserts her agency is by upholding familial and social obligation. Hong Shen thus presents a version of female empowerment quite at odds with the future Nora-inspired plays of the 1920s. Hong's "empowerment" does not liberate Miss Wang from the confinements of the family or transform her into a Chinese Nora; rather, it sends Miss Wang to the inner chambers and to a life of widowhood that she has chosen.

Qing Reigns Supreme

In contrast to Mei and Qi's radical revision of *Hemp*, Hong Shen's *TWH*, though written in English and staged in the "modern" United States (without Bao's knowledge), enhanced Bao's vision of the supreme power of *qing*, making *qing* comprehensible under the schemes of both Confucian ritual and Enlightenment rationality. Significantly, although Hong employs the English term "love" in his script, he frequently used *qing* instead of *aiqing* (愛情 love) in the Chinese metanarratives that he later wrote to explain his motivation behind, and the plotting strategies of, *TWH*. Following the precedent established by Bao, Mei/Qi, and Lu/Ouyang, Hong designates Miss Wang, the female protagonist, as the ideal feminine source from which to

furnish and deliver the transformative power of *qing*. But in Hong's version the theatrical expression of *qing* is not gendered solely as female and is also manifest by the "insane boy" (the husband, Master Chen). Nor do the "sacrifices" committed first by Master Chen and then Miss Wang appear unintelligible or unbearable to the modern and Westernized intellectual youth, Mr. Yang. Hong Shen evenly distributes the configuration of love/*qing* among the dialogues and actions of the three principal characters. The transcendent power of love/*qing* is fully recognized once the melodramatic dichotomies established in the beginning of the play collide at the end: between insanity and rationality; a woman's right to pursue "free love" and the virtue to be gained from observing traditional behavioral codes; and the tension between the prerevolutionary ethical code and the postrevolutionary modern ethos. That is to say, the tension between "good" and "evil" that has driven the dramatization of a domestic issue—the falling through of an arranged marriage—takes a melodramatic turn when, quite antidramatically, the "good" does not completely defeat the "evil." Rather, the borders between these terms become particularly porous, and nearly all the characters perform a certain boundary transgression. Without a happy reunion (*da tuanyuan* 大團圓) between Miss Wang and Mr. Yang, a stylistic feature that, on the surface, was commonly shared by Chinese *chuanqi* and Western melodrama, Hong Shen instead aspires to reach an even higher "reunion" between the Confucian values of loyalty and filial piety and the Enlightenment values of rationality and subjectivity.

In Hong's carefully plotted script, the first dramatic encounter between a Chinese understanding of *qing* and a Western appreciation of "love" occurs when the boy and Mr. Yang foolishly but sincerely attempt to make sense of "love":

BOY (*Looking around*). Say, don't tell anybody. I want to ask you a question.

MR. YANG. A question?

BOY. Yes, is my wife pretty?

MR. YANG. Your wife?

BOY. I mean her—Miss Wang. Once betrothed to me, always my wife.

MR. YANG (*Shaking his head*). Is that so?

BOY. That's tradition. My father told me that. Now tell me is she pretty.

I love her.

MR. YANG. Why, have you met her before?

BOY. Not yet.

MR. YANG. And you say you love her?

BOY. Yes.

MR. YANG. How could it be possible? It's the greatest joke I ever heard.

"Love at first sight" you go beyond that.

BOY. If I want to love, I need no sight.

MR. YANG. Tell me, why do you love her.

BOY. Because, because she is my wife.

MR. YANG. Your wife, to love her is your duty. (*He pauses*) Now let us drop the subject. It is too ungentlemanly to joke about such a sacred thing as love.

BOY. I mean it seriously. I love her.⁴²

The boy's sincere belief in love between husband and wife at first appears to be only a joke to Mr. Yang, who reveals his suspicions by means of his teasing comment on "love at first sight." His conflation of "love" and "duty" further irritates Mr. Yang, who seeks to protect the sacredness of love from moral and social burdens, or, in this case, from family obligations. Yet, as the dialogue proceeds, Mr. Yang finds himself moved and acknowledges his misjudgment of the boy:

BOY. Another question, do you think she will love me?

MR. YANG (*Thinking hard, then desperately*). She hardly will.

BOY. Not?

MR. YANG (*Looking before him*). No.

BOY. Never mind, I love her all the same. I can wait.

MR. YANG (*Looking at boy*). Wait?

BOY. If she does not love me today, I will wait till tomorrow, then the day after tomorrow.

MR. YANG. Love is a matter of heart and not a matter of waiting.

BOY. All the same to me. I will wait and wait till some day when my hair is white—

MR. YANG. Nonsense!

BOY. And if she does not love me then, perhaps she will love me after my death.

MR. YANG. Stop, stop. My friend (*Moved*) My friend, I am sorry, I—misjudged you.⁴³

With Hong Shen's well-crafted characterization, the boy does not lose his "insanity" as the scenes progress; he maintains his symbolic "unintelligence" to counter the "rationality" of Mr. Yang, as well as of a general public that was accustomed to the idea of "love" as psychological testaments

of subjectivity and individuality. Yet the boy's "insanity," represented here by his conflation of duty and love, does not weaken the inherent power of a *qing*-based conception of "love" that reveals itself to be equally credible and rewarding. This dialogue takes place in Act 1 and foreshadows Master Chen's sacrifice and death in Act 2 as well as Miss Wang's willingness to accept widowhood in the name of love/*qing* in Act 3. Theatrically, Hong Shen employs this dialogue to prepare Mr. Yang and the spectators for a new structure of feelings in which love/*qing*, conjugal duty, and Confucian ritual inform and reinforce each other.

While the boy and Mr. Yang engage in their philosophical debate, a growing danger casts its shadow ominously upon the stage. Compared to the previous versions of "Hemp," *TWH* unfolds a simple motif of "illness"—diphtheria—into a "plague" that ravages the city of Tianjin and spreads into the Wang family:

FIRST SERVANT. . . . The plague is raging in the city. You cannot be too careful.

SECOND SERVANT. Exactly. You know Wang-far and Li Lien-sheng [other servants]. Are they not healthy and strong? Did they not talk and laugh with us just three days ago? Hm, the plague, that worries me.⁴⁴

Not surprisingly, it is the servants (the essential workers) who first note the abnormal spread of the plague while laboring in preparation for Miss Wang's betrothal. That an unidentified contagion can suddenly take the "healthy and strong" worries these servants and foreshadows the general fear that slowly spreads among the gentry class.

The plague's expansion across class boundaries offers a subtle social critique. At first, the gentry have the privilege to spare themselves from working and thus coming into direct contact with the plague, but they cannot escape the "scorching heat" that facilitates its spread. Sensing the danger, Mr. Yang, Miss Wang's in-laws, and their Western-educated doctor friend all try to reschedule the wedding ceremony. However, tradition is dearer than public health for Lord Wang, and the marriage continues as planned, with the unfortunate result that Miss Wang becomes the plague's next victim. Here the plague crosses gendered and economic lines as the female body becomes the pathway for the pathogen, bringing the distant illness right into the gentry home. Hong Shen's victimization of the laboring class and women thus far has delivered an explicit critique of the Confucian moral code, echoing the contemporary New Culture Movement in China.

Yet, as Miss Wang's illness develops, Hong instead teases out the structure of feelings (*qing*) embedded in Confucian rituals, while also criticizing the scientific justification for quarantine. The Confucian proper relationship between husband and wife is creatively reinscribed into a humane care for the sick. Notably, this reinscription takes place when the boy reasons eloquently that the ideal-based conjugal relationship should override the science-based quarantine and its accompanying panic:

DOCTOR. The plague is very contagious. (*To himself frowning*) What is the trouble; what idea is getting into his head.

BOY. No, I won't desert her. . . .

BOY. Doctor. I want to ask you—er, another—philosophical question.

DOCTOR. Huh, philosophical! (*Shaking his head.*)

BOY. People call me insane, a fool. So, if my question is not right, please don't—

DOCTOR (*Impatiently*). What is it?

BOY. Why should a man love his wife?

DOCTOR. Why should a man love? I give it up. I say, I give it up.

SIR CHEN [BOY'S FATHER]. The plague is a serious matter. I have only one boy, that is you.

BOY. Father, the plague is everywhere. This is as safe as any place.

DOCTOR. Now tell me what good you can do by staying here?

BOY. Nurse my wife; perhaps she is not so hopeless after all. She might recover. . . .

BOY. What will a physician do?

DOCTOR. I am trying my best to take care of the sick; cure them and save their—

BOY. No, Doctor, you don't do that. (*Pauses*) You don't cure the sick; you give them up. And now, now, now (*Unbuttoning his coat*) you talk about my safety, the community's safety, you want to save your own life.⁴⁵

Here Hong replaces the boy's lighthearted tone in the previous act with a reasoned and sincere voice. Although the Doctor states that the boy's decision to stay and nurse Miss Wang is foolish and defies universal practices in the West, the boy criticizes the modern medical man for talking about the safety of himself, the boy, and the community, while forgetting the bride. In this debate between the boy and the Doctor, or between "insanity" and "science," Hong Shen cleverly subverts expected positions: Hong presents Master Chen as a responsible husband and calm son, as the melodramatic

and sometimes even comic presentation of the boy's understanding of love/*qing* gains its philosophical weight. In contrast, both the Doctor, representing rationality and the Western hegemonic voice, and Sir Chen, voicing the Confucian family structure and Chinese patriarchal voice, appear insecure, frustrated, and selfish. Confronted by the boy's inquiry regarding "what is love," the Doctor simply "gives it up" as irrelevant to his concerns about contagion. The Doctor and both fathers are unable to conceal their desperation.

In Act 3, Hong further highlights the love/*qing* that Miss Wang and Mr. Yang have come not only to feel sincerely but to worship. Despite Lord Wang's intent to arrange a new marriage between his daughter and Mr. Yang, Miss Wang resolutely relegates herself to the status of widowhood by performing a dramatic mourning scene. Unlike previous adapters of *Hemp*, Hong Shen does not present Mr. Yang as indifferent to Miss Wang's self-subjugation to the role of the chaste widow. Instead, Mr. Yang fully understands and respects Miss Wang's choice:

MADAM CHEN [MISS WANG] (*To her father*). When I promised you the first marriage, I prepared for a suffering life. But I am quite satisfied, quite happy now as it is. (*Pauses*) And father-in-law, you are so kind to me. (*Pauses again*) And Mr. Yang, how do you do? I am sorry for you. Our marriage is out of the question. Remember me as your friend—as your sister; but for that sacred love, the love between man and wife, (*To Lord Wang*) father, allow me to reserve it for my husband. He loved me and died. Good-bye, Mr. Yang . . .

MR. YANG (*Following her several steps*). Madam Chen, remember me as your friend, I shall always be at your service.⁴⁶

In this manner, the authenticity and sacredness of love/*qing*, first voiced by the insane boy and scorned by the modern Mr. Yang, eventually reaches its full power over the living and the dead, men and women, "the Orient" and "the West."

Unfortunately, *TWH*'s Western readers and spectators struggled to grasp the implications of Hong Shen's cross-cultural synthesis, both in 1919 and later. The leading characters' striking pursuit of Confucian *li* (ritual) because of their devotion to *qing* (sentiment/love), reflected by the boy's death and Miss Wang's choice to remain a widow, as well as the "modern" Mr. Yang's initial skepticism and then admiration for both *li* and *qing*, were taken to reflect the "realistic" representation of "the dignity of the high-class Chinese."⁴⁷ For most of the Columbus audience, these three lead-

ing characters' choices likely appeared to have been too representative of "authentic" Chinese culture to dwell upon. Not surprisingly, the uniqueness of Hong Shen's position in the context of May Fourth discourse was not appreciated.

Nor has the limited critical scholarship on *TWH* addressed the play's progressive implications, focusing instead on its "conservative" ending. Dave Williams includes *TWH* in his 1997 drama anthology and reads it as an example of how the "Chinese other" is useful for understanding the American self. For Williams, the characters' observation of Confucian ethical conventions, especially Miss Wang's subjugation to patriarchal power, reveals Hong Shen's "wholesale adoption of the Euro-American culture's image of the Chinese, rather than any resistance to it."⁴⁸ He describes the characters as "more or less willing slaves to ancient customs."⁴⁹ Williams reads the piece, despite its claim to be a "realistic Chinese play," as the reflection of economic, social, and psychological issues that dominated American thought about China in the 1920s.

Yet both readings, that of the local press at the time and Williams's nearly eight decades later, deviate from the intention Hong Shen explicitly stated in his 1933 "A Life of Drama." Neither an uncritical representation of the Chinese elite class nor a wholesale pandering to Americans' "Pacific Orientalist" imagination,⁵⁰ *TWH* was Hong's attempt to present Confucian ethical norms as worthy of inclusion in the post-World War I cosmopolitan world. On the surface level, Hong explains that at the time of writing *TWH* he had become exhausted with the "reunion endings" in both Chinese *chuanqi* dramas and Western melodramas.⁵¹ Hong consciously writes against the popular expectation to reward "goodness" with Miss Wang and Mr. Yang's marriage, and so he designates no characters as villains, demanding not moral judgment from the audience but sentimental sympathy. Hong Shen hoped that Miss Wang's final choice to be loyal to her first marriage would leave the audience with something to "think retrospectively" (*huiwei* 回味) about regarding each character's dramatic life.

Hong also provides a more subtle reason for his ending. "I wanted to morally transform Americans by an emotional appeal to what real loyalty and filial piety are," he emphasizes.⁵² Such intent recounts the heated debates around the encounter between Confucian values and individual subjectivities in postrevolutionary China. Strikingly, these values do not strangle the subjective voices of the characters in *TWH*. Quite the contrary: Miss Wang's observation of the virtue of woman's chastity suggests more loyalty to her subjective faith in "love/*qing*" (the sacred sentiment) and hence, ultimately, to herself than to her late husband. Moreover, it is Master Chen's

understanding of a husband's obligation that empowers him to question love/*qing* and rationality with Mr. Yang and the Doctor. In other words, the traditional Chinese ethical codes do not negate "subjectivity"—the most widely recognized and celebrated register for Chinese modernity—but rather provide a "Confucian structure" for individual feelings, responsibilities, and familial-social orders. Love and *qing*, as well as the Western modern subject and the Confucian moral structure, in Hong's "realistic Chinese play" transgress the repressive tradition/liberating modern dyad that was much enforced in China during the New Culture and May Fourth eras. Hong thus aspired to find tradition/China and modernity/West in each other and so revise the reception of "China" among his readers and spectators. He did not simply write and stage an ethnographic exhibition or self-Orientalization but promoted a global understanding of Chinese concepts of *qing*/love, loyalty, and filial piety by fashioning a transcultural discourse based on authentic sentiment.

Practicing Cosmopolitanism: Interracial Intimacies in *TWH*

Hong's choice to embed the conflict between Confucian rituals and modern rationality within the framework of a "plague" was not arbitrary. Rather, it was a realistic reflection on the 1918–1919 influenza pandemic that profoundly affected Hong while studying at OSU. State officials, alarmed by the accelerated spread of influenza, issued a series of recommendations to community health departments throughout the state to close public gathering places and to practice social distancing and quarantine, including shutting down theatres.⁵³ Hong understandably wove the fabric of social distancing into the plot of *TWH*. However, his "realistic" reflections on "illness" went beyond an account of his immediate experiences in Columbus. By developing a dialogue between Confucian conjugal obligation and scientific medical knowledge in *TWH*, Hong offered a strong rejoinder to the xenophobic discourse of the "yellow peril" in the United States.

By the time Hong Shen set out for Columbus in 1916, Chinese students had already been studying in the United States for nearly seventy years.⁵⁴ This long period of overseas study, along with "trade, imperial expansion, missionary movements, and global labor migration,"⁵⁵ brought China and the United States into ever closer contact. Although American communities were awarded with increasing privilege and prestige in the eyes of the Chinese, in part because of the "global unevenness" of the era,⁵⁶ overseas Chinese laborers went from being viewed by Americans first as exotic and desirable "Oriental others" to being the source of the "China problem."⁵⁷

This shift in American perspectives is marked by 1882, when the Chinese Exclusion Act was enacted by the US Congress, and 1902, when “Chinese Exclusion” was made legally permanent. Although these acts were geared toward the laboring class only, Hong Shen and his elite peers were not exempted from the identity negotiations that this legislation provoked.

Hong studied Confucian texts in his hometown before immersing himself in a Western education, first at Tsinghua and then the United States. Thus, he comfortably fits the definition of what Weili Ye terms the “special generation,” those Chinese students who had “Confucian learning etched into . . . (their) childhood memory,”⁵⁸ while actively engaging the challenges and the excitements of an inescapable West. Despite embracing drama as a writer, performer, and enthusiastic reader-spectator at Tsinghua, Hong, like his “special generation” peers, had likely not thought about abandoning a “substantial” subject for a career in theatre before coming to America. In fall 1916, under the auspices of a Boxer Indemnity Scholarship, Hong set off on his journey to OSU for a major in ceramic engineering, joining an expanding community of Chinese overseas students in the United States.⁵⁹

Judging from Hong Shen’s transcript, the “Western learning” he received at Tsinghua facilitated his early adjustment to American university life. In his first year at OSU, Hong was able to waive twenty-eight hours (out of thirty-eight in total) in the subjects of chemistry, drawing, German, and mathematics. Starting English 101 with an “average” grade in fall 1916, Hong quickly improved and earned a “good” grade in the spring. Then, in spring 1918, in a graduate student seminar (English 213) that he took with Professor Louis Cooper, Hong achieved the highest grade, “M-Pass with Merit,” with his writing of *TWH*.⁶⁰ Unlike some distinguished Chinese overseas students in Japan, who struggled with a heavy workload and sometimes poor grades, Lu Xun among them, Hong was spared from such pressures to engage in various theatre-related activities and student life. It was on the campus and in the theatre of OSU where Hong Shen negotiated with a host of social determinatives regarding his own claims of race, gender, and nationality.

For Hong, the original motivation for writing *TWH* was explicitly academic, with his intellectual cohort as the imagined readership. This clear “confinement” marks *TWH* as foreshadowing the amateur theatre movement that Chen Dabei attempted to defend from commercial new theatres. Chen’s promotion of a new and intellectual theatrics that would not be “manipulated by capital” or “dominated by the box office”⁶¹ carried within it an implied admission that “amateur” theatre was destined to remain peripheral. Indeed, all amateur and student theatre activities in urban

China in the 1910s–1920s experienced limited popularity when compared to commercial productions.

Yet it was this academic background that allowed Hong to challenge the trope of “yellow peril” that appeared soon after China’s defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). The “yellow peril” expression, when placed in the context of the perceived social Darwinist competition among races, captured Euro-American xenophobia in the late nineteenth century. It was applied to China and Chinese people, Carlos Rojas argues, “precisely on account of their comparative weakness vis-à-vis the West.”⁶² The trope in America gained further embodiments: from a deadly disease of yellow fever, to a flood of cheap labor that threatened to “diminish the earning power of white immigrants,” to a group of inferior others who were “in need of the guidance of Anglo-Saxon Protestants,” and finally to the insidious villain created by the mass media, Fu Manchu.⁶³ Outside of the relative safety of academia, the trope of yellow peril and the Hollywood epitomes of villainous *yellow*s were conflated with Chinese and stirred new waves of American racism.

Within American universities there was a lessening of such discrimination. The early cohort of Chinese overseas students experienced America through privilege.⁶⁴ Officially, Hong Shen and his peers were considered assets for both the United States and China. Yet Hong in his “realistic” theatrics of Chinese people did not naively suppose that the American popular imagination would distinguish between Chinese laborers and Chinese intellectuals. Instead, Hong attempted to critique such racial profiling by strategically flipping the Hollywood and popular epitome of yellow peril. In the beginning of Hong’s play, the wedded husband is placed within the stereotype of “Chinaman”: “physically and intellectually inferior, morally suspect, disease-ridden . . . infantile.”⁶⁵ However, the dialogues between the boy and the Doctor transform the husband, if we take Miss Wang’s perspective, from the plague’s vector to its cure. The “mentally weak” and “sick man” becomes passionate and eloquent, bringing forth the Confucian structure of feelings as an alternative yet effective treatment for Miss Wang’s illness. Despite the Doctor’s early confusion and rejection, the boy’s commitment to saving his wife, in both discursive and practical levels, wins respect and recognition from the other characters in the play, and even from Mr. Yang, who is the very product of Western learning and Enlightenment discourse. In an America beset by disease and discrimination, *TWH* suggested a more ethical path.

Just as *TWH*’s dramatic conflicts reflect Hong Shen’s experiences in America, so, too, do their resolution. Among the many activities Hong par-



Fig. 1. Members of the OSU Cosmopolitan Club. Hong Shen is in the second row, third from right. Courtesy of The Ohio State University Archives.

ticipated in at OSU,⁶⁶ the Cosmopolitan Club warrants special attention. The Cosmopolitan Club was an outgrowth of the cosmopolitan movement that started in Italy in 1898 and reached its greatest influence in the period after World War I.⁶⁷ Beginning in 1918, Hong, along with two white Americans, served on the governing board of the OSU chapter, which at that time consisted of twenty-six students (twelve American and fourteen international), eight faculty members, and even two honorary members: the president of OSU and his wife.⁶⁸ On February 12, 1918, the OSU Cosmopolitan Club called a meeting of officers to announce its newly elected leadership⁶⁹ and took a photograph to commemorate the event.

Posing with uniform solemnity, the officers in the photo put forth an official image that reflected the club's spirit of inclusion: three Caucasian female students stand in the middle of the first row, separated by two Caucasian male students from Hong Shen, who is in the second row, and C. C. Lin, another Chinese man, who stands in the front row. Although it is easy to imagine the racial and gender-mixed crowd chatting with each other, perhaps over matters previously discussed in the officers' meeting,

the photograph reflects only a carefully composed image of seriousness and purpose. The crossing of boundaries of gender and race in this photograph reflects a fraternal intimacy in which heterosocial and interracial friendship was celebrated but the suggestion of interracial sexuality was muted. That is, the photograph affirms the equality of races while implying that they should be segregated.

Further evidence of such fraternal intimacy can be found in a December 1918 club meeting that was open to the public. There, Hong presented a series of fifty questions to the two hundred members and guests, seeking to generate feelings of international awareness and camaraderie. Posing questions such as “How many of the allied nations have a republican form of government?” and “How old is Charlie Chaplin?” Hong challenged the knowledge of the assembled, before bringing to light that “there are 25 nationalities represented” at OSU alone.⁷⁰ In this manner, Hong and the Cosmopolitan Club acknowledged the worth of different cultures but did not call for their synthesis. The following spring, when the influenza pandemic died down and theatres reopened, Hong would move far beyond fraternal intimacy for something bolder.

What Was “New” about TWH?

Under the joint auspices of the Cosmopolitan and the Chinese Student clubs,⁷¹ Hong Shen staged *TWH* with a mixed-gender and interracial cast: two Caucasian women played Miss Wang and the Maid, Hong Shen played Mr. Yang, C. C. Lin (Hong’s colleague in the Cosmopolitan Club) acted as Master Chen, and three Chinese male students portrayed the other characters.⁷² Tickets for the two campus performances were sold at fifty cents for the main floor and thirty-five cents for the balcony in the offices of the University YMCA, the Chinese and Cosmopolitan Clubs, and the “Oriental” and Ohio State–owned restaurants downtown. “This is probably the first time such a production has ever been attempted in this country,” praised Louis A. Cooper, the professor of Hong Shen’s seminar, who went on to say, “This drama, written by a Chinaman and played by Chinese actors, has an atmosphere and setting which we feel is genuine.”⁷³ Meanwhile, on the Friday before *TWH*’s debut, Hong received a telegram from Washington, DC, requesting tickets for a group of enthusiastic sinologists, or “Eastern Professors,” including Professor Warner (Columbia School of Fine Arts, New York), Professor Goucher (Goucher College, Maryland), and Dr. Goudy (Director of the Chinese exhibit at the Centenary Exhibition of American Methodist Missions to be held in Columbus later that summer).⁷⁴

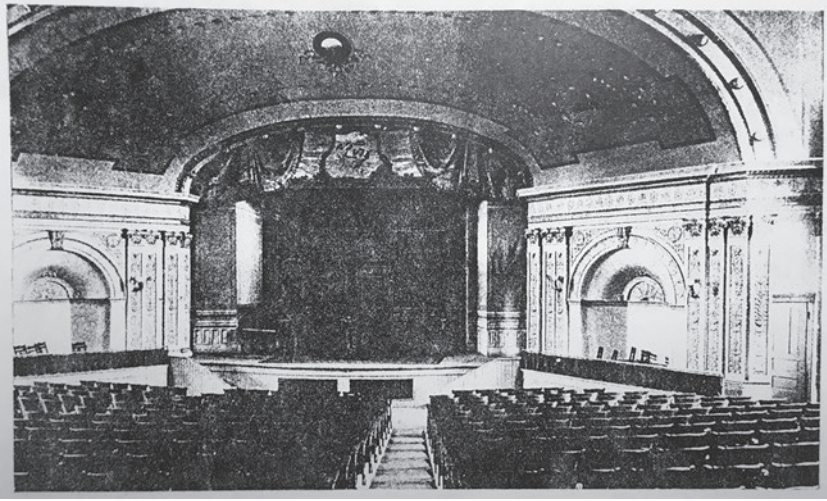


Fig. 2. The University Chapel where *TWH* was staged. Courtesy of The Ohio State University Archives.

TWH enjoyed popular and critical reception as a pathbreaking production. But what, exactly, was deemed “new” about *TWH*?

What likely appeared provocative and revolutionary for Professor Cooper was not that *TWH* introduced Chinese customs to an American audience, but that Chinese student actors played Chinese characters. After all, at the time that *TWH* was staged, plays with Chinese themes, content, and characters were not unheard of in America, especially along the East Coast. Ever since Voltaire’s (1694–1778) *Orphan of China* (1753) was adapted into English by Arthur Murphy (1727–1805) and staged in Philadelphia’s Southwark Theatre in 1767, Chinese characters “lived” as exotic heroes in America’s commercial theatres via Caucasian actors in yellowface.⁷⁵ Alongside the increasing efforts of Americans in the first half of the nineteenth century to seek “their new national identity in the context of older civilizations,”⁷⁶ as Esther Lee puts it, their curiosity about the “Orient” grew. Theatres with yellow-faced “Chinamen” and ahistorical touches of “Chineseness,” along with museum exhibitions and circus performances, became a popular avenue for European Americans to obtain both “anthropological education” and “freak-show entertainment” from racial others. These presentations, known as “faux” or “simulated” Chinese theatre, followed the performative norms of American domestic theatres in using English dialogue and obeying the rules of “staging race” that were shared with a cohort of “black” per-

performances in New York theatres by white men in blackface, and easily won both box-office success and cultural capital.

Thus, in a field where nearly all China-related dramas were “voiced” and “embodied” by Caucasian Americans, *TWH* instantly distinguished itself for being a Chinese drama made by Chinese themselves, and for being understandable to a general American audience. Despite its paucity of financial and human resources, *TWH* envisioned new performative norms that professional theatre companies dared not imagine and that the commercial theatre market would not allow. Yet, impressive as this was, the staging of a “realistic Chinese play” with Chinese actors constituted only half of *TWH*’s “newness.” What I take to be the second half—the interracial intimacy *TWH* depicted onstage—was likely not planned but arose out of necessity.

Once Hong Shen made the decision to stage *TWH*, he was faced with the task of finding capable actors. Thankfully, the student production nature of *TWH* lent the cast an “amateur,” and thereby artistic, aura that shielded the play from lingering Chinese biases against the acting profession as crude and obscene. It was therefore relatively easy for Hong to find Chinese male peers willing to perform gentry men realistically. All the male students in the cast were “sons of well-known men”⁷⁷ sent by the Chinese government to study ceramics, chemical and mining engineering, or the arts. Coming from “prominent families” like the Wang and the Chen families in the play, these well-educated gentlemen, who had experienced cultural and social transition at home and self-redefinition in America, understood both the emotional topographies and the mannerisms of the male characters in *TWH*. Indeed, these male students’ devotion to theatre was fueled by their fascination with acting, which had been a feature of the literati world since at least the Ming-Qing transition.⁷⁸

The theatre stage in the eyes of Chinese overseas nevertheless remained gendered and race bound. Compared to male students’ enthusiastic response to Hong’s call, no Chinese female students had the nerve to play Miss Wang and the Maid. Hong Shen did include a female musician in the performance: one Pao-Ho Vong, who played “Chinese fiddle” (*erhu* 二胡) and accompanied Hong’s operatic vocals delivered before the play and between acts, as well as during the wedding scene.⁷⁹ Overall, the public exhibition of a female student’s “talent” offstage was far less daunting and more culturally acceptable than presenting her “body” in discussions of love/*qing* on stage and performing a marriage ceremony with a mixed-gender cast.

True, mixed-gender “flower-stage operas” (*huagu xi* 花鼓戲) and even “all-female operas” (*maoer xi* 髦兒戲) were performed in the foreign settle-

ments in Shanghai during the late-Qing and early Republican eras, and Liu Xikui (劉喜奎 1894–1964), a female *dan* opera singer, received more votes than Mei Lanfang in a popularity poll conducted by the *Fengtian Times* (*Fengtian shibao* 奉天時報) in 1918.⁸⁰ However, female participants in these theatres were either abandoned daughters from poor families or prostitutes who had to perform both sexual and theatrical labor.⁸¹ Even established female performers such as Liu Xikui were considered to be “sexually available.” The moral stigma attached to women “showing faces [and bodies] in public” (*paotou loumian* 拋頭露面) via theatrical productions also affected Chinese students in the United States.⁸² Thus, although opportunities in the early twentieth century for coed socialization in America offered by inter- and intrauniversity organizations, such as the Chinese Student Alliance summer conferences, weakened gender segregation and pushed female students into new realms of hetero-socialization,⁸³ such camaraderie became dangerous for female students’ reputations if it implied traces of romantic or sexual intimacy.

Even more controversial for Chinese female students considering acting for *TWH* was that their performance, of both their “faces” and “bodies,” would be judged by an audience consisting not only of Chinese but of racial others. Chinese female students’ onstage performance would serve as cultural exotica for the American audience offstage, leading to sexually charged interracial encounters where Chinese women were gazed at by the men (both Chinese and foreign) watching. Although interracial encounters between Chinese men and local women had long been an “accepted practice among Chinese male migrants, virtually wherever immigrant communities were to be found,”⁸⁴ encounters between Chinese women and foreign men, especially in a romantic and sexual manner, were regulated. Chinese female immigration to the United States was tightly restricted between 1875 and 1945, which caused interracial marriage and heterosexual encounters to largely follow the model of Chinese male and non-Chinese female.⁸⁵ Then, in the first decade of the twentieth century, with the rise of Han Chinese nationalism, hostility toward Chinese women marrying foreign men became heated, and interracial marriage and intimacy were perceived as forms of national betrayal.⁸⁶ One may observe the extra “carefulness” and “sensitiveness” of this topic when reading the evolving Chinese legal acts regarding the interaction between Chinese female students and foreign males.⁸⁷ In the face of such historical limitations and moral burdens, Chinese female students were understandably reluctant to contribute to the staging of *TWH*.

Fortunately, Hong Shen was able to recruit two white American female

students, Lorena L. Vogel and Madeleine M. Tobias, to play the roles of Miss Wang and the Maid. Significantly, they did not perform their Chinese roles in yellowface. *TWH* not only made history within the field of Chinese theatre by staging a gender-aligned and mixed racial cast, but also within Sino-American interactions at large with its cross-racial spectacle of romantic and sexual intimacy.

Interracial Intimacy: From Fraternal to Romantic

Hong Shen saw *TWH* as a way to present “China” to an American audience in a respectful manner. Alongside the play’s obvious but necessary attempts to cater to Western interests were textual and visual critiques that challenged unflattering assumptions about China and Chinese. The most striking spectacle in the production of *TWH* was the wedding scene between Master Chen (C. C. Lin) and Miss Wang (Lorena L. Vogel) in Act 2. Advance publicity promised that the wedding would offer the audience “a true picture of Chinese life and custom.”⁸⁸ The scene’s “authenticity” was described as the embodiment of exotic Chineseness “in almost every detail”:

Noticeable among the costumes will be the bride’s dress of light red and her veil of crimson. Red, and its tints and shades, is the color used in China for all joyous occasions. Silks of intense red and green crossed over the chest of the bridegroom represent “happiness.” The costumes are all products of the Orient having been brought to this country by members of the Chinese Legation, students at Vassar and members of the cast of the play.⁸⁹

Here the lack of mention of the interracial aspect of *TWH*’s wedding scene should not be taken as reflecting the scene’s lack of significance or commonness. Quite the contrary, what is significant is that Hong Shen was able to display an interracial marriage ceremony in 1910s America without it being singled out for attention. Working within the temporal and spatial limitations of the theatre stage, Hong was able to present a “subversive” pairing of nations and races in a manner that his predominantly Western audience found acceptable.

However, Hong did more with his wedding scene than make “Oriental culture” visible, understandable, and desirable for a cross-racial audience: he also subtly developed the *qing*-based discourse of *TWH* and the cosmopolitan ethos of OSU to suggest that just as Chinese ideas were equal to those of the West, so, too, was the Chinese race on a par with the white race.

Because no attempt was made to hide the fact that the actors were of different races, *TWH's* wedding appeared to be between a Chinese man and a white woman. When viewed in the context of discrimination that Chinese faced in America at that time, the interracial intimacy displayed onstage by Lin and Vogel in Act 2 and by Vogel and Hong Shen in Act 3 is significant. Whether or not Hong intended it, the roles performed by *TWH's* multi-racial cast were another means by which the playwright staged "China" before the "World."

Aided by the enticing stage props, Hong carefully crafted the wedding scene into a spectacle to gracefully perform the interracial intimacy between the two leading actors, Lin and Vogel. According to Hong Shen's stage direction, Lin, dressed in elegant red and green, is introduced to the audience with Chinese musical background. In contrast to the stage direction calling for Master Chen's insane and comic performance in the previous act, Hong demanded a dignified manner from Lin in keeping with the festive but solemn mood of the wedding. Standing stage front, Master Chen waited for his bride, who was dressed in red silk, to be introduced first to the audience and then to himself. Master Chen walked backward on the red carpet, holding one end of the red and green silk, while the bride, with the help of her servants and maid, held the other, following the groom's lead. When the groom and bride finally reached center stage, they turned to each other, and Master Chen bowed while the bride stood still with neat composure. C. C. Lin, who in the 1918 photograph of Cosmopolitan Club officers was safely "segregated" from his Caucasian female peer, here stood next to a white woman in red Chinese dress to share the traditional symbol of wedlock (holding both ends of the silk). Thus, in the process of transforming script into performance, the use of a gender-aligned and mixed-race cast greatly complicated the theatricality of the scene in the text. What in reality was a cross-racial heterosocial interaction, depicting the interracial intimacy between a Chinese male student and his white American female peer, was enveloped in a theatrical illusion of marriage between a Chinese gentry man and woman. Considering the anti-Asian sentiment in American popular imaginations as well as Chinese students' racial and classical redefinition by 1919 as an "inferior race" in comparison to Caucasians but a "superior class" to Chinese laborers, one may find it hard to decide which "reality" was more theatrical, the staged Chinese wedding between Master Chen and his bride or the staged intimacy between Lin and Vogel.

Admittedly, Hong Shen also sought to employ *TWH's* wedding scene to entice his audience with an Oriental spectacle. Yet Hong's promotion of the wedding and *TWH's* theatrical materiality went beyond self-Orientalizing

ethnography and was done in response to the play's own dramatic logic. Structurally, the wedding scene deserved its extravagant visuality because it was here that Miss Wang succumbs to the plague and the play's plot is diverted. Also, the wedding serves to connect the two previous debates over "love/*qing*" between Master Chen and Mr. Yang, and Master Chen and the Doctor, respectively. The alteration between dialogue-heavy scenes and one exhibiting the spectacle of a Chinese wedding was, as Hong planned, a pleasant change and served to resolve the melodramatic conflict quickly in this short three-act play.

Moreover, it is only after the wedding scene that Master Chen transforms from a childish and comical "insane boy" to a sincere and devoted "wedded husband." Whereas the character of Master Chen was depicted by Hong Shen and portrayed by C. C. Lin as a comic role in Act 1, he becomes noticeably elegant and mature during the wedding scene in Act 2 and later even problematizes the "scientific" reasons given by the Doctor for quarantine with his "emotional" appeal to love/*qing*. In this manner, Hong's depiction of Master Chen starts by following mainstream American theatre and Hollywood narratives' portrayal of Chinese men as insane (i.e., inferior/impotent) beings, but then skillfully subverts this stereotype by demonstrating Master Chen's cultural elegance and eloquent rhetoric.

Unfortunately, Hong Shen's attempt to subvert the stereotype of the comical "Chinaman" was only half successful. One detailed review recognized the play's efforts to transform Master Chen from funny to refined. However, C. C. Lin, according to the review, gave an uneven performance with excellent comical body gestures but poor delivery of English dialogue.⁹⁰ In contrast, Hong's own acting talent stimulated the audience's sympathetic understanding of the relationship between Mr. Yang, played by Hong himself, and Miss Wang / Vogel. Mr. Yang was portrayed as a bitter but understanding lover-cum-friend in scenes bidding farewell to Miss Yang (Act 1) and accepting of Miss Wang's decision to follow the customs of widowhood (Act 3). After learning from the Doctor that Miss Wang was arranged to marry Master Chen in order to fulfill her filial piety to Lord Wang and to demonstrate her father's Confucian righteousness to Lord Chen, Mr. Yang chooses self-exile to Mongolia and to be remembered "as your [Miss Wang's] friend." Upon returning home to learn that Miss Wang would not marry him, Mr. Yang respects Miss Wang's adherence to "the most sacred tradition: a woman once wedded can never marry again." Now addressing Miss Wang as "Madam Chen," Mr. Yang shows that he values the "sacred love" between the "widowed wife" and "dead husband."

While in the wedding scene Vogel was heavily ornamented with the



Fig. 3. The cast of *The Wedded Husband*. Hong Shen, “Xiju de rensheng” (戲劇的人生 *A Life of Drama*), in *Wukui qiao* (五奎橋 *Wukui Bridge*) (Shanghai: Xiandai shuju, 1934). Courtesy of the Shanghai Library.

wedding costume and remained nearly silent,⁹¹ in both Act 1 and Act 3, Miss Wang / Vogel talks to Mr. Yang / Hong wearing everyday clothes and appearing far less exotic. Judging from the photo of the cast, Vogel’s costume in Act 1, despite being in accordance with her role as a Chinese gentry woman, did not conceal Vogel’s physical features as a Caucasian woman.

The English dialogue between Vogel and Hong further made Vogel’s presentation as a Chinese gentlewoman unconvincing. These physical and linguistic features blurred the distinctions between the two female bodies represented on stage: the character of Miss Wang and the student actor Vogel. The theatrical illusion of a white woman’s impersonation of a Chinese gentlewoman was thus constantly at risk of being exposed as the reality of a Chinese man and a white woman acting. Yet I would argue that Vogel’s performance should not be interpreted as a variant of yellowface—albeit without the makeup—because the character she was portraying was depicted as neither caricatured nor humorous. Furthermore, when one is cognizant of the fluid crossing between the role Miss Wang and the actor Miss Vogel, the following moment of intimacy between Mr. Yang and Miss Wang reads as even more sensually striking and culturally meaningful:

MR. YANG. Is she? (*Turning he sees Miss Wang. There is silence between them*)
 (*The Maid withdraws quietly*)

(*The two salute each other by half-kneeling.*)

MISS WANG (*Very slowly*). Very glad to see you, Mr. Yang.

MR. YANG. Very glad to see your ladyship. Are you well?

MISS WANG. Yes, thank you. (*Deep silence*) I heard that you are going away.

MR. YANG. To Mongolia, the great North, the great desert, the land of hopes.

Shall start tomorrow morning.

MISS WANG. Tomorrow, that's three days before my wedding. Why in such a hurry?

MR. YANG. I don't mean to get away before your wedding. But you know a broken hearted man is no decoration for a happy occasion.

MISS WANG. Do you call it a happy occasion? . . .

(*It is as if they have a thousand words to speak to each other, but don't know where to begin.*)⁹²

Both the dialogue and stage directions inform the spectators that the scene depicts a couple in a romantic relationship who, restrained by ethical and behavioral norms, bid farewell with no need to spell out their melancholy. The tension between the theatrical illusion and the reality of the actors perhaps caused the audience to shift their attention back and forth between the dramatic story and the real interracial intimacy. Hong and Vogel performed interracial intimacy drastically differently from the mainstream American theatrical norm. On those two April nights in 1919, in the OSU Chapel, an audience of over thirteen hundred Chinese and Americans were presented with a memorable event: a potent and handsome Chinese man expressing his longing for a Caucasian woman in a manner that was deemed neither threatening nor comical.

Rainbow: When a Confucian Father Is the Protagonist of "May Fourth"

Driven by the success of *TWH* and also inspired by the May Fourth Movement then unfolding in China, Hong Shen made one more student production at OSU. *Rainbow*, staged on September 5 and 6, 1919, at the OSU Chapel, marked another effort to "realistically" represent China in a modern theatre. This play dramatizes Chinese reactions to World War I and the Paris Peace Conference that had transferred Germany's territorial privileges in

the Shandong peninsula to Japan. Hong in a December 1920 article in Chinese took pains to stress that his work was based on objective “facts,” citing multiple journalistic sources and missionary correspondence.⁹³ Drawing on these “raw” materials, Hong staged a Chinese Confucian father’s prewar mobilization and the Shandong residents’ postwar mass protest, bringing a refreshing counterpoint to the standard narrative focused on the student political demonstration that took place on Tiananmen Square on May 4, 1919. Like *TWH*, which does not observe the canonical narrative of Chinese Nora plays, *Rainbow* also subverts established May Fourth accounts.

If one were to map out the cultural frontier of the May Fourth Movement specifically, and of Chinese modernity in general, Columbus, Ohio, would likely not even come to mind. However, it was exactly on this “backstage” where Hong Shen employed student theatres to develop his and his cosmopolitan peers’ emotional and critical inquiries into the epochal significance of May Fourth and contribute to the surging discourse of national and global renewal. Reading *Rainbow* in tandem with *TWH*, one may be surprised to learn that, on the campus of OSU in 1919, two key foci of the May Fourth legacy, an iconoclastic Nora who walks out of the patriarchal family and the patriotic Chinese youth who walk to Tiananmen, found alternative presentations. Unless we consider Hong’s productions of *Rainbow* (and *TWH*) within the context of May Fourth, neither the historical narrative of modern Chinese theatre nor that of “May Fourth” is complete.

Recovering *Rainbow* is much trickier than recovering *TWH*. While the production program of *Rainbow* is archived at OSU, its complete English script, if there is one, is not. “Rainbow” thus only existed among materials in the form of a pamphlet with no mention of the plot. Fortunately, in summer 2012, I located a detailed Chinese synopsis of the play published in the *Chinese Students’ Quarterly*.⁹⁴ There, under an alternative Chinese name, “Dongfang ming xi” (The East Is Bright)⁹⁵ Hong Shen details the play’s three acts, set between summer 1917 and summer 1919.

Intriguingly, the protagonist in *Rainbow*, a play about May Fourth, is not an iconoclastic youth, but Gentryman Liu, who recently retired from the position of chancellor in the Ministry of Civil Affairs. Liu, unlike other patriarchal heads of “traditional” Chinese families, is an earnest believer in US President Woodrow Wilson’s (1856–1924) World War I proclamation, “The world must be made safe for democracy.” To ensure democracy and to protect China from foreign threats, Liu “sacrifices his own social status and career, his only son’s life, and a friendship” to mobilize his fellow countrymen in the war against Germany. Stung by his best friend’s criticism, “How dare you make the decision of life and death for our four hundred

-The Rainbow-

PROGRAM

Public Entertainment

By

Students in Conference
The Chinese Students Alliance
Mid-West Section, U. S. A.

At Ohio State University Chapel



Friday 8:00 p. m. and Saturday 2:00 p. m.
September 5th and 6th, 1919

Fig. 4. The Program of *Rainbow*. Courtesy of The Ohio State University Archives.

million people?”⁹⁶ Liu employs Mencius’s praise of the legendary emperors Yu 禹 and Ji 稷, who existed “in the age when the world was being brought back to order,”⁹⁷ to explain his motivation:

[Yu thought] that if anyone in the kingdom were drowned, it was as if he drowned him. [Ji thought] that if anyone in the kingdom suffered hunger, it was as if he starved him.⁹⁸

In Liu’s self-defense, Hong Shen finds a commonality between Confucianism and American progressivism. “Democracy,” the new moral order that the world will adopt, entails every individual’s well-being: no one will be drowned, famished, or suffer from conflict. Like the young gentry men and women in *TWH* who found in Confucian rituals the “cure” for the plague, Liu leverages Confucian ethics creatively to place the world back in order, equating Confucian models and doctrines with the contemporary pursuit of democracy.

Although China took part in the war effort and paid, in Hong’s view, the “highest sacrifice among the Allies,”⁹⁹ democracy did not arrive. Ruthlessly, after the Versailles Treaty, Chinese territory was transferred from one imperial power to another. Accordingly, the Shandong Question fills the populace in *Rainbow* with indignation. The public’s collective anger is channeled against Liu because what Liu so earnestly advocated, a world in line with Wilson’s Fourteen Points, has not come to be. Several thousand residents gather in front of Liu’s house, attempting to ransack and burn it. The curtain of Act 3 drops when Liu walks out of his home alone, unarmed and unprotected, to talk to the angry mob. Whether he calms the crowd or becomes its victim is unknown. In addition to reflecting Hong’s disappointment over the Versailles Treaty, the play’s sudden ending suggests a pronounced skepticism toward the masses.

Hong Shen’s decision to wrap up *Rainbow* with a “mass protest” that does not yield any positive results is not in keeping with dominant May Fourth narratives, neither during Hong’s time nor in the constant recollections and commemorations in China since. Chen Pingyuan argues that a contemporary “live report” from a Beijing journalist published in the *Morning Post* (*Chenbao* 晨报) offers the most reliable account of the day’s events.¹⁰⁰ The detailed report, which documents the weather, participants, protest banners, and parade routes, likens the student demonstration to a mobile theatre that began on a sunny morning at Tiananmen and climaxed with the burning of the residence of Cao Rulin (曹汝霖 1877–1966), the vice minister of foreign affairs scapegoated for the loss of territories in Shandong.

When we read *Rainbow* together with the “live report,” it appears that Hong adapts Cao’s story, taking the retired official Liu’s perspective to dramatize the mob’s threat to burn down his house. By presenting Liu as a brave and responsible nobleman, Hong critically reevaluates the collective force of the masses, framing their indignation in destructive rather than constructive terms. What caused Hong to take such an explicitly elitist and conservative stance? Apart from promoting Confucian doctrines as equal to democracy in positively reorganizing the world, Hong’s sympathy to Liu and cynicism toward the mass movement were likely shaped by family trauma.

When *TWH* was undergoing a two-week campus promotion, the Ohio State *Lantern*, on April 4, 1919, focused on the elite background of the Chinese student performers, calling them “Sons of Men who are Prominent in Governmental Circles.”¹⁰¹ The article mapped out every male actor’s political and social pedigree in China, except for Hong Shen, whose father, a former cabinet secretary, was noticeably absent. By then, Hong Shuzu (洪述祖 1855–1919) had already been tried and convicted as a conspirator in the assassination of Song Jiaoren (宋教仁 1882–1913).¹⁰² Hong Shuzu was executed on April 5, 1919, roughly a week before the production of *TWH*, and the case remains today a controversial political scandal. Considering the highly sensitive nature of the matter, neither Hong Shen nor his daughter, Hong Qian (洪铃 b. 1941), provides details in their writings regarding how Hong processed his father’s death. Nevertheless, for Hong Shen, his father’s execution was likely devastating. Contextualizing *Rainbow* in this way further explains Hong’s choice to trust the scapegoat (Liu) over the agitated masses.

With access only to the title, scholars may miscategorize *Rainbow* as “a political satire,” missing its personal content entirely.¹⁰³ However, once the plot and the characterization of Gentryman Liu are explained, the connection between Liu in *Rainbow* and Hong Shuzu in reality becomes clear. In the span of three acts, Liu’s self-imposed responsibility for his fellow citizens and the multiple sacrifices he made for the sake of the nation are all forgotten, while the masses, blinded by their despair, become a deadly threat. Like Liu, Hong Shuzu was also condemned, even though Hong’s father had faithfully served the government and acted for what he thought was a “greater good.” By means of staging *Rainbow*, Hong Shen continued to pursue his goal of realistically presenting “China” in theatres. In this second play, the theatrical realm departs from a gentry family in *TWH*, expanding further to a mass political movement before returning to Hong’s unspoken interiority.

Creating the “Grammar” for Modern Chinese Theatre

TWH and *Rainbow* played a catalyzing role in the transformation of Hong Shen’s career from “a possible second- or third-class engineer” to “a dramatist with an unbelievably promising future” and in the development of modern Chinese theatre more generally.¹⁰⁴ The success of these productions prompted Hong to pursue more training in playwriting and to write three more Chinese plays in English. More importantly, the public staging process of *TWH* altered the trajectory of Chinese students’ theatre activities in America. Previously, Chinese students either published scripts in journals for Chinese overseas students or practiced cold readings but never staged a performance for the general public. Alongside these transformations, Hong asked himself and those students new questions: What kind of Chinese theatre should be staged in America? What kind of modern theatre could be staged in China? What “grammars” should the writing and staging of Chinese drama follow? To answer these questions, I examine Hong Shen’s dramaturgic works and theoretical advances he made in the aftermath of OSU while he was still in America.

Soon after *Rainbow*, Hong left Columbus for Workshop 47, George Pierce Baker’s famous playwriting class at Harvard University.¹⁰⁵ He also attended the Curry School of Expression (now Curry College) and would later become involved with a professional theatre company in New York whose name remains unknown.¹⁰⁶ Between 1919 and 1922, Hong was directly involved in the publication and/or production of the English-language plays listed in Table 1.

The two plays staged at OSU enabled Hong Shen to engage a cosmopolitan audience regarding Chinese overseas students’ concerns in both political and personal arenas. *Return*, like the plot for *Rainbow*, illustrated Hong’s critical understanding of how World War I and the ensuing global political ideals of democracy and self-determination influenced political and social transformation in China, while *Romeo and Juliet* reflected Hong’s flirtation with Shakespeare to express Chinese overseas students’ understandings of love and marriage.¹⁰⁷ However provocative these subsequent works may have been, they gained far less attention and support from the general public than Hong’s OSU productions and predominantly served as extracurricular activities. Only with his successful production of *Mulan*, a play done in cooperation with Zhang Pengchun (張彭春, aka P. C. Chang, 1892–1957) that raised funds for flood relief in northern China, did Hong regain the kind of public attention garnered by *TWH*. In the view of a certain *Shenbao* correspondent, the successful two-night performance of *Mulan* in the Cort The-

Table 1. English-Language Plays That Hong Shen Either Wrote or Staged

Play	Time	Troupe	Published Script (or Summary)	Location	Patronage	Hong Shen's Role
<i>The Wedded Husband</i>	April 1919	Ohio State University	<i>Poet Lure</i> (1922)	Chapel, Ohio State University	Cosmopolitan Club; Chinese Students Club (Ohio State University)	Playwright, director, prop manager, actor (playing Mr. Yang)
<i>Rainbow</i>	Sept. 1919	Ohio State University	<i>Chinese Students' Quarterly</i> 2, no. 4 (Dec. 1920)	Chapel, Ohio State University	Chinese Students Club (Ohio State University)	Playwright, director, actor
<i>Return</i>	1919	Not staged	Not published	NA	NA	Playwright
<i>Romeo and Juliet: A Farcical Comedy in One Act</i>	April 1920	Unknown	<i>Chinese Students' Monthly</i> 15, no. 6 (April 1920)	Unknown	Unknown	Playwright
<i>Mulan Joins the Army</i>	Feb. 1921	Columbia University	Not published	Cort Theater, New York City	Unknown	Playwright (co-operating with Zhang Pengchun), actor (unknown role)

atre in New York was the most remarkable event in the “China lifesaving” movement inspired by US President Herbert Hoover’s (1874–1964) Relief Expedition for the 1921 European famine.¹⁰⁸

The news report erroneously attributed the script and the production of *Mulan* to P. C. Chang, and Hong Shen was only briefly mentioned as one of the two leading student actors. According to Hong’s own account, he was the dominant author, writing the first five acts and providing an outline for the final one, while Chang only finished the script for the sixth act and played an advisory role in the performance.¹⁰⁹ However, because Chang was already established in New York and enjoyed a wide network with local and Chinese journalists, he was the one given credit. Further hindering Hong’s chance at recognition was the *Shenbao* journalist who reported on the work and who mistakenly transcribed Hong Shen’s English name, S. Hung, into “Shen Hong.” Obscured by the towering shadow of P. C. Chang, the anonymous Shen Hong understandably raised little attention among domestic and diaspora theatre communities.

Fortunately, the controversial authorship of *Mulan* did not prevent it from being an artistic and commercial triumph. In 1921, *Mulan* was staged in New York and later in Washington, DC, eight times and made a net profit of over \$10,000. What made Hong particularly proud was that this profit was drawn not from VIPs who typically spent over \$100 per night for a box seat, but from ordinary people who only paid from fifty cents to \$2.50 for their tickets.¹¹⁰ Even if we were to assume that everyone purchased a \$2.50 ticket, the total viewership would have been four thousand, or more than three times the amount that saw *TWH*. *Mulan* clearly struck a responsive chord among a mass audience, and the play’s success likely paved the way for Mei Lanfang’s sensational Peking opera tour in New York a decade later.

The Scenario versus Script Debate

Although not all of the scripts of Hong Shen’s English plays have been preserved, it is clear that his theatre productions in America were centered on written scripts, and not performers’ improvisation, as was then the norm in China.¹¹¹ In addition to writing English scripts for his plays, Hong published articles in English and Chinese discussing the proper dynamic among the playwright, actors, and the performative context when writing drama. These discussions reveal how Hong’s definition of writing and staging drama complicated the “scenario versus script” debate (*mubiao yu juben zhi zheng* 幕表與劇本之爭) that first appeared in Japan in 1889 and was rehashed in Shanghai in the 1910s.

There were but few bona fide “scripts” within Chinese drama circles in the early twentieth century. Milena Doleželová-Velingerová, disappointed by the paucity of plays and their poor quality, suggests that Chinese modern drama only truly came into existence in the 1930s and the 1940s, three decades behind other modern literary genres, such as fiction and poetry, whose origin can be traced to the late Qing.¹¹² Granted, anyone who briefly scans the voluminous scripts published in the sea of newspapers, literary magazines, and tabloids in the first decades of twentieth-century China would likely question the complaint of “script hunger” (*juben huang* 劇本荒) put forward by both new theatre activists and modern scholars.¹¹³ Yet the harsh reality is that most published scripts were either crude imitations or literary translations of Western plays or elite literati *chuanqi*-style “closet dramas” (*antou ju* 案頭劇) that were not intended to be staged. What enabled the smooth running of thousands of new theatres and hundreds of *wenmingxi* troupes, despite the unsatisfying “literary dramaturgy,” were the scenarios that grew out of the domestic operatic theatres in the early twentieth century.¹¹⁴ Unlike scripts, scenarios were collectively created by performers backstage prior to the performance. Usually, scenarios only contained the dramatic plot outline, act divisions, and the assignments of entrances and exits of each character. The specific dialogues, monologues, and actions in each scene were determined by improvisation.

Siyuan Liu, in his detailed construction of *wenmingxi*'s “literary hybridity,” explains the two sides of the “scenario versus script” debate. Lu Jingruo and most Spring Willow members were opposed to scenarios. Likely inspired by Mori Ogai (森鷗外 1862–1922) and Osanai Kaoru (小山内薫 1881–1928) in Japan, Spring Willow member Feng Shuluan (馮書鸞 1883–1940) argued for the supremacy of scripts, proposing that the theatre hierarchy should be as follows:

The script is the primary element of a play; the second element is scenery; and the third is costume. . . . The actor is a puppet, and the script represents the wires that control it. The person who can manipulate the wires to make the puppet talk and move is none other than the playwright.¹¹⁵

The ideal relationship between script and actors thus should be like that of a single puppeteer and his marionette. However, Feng and Mori's radical reformation and flattering appraisal of the Western notion of individual authorship, while influential in Japan, failed in changing norms in Chinese new theatres in the early twentieth century. Instead of upholding the

supreme power of the script/text, Feng Xizui (馮昔醉 n.d.), Xu Banmei (徐半梅 1880–1961), and other *wenmingxi* veterans demonstrated the “indigenous theatrical perspective,” diagnosing that Chinese new theatre realities necessitated the combined practices of scenario-writing and actor-centered performance, in part to free semiliterate or illiterate actors from the burden of reading and memorizing wordy scripts.¹¹⁶

Hong Shen’s ideas concerning the role of the script in dramatic performance bridge these two contradictory opinions originating in Shanghai and Tokyo. These ideas are presented in an essay he wrote with Shen Gao (潘銛 n.d.) entitled “New Discussion on Scriptwriting” (Bianju xinshuo 編劇新說), which was published in 1919 in the journal *Students Abroad in America Quarterly* (*Liu Mei xuesheng jikan* 留美學生季刊) soon after the success of *TWH*. There Hong Shen and Shen Gao argue that a good dramaturge should practice “economy of attention” (*jingji* 經濟 Chinese and English in original) toward actors, spectators, and performance space:

Playwrights should not write without thinking of actors. Instead, one needs to carefully compare and calculate all different elements before writing, among which, three items are most important: (1) The actors’ talent. Playwrights’ first *zhiji* [“like-minded friend”] is the actor. . . . (2) Performance Space. Now theatres are built with scientific perception, which greatly benefits performances. . . . The electric lighting can make artificial sunshine and moonlight, sunset and storm. [But] new drama productions should carefully plan the costume and stage set to be historically accurate . . . as spectators can all see clearly. . . . (3) Spectators’ psychology. As tradition and education change, social psychologies also vary. For example, suicide in Eastern [plays] must be a virtue . . . but [in Western plays] it is only rendered as “lack of courage.”¹¹⁷

The first rule of scriptwriting in this essay is to establish a *zhiji* relationship between playwrights and actors. This position sounds strikingly humble when read against Feng/Mori’s master-puppet metaphor typical of the drama reformers’ discourse linking Spring Willow, Japanese *shinpa*, and modern European theatre. In fact, the artistic and social fraternization with actors that Hong and Shen imply here was not substantially new in light of the long-standing relationship, charged with both social and erotic tension, between elite intellectuals and actors, who had operated with an ambiguous social status since the seventeenth century.¹¹⁸ Noting that “only if actors are able to grasp and express the goodness of a script will spectators discern

the playwrights' intention and agenda,"¹¹⁹ the pair add a unique touch when they further point to the need for a fraternal relationship between actors and playwrights for the completion of a theatre piece:

Playwrights' ideas and thoughts, of course, are more advanced than actors'. However, actors' understandings [of the roles and plays] are derived from their life experiences. If actors do not believe in [the playwrights' narration] from the bottom of their hearts but are forced to act out, the effect will not be good. Thus, the actors' voices should also be considered. On another note, the playwright sometimes carefully composes the dialogue in order to perfect the plot. However, the composition is so ornate and wonderful that actors cannot truly understand and express it. In that case, even if the actors are shouting and exhausting themselves, neither the playwrights nor the audience will be pleased. Thus, playwrights should calculate in advance the potential talents of the actors and accordingly write the script to enhance their advantages and avoid the disadvantages. Playwrights are like the chief of staff, actors are like soldiers and generals on the front. The chief can never forget the general and soldiers' strength.¹²⁰

Here, Hong Shen and Shen Gao further employ the concept of *zhiji* to describe the ideal dramatic community where the playwright and the actors are united by common goals. Their idealization of text/playwrights and performance/actors differs in nature from both ends of the "scenario versus script" debate. Unlike Feng and Mori, Hong believes that the success of a play lies in the masterful calculation and democratic cooperation among actors, theatres, playwrights, and spectators. At the same time, although Hong argues that playwrights should write with their actors in mind, he does not advocate the direct input of actors in creating a script. Thus, neither script-centered nor actor-centered, Hong Shen spans the two poles of the "scenario versus script" debate. Hong writes to serve, not to rule, a theatre.

The Theatre as a Democratic Institution

Hong Shen elaborated his vision for Chinese theatre in a 1920 essay he wrote for *Theatre Arts*, which, at the time, was the only magazine discussing theatre art in the United States. This essay not only earned Hong a small sum of money (two cents per word) but also provided a platform to promote his ideal community for modern Chinese drama. The focus of Hong's short

essay is the transformation of the infrastructure behind Chinese theatre. “Everything in China is in a state of flux; so is the Chinese theatre,” he states.¹²¹ According to Hong, three types of theatres coexisted in China:

Modern theatre, to be found only in such big cities as Peking and Shanghai, with its asbestos curtain, electric lights, concrete or steel fire escapes, and in one case, with a sanitary shower booth for patrons! Not only that, another modern feature was introduced in 1906—the revolving stage. Then there is the Imperial Theatre in the New Summer Palace near Peking. It contains three stages, one above the other. Important actions are on the middle stage, which is therefore the main stage. Gods sit in the upper story as if to control the destiny of the people directly below them. While the lower and warmer region is represented by the lower stage to which the villains always fall after being slain by the heroes. Truly a model of perfection! In most parts of China, one finds the third type [of theatre] predominant, sometimes the only one existent. . . . It is, in fact, the contemporary Chinese theatre, because it is so prevalent and still so popular with the great mass of people. Certainly, it is Chinese, for it preserves the Chinese theatrical traditions.¹²²

Strikingly, the type of Chinese theatre that Hong labels “contemporary” is not the first or second, defined by lavish performative spaces exhibiting modernity and imperial power, but the third, which Hong characterizes in terms of the social relations enabling it.

This third type of theatre was often staged by traveling companies and was therefore both seasonal and mobile. Usually, a company was organized and founded by several experienced actors, including the roles of historical player, sword dancer, and cross-dressing male performer. Each of these actors mastered a repertoire of twenty to one hundred plays in which he could act the leading role.¹²³ As for the rest of the cast, companies would “loan” actors from other troupes and places. Such a composition was necessary for Chinese theatre since “the long run is unheard of in the East.”¹²⁴ Ordinarily a program consisted of eight or nine plays that were given continuously from seven in the evening to one in the morning. These prepared programs needed to be changed every day and had to include the popular subgenres of historical plays, family melodrama, and farce. Thus, only a variety of performers, able to adequately perform a range of roles, could ensure the survival of a theatre company. Comparing the Chinese mobile theatre to Western theatre culture, Hong drew attention to the lack

of rehearsals and regulation in Chinese theatre troupes. It was the leader of the theatre who selected plays, arranged programs, and assumed responsibility for the troupe.

Hong probably decided to highlight the particulars of this type of Chinese theatre because it was the most unknown to Americans and, therefore, the most “theatrical.” At the same time, Hong likely wanted to emphasize the parallels he saw between it and the ideals of American democracy. Understanding theatre as a performance space and theatre culture as a microcosm of Chinese society in flux, Hong Shen’s account focuses less on dramas onstage than on the performance of social roles offstage and the relations between actors and the audience. Writing that “the Chinese theatre has been a very democratic institution,” Hong described the spontaneous actions of an audience, largely composed of middle-class merchants, to the performance as follows:

When a good play goes wrong, the audience will demand the actors to act it over again. Under exceptional circumstances, stools and tea pots may be thrown to the stage and the return of the admission fee may be demanded. . . . If a prince dares to utter a *hao* to show favoritism [when it is inappropriate], he is promptly *dao haoed* [booed] by the rest, even including his own servants.¹²⁵

While conceding that Hong Shen could not provide a detailed history of Chinese theatres within a four-page article, it is necessary to point out the discrepancy between Hong’s accounts of Chinese theatre in the late Qing and early Republic and Joshua Goldstein’s construction of the transformation “from teahouse to playhouse” at the turn of the twentieth century. In Goldstein’s representation, the transition of Chinese theatre, from an institution that enhanced social rankings (teahouse) to a potential space of liberty (playhouse), was facilitated by the dramatic reformation of architectural design and seating arrangements in metropolitan theatres. The Qing teahouse “facilitated the differentiation of social hierarchies: commoners, officials, and actors . . . each had their own spaces and standards of conduct.”¹²⁶ These enhanced social hierarchies were superseded in the Republican-era playhouse, which functioned as a space intended to facilitate the leveling of social ranks and the enacting of new forms of sociality, where “customer-citizens were to be treated with equal respect in what was provisionally a universally accessible public space.”¹²⁷ Goldstein thus underscores the importance of architecture in shaping modern Chinese theatre’s democratic features.

In contrast, Hong emphasizes the native democratic spirit embedded in the Chinese performance space. He asserts that this democratic spirit sprung from a healthy dynamic between audience and performers, in an environment where the illusionary space (onstage) and social space (off-stage) were permeable and congruous. As Hong wrote, a performance could only be completed by spectators' spontaneous reactions of bravos and boos. Such a scenario differs from traditional Western dramas staged in playhouses, where the audience is expected to believe in and enhance the separation between illusions (performative space) and reality (audience space) by acting as quiet observers. It also differs from the "marketplaces with an array of items for sale" that Goldstein constructs as the native environment for dramas in teahouses, where spectators were easily distracted, seeing the performance simply as an "item" sold onstage.¹²⁸ Hong Shen considered the "sincere, sympathetic, and empathetic" participation of spectators to be an essential component of the overall performance: "Hundreds of *haos* and *dao haos* unified into one loud ejection!"¹²⁹ It was in the theatre that the audience obtained experiences to form a collective opinion, which sometimes included the power to revise or even to cancel the performances.

At first glance, the community formed within the performative space Hong describes may appear to be an egalitarian one, where a "prince" and his servants obtained equal access to watch and equal rights to comment on performances despite the social distance between them outside of the theatre. However, such a complete subversion or even erasure of hierarchy was illusory. Within the audience, there still existed a "theatrical order" building on spectators' understanding and knowledge of performances and theatre culture in general that superseded the hierarchy derived from social rankings. If we were to understand the rhetorical conflation of imperial social hierarchy ("prince" and servant) and Republican class differentiation as a reflection of the Qing-Republican transition's hybrid culture, it would not be a stretch for us to infer that middle-class patrons might "bully" an inexperienced "prince" but still needed to show respect to a sophisticated theatre fan, even if that fan was just a servant.

Hong Shen's anecdotal stories describing contemporary Chinese theatre as a "democratic" institution thus reveal his true desire to build and defend within contemporary Chinese theatre an agreed-upon theatrical order that was permeable on- and offstage. The ideal *zhiji* relationship that Hong espoused between playwrights and actors should thus be expanded to include informed theatre fans, as well. Theatre, in Hong's imagination, not only subverted the established social order, which led late imperial and early Republican state authorities to view it with great suspicion, but also

constructed a new orderly community in which it was one's appreciation of drama that determined one's authority. On the surface, Hong's wishful thinking about creating a new "theatrical order" puts him on level with political pragmatists who viewed theatre chiefly as a means to carry out a political goal.

In fact, when we view Hong's claims about a democratic theatre alongside further comments he made with Shen Gao regarding the artistic nature, literary tactics, and sensibility of drama, we see that Hong aspired to a new understanding of theatre itself. Specifically, Hong and Shen reject Feng/Mori's script-centered approach to drama in part because they see drama and literature as being inherently different. Placing drama within the category of art, they stress that drama brings forth "aesthetic perception" and "a joyous state" among its audience by strategically "adding, deleting, revealing, and concealing" information and stories at hand, in contrast to such fields as medicine and history that prioritize accuracy and clarity.¹³⁰ Hong and Shen observe the delineation between sense and sensibility that was established in the Western Enlightenment. They first assert that the power of drama does not stem from the "cold-headed" indoctrination of rationality but the "warm-hearted" movement of sensibilities.¹³¹ Hong and Shen then go one step further, arguing that it is not merely a difference between art, science, and history that makes drama distinctive. Rather, even within the category of art, drama stands out, for it is drama alone that distinguishes itself by its leaps toward sensibility, which, considering the distinction between "spirit" (*qinggan* 情感) and "structure" (*jiégou* 結構), are more pronounced in the emotional pull of drama than in the textual citation and reasoning of fiction.¹³² Briefly, they draw the distinctions between drama and literature shown in Table 2.

What I find most significant about Hong and Shen's argument is that they define drama as a sentiment-based collective experience that reaches its potential when performed in the "democratic institution" of the theatre, where a *zhiji* relationship exists among playwrights, actors, and theatre fans. By the same token, drama—or what I have called "playmaking"—could not be separated from society at large (i.e., "art for art's sake"); it required an active audience to shape, and be shaped, in return. There, in the theatre that Hong described, a new community was formed, bounded by sentiment.

Conclusion

Following in the footsteps of the first generation of modern Chinese intellectuals, Hong Shen and his peers, the so-called "special generation," com-

Table 2. Distinction between Literature and Drama. Hong Shen and Shen Gao, “Bianju xinshuo [1] (編劇新說 New Discussion on Scriptwriting),” *Liu Mei xuesheng jikan* (留美學生季刊 Students Abroad in America Quarterly) 1, no. 1 (Spring 1919)

	Literature	Drama
Difference in Spirit	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can be joyously read alone. Thus, readers can demonstrate individual favoritism. 2. It also can discuss philosophical theories; argues by reasoning. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Must be watched with others. Thus, it is the passions (pleasure, anger, sorrow, fear, love, and hatred) that need to be celebrated in order to strike a chord with the audience. 2. It must move the sentiments.
Difference in Structure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A narrator can appear when needed, giving credible accounts of the characters. 2. The materiality, printed on paper, ensures its permanent existence. Readers can always go back to the text if they do not understand it at first. Thus, fiction writers must not miss necessary description, but they do not need to repeat. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is no narrator in a play. Playwrights do not have the privilege of mastering a commentary voice. Thus, all characters' thoughts and personalities must be disclosed by dialogues and actions. 2. Drama is ephemeral. If the audience is confused at one place, it is likely to miss the whole point of the play. Thus, a play needs to constantly repeat the main theme and drama conflict.

mitted themselves to the cause of national development by studying in the United States and Japan. If Western modernity was only reimaged and reimagined via print and visual media and thereby remained “foreign” for Hong Shen before traveling abroad, the texture of modernity came to life, and became more complicated in the process, once he landed in the United States. For Hong and his peers, “modernity” was not just an intellectual issue but an existential one as well.¹³³ Living in a frontier where Western culture interacted with Chinese moralities and norms, these intellectuals generated numerous accounts of the exchanges between China and the West. Predictably, the most memorable narratives are those that are charged with tension and loaded with cultural shocks, such as Lu Xun’s (in)famous description of being an “observer and spectator” at the photographed execution of a Chinese spy that was displayed in Japan, or Wen Yiduo’s account of the discrimination against Chinese men at the graduation ceremony of Colorado College in the United States. Later, these personal experiences became woven into a shared discourse of suffering, suggesting that Chinese “modernity” arose out of bitterness and exclusion. In con-

trast, Hong Shen's successful staging of *TWH* and *Rainbow* at OSU provides a far more optimistic story. When we include Hong's early activities into our understanding of modern Chinese theatre's creation, we are reminded of a time when theatre was not only a tool by which "modern" Chinese could reclaim their national dignity vis-à-vis a "feudal" past and a "hostile" West but also a forum where modernity and tradition, China and the West, could merge in mutually beneficial synthesis. Considering that much of twentieth-century *huaju* was intended to serve "anti-imperialist" and/or "antifeudal" goals, Hong Shen's distinct nonconfrontational approach is even more striking.

The present academic and theatre industry vogue of reading and staging modern Chinese drama "globally" suggests that we should cease viewing *huaju* solely, or primarily, as an imitation of the Western realist theatre tradition by May Fourth men of letters and highlight instead the genre's hybrid and cosmopolitan features. Such a reframing is necessary if we are to gain a fuller picture not only of *huaju's* development, but also of the pursuit and participation of Chinese intellectuals in cosmopolitanism, which, subdued by nationalism in the latter half of the twentieth century, has come back to life in our present era under the rubric of "globalization."

Centering Hong Shen's early drama activities at OSU and in New York fulfills this scholarly need by telling the story of modern Chinese theatre's history from the other side of the globe. This story of playmaking reveals a space in which many of the long-standing ideas of modern Chinese theatre history are disrupted. Contextualizing *TWH* among earlier adaptations of *Hemp* and reconstructing its textual borrowings blurs the boundaries between "radical," "reformist," and "conservative" players and calls those terms' very applicability into question. While the lack of a complete script and production records do not allow a thorough reading of *Rainbow*, its partial recovery still productively augments the standard narrative of student protests in the May Fourth Movement. We see in these works a surprisingly critical perspective on the legacy of Nora in Chinese theatre and support instead for the contributions of Confucian ethical norms to post-war cultural cosmopolitanism. Theatre-related activities meanwhile served not only as a vehicle for these cultural and political projects, but also as a means for some Chinese overseas students to practice fraternal intimacy offstage and romantic intimacy on stage with racial and cultural others. *Rainbow* and *TWH* suggest an alternative trajectory for the development of *huaju*, one where the genre's two formative traumas, a hostile imperialist West and a backward tradition, are harmoniously reconciled.

Playmaking provided Hong Shen with a means to rethink drama and

democracy on Chinese terms. In stressing the *zhiji* relationship between playwrights and actors, Hong distinguished himself from both Japanese drama reformists and Chinese *wenmingxi* veterans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Believing that the reciprocal understanding between playwrights and actors would lead to excellent productions that would effectively deliver theatrical effects upon spectators, Hong presented the theatre as a democratic space where multiple voices are heard. It was these initial forays onto modern Chinese drama's theoretical terrain that prepared Hong to later define *huaju* as a "collaborative" art in his 1935 "Introduction to Drama." Modern Chinese drama could thus constitute a genre in its own right—one with the potential to create and shape an ever-broadening community.

2: Script to See

Spectatorial Subjects and Enlightened Eyes in Chinese Realist Theatres of the 1920s

On August 17, 1923, over six hundred friends and family members clustered at the dock of the China Merchants Steam Navigation Company (Lunchuan zhaoshang ju 輪船招商局) in Shanghai to send off 150 intellectual youth on the SS *President Jackson*, a ship with “all modern conveniences, the best food and accommodation,”¹ to study in America. The ceremony lasted nearly four hours and was documented by a film team from the American Tobacco Company.² Successive reports in *Shenbao* focused on these students’ triumphant departure, describing them “throwing colorful paper down to their families waiting on the dock while peers from Tsinghua and St. John’s University loudly sung their alma mater.”³ Significantly, it was the aspiration for “enlightenment”—a source of alienation and frustration for China’s educated elites—that at last captured popular attention when it took the form of a spectacle.

These young elites improvised farewell skits, both to acquaintances on the spot and to distant urban viewers via newspapers and documentary films, transforming themselves from May Fourth men of letters (*wusi wenren*) who scripted the era’s dominant “home-leaving” narrative to men of theatre (*ju ren*) who acted it out. Notably, they did so while standing on the ship’s deck, which served as a makeshift stage equipped with spectacular gadgets and mechanical devices, similar to what cosmopolitan Chinese called a “picture-frame” stage (*jingkuang* 鏡框).⁴ Shanghai urbanites, who were familiar with over-the-top entertainment complexes such as the Great World (Da shijie 大世界),⁵ likely viewed the educated elites’ farewell performance as yet another variation on the commercial theatres that had prioritized fantastic scenes and lighting since the second half of the 1910s. By walking into the pictorial frame of the SS *President Jackson*, this group of educated youth briefly became the “to-be-viewed” in a photographically realist spectacle.



Fig. 5. Chinese students leaving for America on the SS *President Jackson*. “Guan si fei liumei xuesheng fangyang ji” (官私費留美學生放洋紀 A Record of the Students with Government Funds and Self-Support to Study Abroad), *Shenbao* (申報 Shanghai News), August 18, 1923. Courtesy of the National Library of China.

Among this group of students stood Yu Shangyuan, one of three faculty members sent by Tsinghua University, who had committed himself to studying drama at the Carnegie Institute of Technology.⁶ The grand departure for America marked a new act of Yu’s personal life and influenced the trajectory of modern Chinese theatre. Yu left China determined to address two urgent problems then affecting presentations of “modern realities” in theatre: audience exhaustion with an overabundance of stage extravagance in *wenmingxi* and other commercial hybrid theatres, on the one hand, coupled with an inability to translate aesthetic and political agendas into spec-

tators' sensuality on amateur drama (*aimei ju*) stages, on the other. Realism (*xieshi zhuyi* 寫實主義), endorsed by intellectual advocates of modern theatres in the 1910s, had by the early 1920s experienced increasing disappointments and critiques. Popular audiences, formerly wowed by the various forms of new theatres, had grown tired of the endless efforts to deliver the "real" on stage. Yu and his fellow dramatists, representing various political and aesthetic stances, had reluctantly concluded that sight was the sensory mechanism most difficult to stimulate and satisfy. Despite the failures of realism to deliver "enlightenment" thus far, Yu and his cohort were not willing to give up on the latent potential of a realist theatre spectacle.

What to see, how to see, and how to direct the other to see, thus constituted Yu's primary focus in his academic, theatrical, and everyday experiences in America. These inquiries, profoundly influencing modern Chinese theatres' contemplations on realism, as well as Yu's self-transformation from a Chinese intellectual youth to a cosmopolitan dramatist, were fashioned in three texts, written during and after Yu's study abroad: *Mutiny* (*Bingbian*, 1924), which was the first play Yu wrote in America; "Humble Gift" (*Qinxian* 芹獻), a series of essays he composed for the *Morning Post Supplement* (*Chenbao fukan*) between 1923 and 1924; and *Statue* (*Suxiang*, 1928), a four-act play written in China in the aftermath of the National Theatre Movement (*Guoju yundong* 國劇運動, 1925–1926), Yu's ambitious but failed attempt at creating a modern Chinese realist theatre. We see in these works the complicated and striking visual components that together facilitated the theoretical reflections on realism that later proved pivotal for the development of modern Chinese theatre, as the genre transitioned from being a plethora of competing trends to the canonized form known as *huaju*.

This chapter situates Yu Shangyuan's empirical and discursive construction of realist theatre within the literary theories of realism in the 1910s and 1920s. It examines the complicated visual experiences, cleverly embedded in scenography, stage directions, and drama narratives that affected three cosmopolitan spectatorial subjects: the protagonists of *Mutiny* and *Statue*, the imagined audience and readers, and Yu himself. Doing so reveals the mechanism by which a Chinese realist theatre (*xieshi ju* 寫實劇) in the 1920s mediated the science, art, and act of "seeing" to inspire, formulate, and discipline both the audience and the genre of *huaju*. I argue that Yu rested his understanding of realism on two poles: the "ocular realism" of Henrik Ibsen, in which spectatorial subjectivity, not mimetic accuracy, was prioritized, and the neo-Confucian concept of *gewu* 格物, or the self-driven investigation of things. This unlikely synthesis achieved two things: First, by addressing the relationship between spectatorial subjects

and theatrical reality, Yu transformed realism from being mere craftsmanship or mimicry into an act of seeing and knowing. Second, by changing the focus of realism from replication of the exterior (other) to an understanding of the interior (self), Yu foreshadowed modernist trends of the late 1920s and 1930s. In Yu's realist theatre, the playwrights, performers, and audience members became *gewu* subjects with modern, Ibsenesque eyes. Yu Shangyuan's realism therefore troubles three strictly defined binaries: between Western Enlightenment and Chinese neo-Confucianism; representation and presentation (often translated as *xieshi* 寫實 and *xieyi* 寫意, respectively); and objective and subjective reality. Simply put, it presents a "modernity" different from the canonized May Fourth realism of the 1920s. Rather than pitting "China" and the "West" in opposition, Yu demonstrated a way for cosmopolitan Chinese to synthesize their intellectual heritage with Western-based understandings of visual modernity, so as to deliver enlightenment on the theatre stage.

In Search of May Fourth Realism(s)

Modern Chinese theatre and realism—or more specifically, *huaju* and May Fourth realism—are tightly linked in scholarship. Edward Gunn, in the introduction to his 1983 anthology of modern Chinese drama, defined *huaju* as the "most assertive form" of realism that "convey(ed) broader views for social reform and revolution."⁷ Although *huaju* and *wenmingxi* both shared the "spoken" form, only *huaju* could be regarded as "innovative" and modern, while *wenmingxi* remained a form of "posturing and declamation." Nine out of the ten plays in his anthology were, unsurprisingly, *huaju* presenting the May Fourth intellectual's reflections on iconoclasm and social progress. Gunn embraced wholeheartedly the "real drama" (*zhenxi* 真戲) that Hu Shi identified as the future of Chinese drama, and which Hu believed could only be found in Western realist plays.⁸ Hu Shi's seminal article "Ibsenism" (*Yibusheng zhuyi* 易卜生主義) appeared in *New Youth* in June 1918, and, by the early 1920s, the influence of Henrik Ibsen was so prominent that "Ibsenism" was used to signify realism. The vernacular written language, a dialogue-only script, and a theme addressing an Ibsenesque "social problem" served as the dominant model for Hu Shi's followers to imagine a modern Chinese theatrics, and realism was accordingly identified as a core component of *huaju*. Ironically, it was this very conflation of realism and *huaju* that has led to the genre's contradictory readings in scholarship. While Gunn believed that *huaju* was the consummate iconoclastic genre of modern Chinese literature, later scholars have criticized *huaju* for reflect-

ing what David Der-wei Wang calls a “master narrative of a linear and pre-conceived time” that mythologized modernity “as a prerequisite to be fulfilled by non-European cultures that wish to catch up to History.”⁹

Huaju fans and critics alike have been profoundly influenced by the discursive power of the May Fourth paradigm. Sometimes referred to as the May Fourth literary tradition and legacy, the orthodox paradigm sees an overlap in goals between Chinese cultural iconoclasm and Western modernity.¹⁰ Standard *huaju* historiography is that modern Chinese theatre “came on the Chinese stage at the turn of the twentieth century in imitation of the plays of the Western Ibsenesque [realist] tradition.”¹¹ In tandem with the canonization of *New Youth*, *huaju* became associated with and was even replaced by “social problem plays” (*shehui wenti ju*), which were in fact only a subset of *huaju* dominant in the early 1920s. The “strong hold” of realism, as Li Jin suggests, has not only served as the defining feature of *huaju*¹² but has also become the vantage point from which to judge other theatres, such as *wenmingxi* and reformed Peking opera (*gailiang jingju*), that competed with *huaju* to define theatre modernity.

This orthodox reading has received a series of critiques since the 1990s. The drive to move beyond the May Fourth paradigm, or as Kirk Denton puts it, “to liberate modernity from its own discourses and reveal it in more historically complex ways,”¹³ has affected studies on literature, print culture, art history, film, and, more recently, performance and theatre. For example, Joshua Goldstein and Jin Jiang each turn away from Western “spoken” theatre forms to examine reformed Peking opera and reformed Yue opera, respectively.¹⁴ *Huaju* is rendered as the negative example to illuminate the “repressed” modernity embedded in these operatic theatre forms.

Siyuan Liu, in his study of *wenmingxi*, further challenges the yardstick of May Fourth realism and *huaju*. Liu points out that the scholarly neglect of non-Western hybrid theatres is due to a misidentification of “socially conscious, speech-centric, and commercially untainted” realism with modernity.¹⁵ It was, Liu argues, the definition and vision of realism in *huaju* that wrongly denied the creative and transnational modernity that *wenmingxi* brought with its dramaturgical and performance hybridity. In a similar tone, Li Jin re-evaluates the performance style of the melodramatic *wenmingxi* staged in Shanghai during the 1910s and 1920s. Li endorses *wenmingxi*’s sentimentalism as its “unique ethical vision and emotionalist assets”¹⁶ and reveals how veteran *wenmingxi* actors and playwrights such as Wang Youyou (汪優游 1888–1937) structured their performances around affective measures. Li argues that *wenmingxi*’s melodramatic “mode of excess” indeed delivered, by emotional means, the “truthfulness” that

Wang emphasized. On the contrary, it was May Fourth critics who misunderstood and limited realism, circumscribing it within an overly narrow definition of social problem plays.¹⁷

The hybrid theatres that prioritized electrified Western stages over social and sentimental realities have likewise received scholarly attention. Laikwan Pang asserts that the electronic gadgets and changes of stage dimension fundamentally affected the culture and tradition of Peking opera and performance in general. The New Theatre (Xin wutai 新舞台), one of Shanghai's many entertainment complexes, accommodated Peking opera on a wide and semi-oval stage instead of the square stage common in Beijing teahouses. "The noise and inattention inherent in the traditional Peking opera experiences disappeared," Pang argues, and "a new collective subjectivity" was instead constructed through the controlled and dazzling visual experience.¹⁸ Weihong Bao likewise notes the "spectacular realism" of such stages created by "footlights, raucous color, and sound effects, and real material objects placed in the representational space."¹⁹ The sensorial immediacy between the audience and stage, Bao argues, garnered higher praise than cinematic realism, as the latter only rendered a replicable yet distant reality. Goldstein recognizes that the "hyperbole" inherent in cutting-edge spectacles may have outweighed a play's story and message.²⁰ However, such experimental combinations likely only appeared to be excessive in hindsight, once May Fourth realism and a more orthodox form of *huaju* were canonized in the late 1920s and early 1930s. For most urban theatre audiences before that time, "hyperbole" was the "realism" they perceived.

These scholarly efforts have reevaluated the "antirealist" theatrical modernity available for urban audiences during the first decades of the twentieth century. Yet, in these readings, *huaju* and its dominant aesthetic principle, realism, are rarely interrogated.²¹ Consequently, there are still many questions related to the movement left unanswered: What is the culturally and historically specific connotation of May Fourth realism? Are there plural understandings of "realism" even within the May Fourth orthodoxy? If so, how did such heterogeneous interpretations compete to shape the vision and development of *huaju* in the late 1910s and 1920s?

As Marston Anderson demonstrates, an investigation into the cultural translation of Western "realism" to China requires us first to explore May Fourth intellectuals' "internal operation of realism" and then to "identify the points of resistance to the Western mode implicit in China's rich and sophisticated aesthetic tradition."²² China's initial reception of realism was not as difficult as one might expect. Although mimesis is alien to tradi-

tional Chinese aesthetics, the emergence of the neo-Confucian concept of *gewu* in the Song dynasty (960–1279) offered an intellectual framework within which the “questions of the artwork’s relationship with the external world” could be discussed. Shao Yong (邵雍 1011–1077) advocated *gewu* to gain not a scientific and analytical observation of the material world but “a meditative use of the external world in the process of self-cultivation.”²³ The similarity between *gewu* and the Western concept of objective scientific investigation became even weaker in the hands of later neo-Confucian philosophers. For example, Wang Yangming redefined *gewu* in strictly moral terms to mean “rectification of the mind.”²⁴ The focus of *gewu* is, notably, not the “things” themselves, but the relationship between neo-Confucian subjects and those “things.” *Gewu* would influence understandings of “realism” in the May Fourth era.

Realism entered China by way of Japan. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Western term “realism” gained its Japanese equivalent, *shajitsu* 写美, just one of the many neologisms created by Meiji intellectuals.²⁵ Liang Qichao used the term in Chinese as *xieshi* in 1902, followed by Chen Duxiu (陳獨秀 1879–1942), who in *New Youth* described a school of literature that dealt with “meaning and reality” as “realism.” Hu Shi led this discussion into the political realm, shifting from its abstract philosophical and aesthetic connotations to an “actual operation”: Ibsenism. Hu in his (in)famous 1918 article proclaimed “Ibsenism” to be a potent critical act of revealing familial and social corruption through drama and thus moving readers to social reform.²⁶ Such a utilitarian reading has since been consolidated into the dominant understanding of Ibsen and realist theatre, shaping both the May Fourth paradigm and subsequent critics.

However, a mere three years after Hu’s article, at a time when Ibsenesque realism was already showing signs of decline, the writer Zheng Zhenduo (鄭振鐸 1898–1958) helped to reorient discussions on realism to the practice of observation (*guan cha* 觀察), with sympathy (*tongqing* 同情) and sincerity (*cheng* 誠) also highlighted. What interested Zheng, more than depicting social problems, was cultivating ethical norms through visual engagement with the world. Notably, such sentimental focus distantly echoes the neo-Confucian *gewu*: it associates “observation” with the “moral tempering of the observer” and views literary composition as a process by which “the moral knowledge acquired through observation coalesces and finds spontaneous expression in words.”²⁷ These resonances with *gewu* have motivated Anderson, Wang,²⁸ and others to revisit the complexity of realism in May Fourth fictions.

Unfortunately, similar inquiry into the vision and practices of realism

in *huaju* has largely remained stagnant. The potent combination of Hu Shi, Ibsen, and *New Youth* appears too “orthodox” to be effectively challenged. *Huaju* has been smothered under its ideological burden for so long that one may easily overlook the visual modernity it offered in the late 1910s and the early 1920s, or the philosophical traditions embedded within the genre at the decade’s end. For Yu Shangyuan and others in his circle, *huaju* was a synthesis of Western realism and Chinese aesthetics. The delivery of both modernity and tradition in *huaju* required that each of the playwrights and the audience had their own pair of enlightened or cultivated eyes. It is the cultivation of “seeing” that connects *huaju* with the neo-Confucian *gewu* on the one hand, and with Ibsen’s “ocular realism” on the other.

Yu Shangyuan’s Understanding of Realism

In their farewell ceremony at the Shanghai pier, Yu and his cohort took part in what could be viewed as a quintessentially “modern” theatre scene, the central elements of which complemented each other. This scene consisted of a social message (seeking enlightenment), props and a stage (the ship equipped with gadgets), and a spectacle, all of which were witnessed on the spot or reproduced by print and visual media. While this farewell scene was probably not intended to offer a bold new theatrical synthesis, we nevertheless see in it the features that later marked Yu Shangyuan’s alternative approach to theatre, and that differed from the two forms of modern drama then dominant in China: message-heavy amateur drama and prop-heavy hybrid theatres.

By the end of the 1910s, the increasingly complex stage gadgets employed in hybrid theatres had come to overpower a play’s integrity. Spectacular gimmicks and sizable props, such as cars and even ships, flooded new stages and entertainment halls, along with the “ha-ha” or funhouse mirror (*haha jing* 哈哈鏡), shadow plays, magic shows, and other examples of mechanized and visual modernity.²⁹ Audiences became inundated with lenses, cameras, lights, and other ocular gadgets that tricked or enhanced their vision, making them feel comfortable with or even addicted to the stimulation facilitated by these new playthings. Yet, while the “culture of amusement”³⁰ was used to entice audience members, hybrid theatres faced increased criticism and struggled to survive the harsh competition for both capital and performing space in what was a limited entertainment locale.

Overindulgence in visual stimulation deviated from the enlightenment pursuits of May Fourth realism. Moreover, the aesthetic and the economic burden of staging such spectacles contributed further to a collec-

tive reaction against commercialization in modern theatres. This reaction was principally embodied in the amateur drama movement promoted by Chen Dabei and the People's Drama Society (Minzhong xiju she 民眾戲劇社), which was founded in 1921. The society advocated for a "people's theatre" that, thematically, realistically portrayed people's lives and social problems; and aesthetically, pursued "art for art's sake" without commercial considerations.³¹ Amateur drama advocates writing in *New Youth* and *Drama* (*Xiju* 戲劇), the first journal devoted to modern Chinese theatre, particularly targeted electronic gimmicks that promised to represent the modern world "realistically." They, unsurprisingly, drew upon Hu Shi's Ibsenism to designate the "social message" as the core component of realism and the focus of modern Chinese theatre. In standard May Fourth narratives, amateur drama thus came to be viewed as a progressive force overturning "commercially tainted" hybrid theatres.

Between these two poles of amateur drama's "art for art's sake" and hybrid theatre's "commercial corruption" stood other visions of realism and modern theatre, including those that aspired to communicate their social message by means of the visual reality constructed in theatre. Yu Shangyuan represents this counter-orientation. Yu's interest in and impetus for realist theatre went beyond crafty mimicry or social messaging, opting instead for a backstage explanation of how the audience sees and the playwrights construct reality. By grounding realist aesthetics upon one's subjective practice of seeing, Yu's approach endorsed the neo-Confucian cultivation of *gewu*. It also dialogued with Ibsen, albeit not in the manner of Hu Shi's Ibsenesque social problem plays. Instead, it is the "ocular realism" in *A Doll's House* that best illuminates the connection between Yu and Ibsen.

"Ocular realism," in Amy Holzapfel's construction, refers to an impetus originating in the Pre-Raphaelites, a group of English painters active in the middle nineteenth century who strove to "achieve mimetic accuracy on the canvas by paradoxically illustrating the gap between objective reality and their subjective, ocular perception of it."³² Ibsen's connection with the Pre-Raphaelites stems from his experience serving on the jury at the International Art Exhibition to evaluate John Everett Millais's (1829–1896) paintings.³³ Notably, the dramaturgical structure of *A Doll's House* bears an acute intramedial similarity with the visual composition of Millais's *Mrs. James Wyatt Jr. and Her Daughter Sarah* (1850), in which representations of "mother, child, and the doll" are positioned and compared horizontally and vertically. A viewer standing in front of Millais's painting will have a fluctuating experience of seeing: one's eyes will shift from bottom to top, left to right, front to back, and back again, detecting and connecting the similarities and

differences among four sets of images of “mother, child, and the doll.” That is to say, Millais’s painting disclosed a “binocular mediation of reality” but not the verisimilitude of reality.

Ibsen likewise infused *A Doll’s House* with the aesthetic of binocularity by emphasizing “the way various figures see or fail to see an object” and materializing “multiple and fluctuating viewpoints on Nora throughout the drama.”³⁴ Egil Tornqvist, for example, notes how Helmer, the husband, adheres to Nora’s triple role of sexual object, “virgin,” and mother.³⁵ Holzapfel’s close reading of the 1879 premier of *A Doll’s House* further illuminates the “ocular realism” in this play both dramaturgically and theatrically. The director, Hans Peter Holst (1811–1893), arranged for Nora, “the modern mother,” to dance under a print of Raphael’s (1483–1520) *Madonna and Child*, in which stands “a classical mother.” The spectator sees Nora in front of the Madonna, or the modern mother in front of the classical mother, and then synthesizes these two images into a vision of “motherhood.”³⁶

The realist impetus of Pre-Raphaelite painting, Holzapfel notes, “goes beyond a direct copying of nature, opting instead for a meta-conscious approach to how we see, not only in its formal execution but also in its thematic content.”³⁷ Ibsen, who was also a successful painter, practiced realism as “a way of seeing things that empowers the individual subjects.”³⁸ His foremost concern for realist theatre was the interaction between internal consciousness and the external world; not in seeking an exact copy of “life” on stage. In this manner, Ibsen’s theories of vision share surprising overlap with *gewu*, reflecting an ongoing philosophical and aesthetic inquiry into the relationship between self and object. Yu’s realism rests on the interaction between these Chinese and Western trends. It was neither “premodern” nor a form of base materialism, but was alert to, and even foreshadowed, the profound uncertainty of subjective viewing that defined the modernist movement.

To See the World with Enlightened Eyes: Yu Shangyuan and the Craft of Playmaking

In early September 1923 the SS *President Jackson* arrived in Seattle with a fresh cohort of Chinese students. Yu’s time studying theatre in Carnegie and living in America, as documented in his series of essays collectively titled “Humble Gift” and published in *Morning Post Supplement* in 1923–1924, appears surprisingly celebratory, not unlike Hong Shen’s time at OSU, with no trace of the alienation that many Chinese experienced abroad. Yu’s account is illuminated by a diversity of explorative acts of seeing and an

almost obsessive concern for lighting and scenography, the hallmarks of Ibsen's ocular realism.

Like earlier generations of Chinese international students and diplomats, Yu seized opportunities to visit museums and theatres.³⁹ During a brief stop in Chicago en route from Seattle to Pittsburgh, Yu, together with a few fellow Beijing University alumni who were at the University of Chicago, found time to visit an unnamed art museum and the McVickers Theatre. Recounting this adventure, Yu particularly noted the use and misuse of lighting. First describing his lackluster visit to the museum, Yu wrote:

This visit reminded me of my recent experience at [the third] art exhibition organized by the Apollo Art Society (Aboluo meishu xuehui 阿博洛美術學會)⁴⁰ in Beijing. . . . The indoor lighting [at both events] was exceptionally unsatisfying. Previously when I watched amateur dramas, I could quickly tell that they totally didn't understand lighting and the use of lighting. The result, expectedly, was that they failed to stage aestheticism and the audience completely lost passion for this kind of new theatre. [Similarly,] it was not that there were no paintings worth noting at the Apollo exhibition. Unfortunately, those neglected paintings, just like the amateur dramas, failed to win spectators due to the lack of lighting.⁴¹

Finding unsatisfying connections between art galleries in America and China, as well as with theatre, Yu asserts that lighting plays a critical role in "staging aestheticism." Thankfully, unlike the lighting in the Chicago art museum, which just animated the exhibited oil paintings but did nothing more, the lighting and electronic gadgets employed in McVickers clearly impressed Yu. There he saw a concert, one short opera, and two short films:

Before the concert started, the entire theatre was in darkness except for a few shades of colored lights that were projected on the screen installed onstage. As soon as the concert began, the projected lights became dynamic, and the pacing of the color-changes nicely corresponded to the tempo of the music. As was the audience, I was led to a scene that was hitherto never experienced, leaving all ugliness in the human world behind.

During the intermission, all colored lights vanished and were suddenly replaced by a spotlight that illuminated the forthcoming solo. The entire theatre fell again into darkness, and the audience was inexorably absorbed by the sight of the violin solo lit up by the spot-

light. While in reality the violinist was performing for a large audience [seated in a modern theatre], it created an image for me, in which a lone figure was plucking a Chinese zither bathed in moonlight. . . . The facilities and employment of lighting should be credited for creating such an aesthetic conflation.⁴²

Although the switching from dynamic colored lights to a single ray of spotlight only constituted “some electronic plaything commonly used in America,”⁴³ this simple lighting technique during the intermission intrigued Yu’s imagination and even facilitated the transformation of a fixed American theatre setting into, in Zong-qi Cai’s terms, an “aesthetic fusion of scene and emotion.”⁴⁴ The materialized stage lighting structured and aided viewers’ emotional engagement, rather than merely vying for their visual attention.

Yu’s description thus runs parallel to the neo-Confucian understanding of *gewu*, where the subject-object relationship necessitates the subject’s cultivation. Yu, affected by both the theatre’s novelty and his emotional experience of travel, took part in a bifolded viewing encounter, in which the spectatorial subject first sees and captures the details of the intermission performance and then conflates his internal emotion with the external scene, transforming a proscenium stage into an imaginary reality. Notably, while Yu gave full credit to the stage lighting, the spectators’ act of seeing was equally important to actualizing the performance’s power.

Yu next recounted his experience of watching an opera at McVickers, which Yu described as the tragic story of “a Japanese woman [who] married an American sailor who did not plan to bring her back to America”⁴⁵ and was almost certainly Giacomo Puccini’s (1858–1924) then very popular *Madame Butterfly* (1904).⁴⁶ Although Yu recognized the singers’ vocal skills, their natural performance, and, surprisingly, the verisimilitude of their makeup (it appears that Yu was not at all offended by the practice of “yellowface”), what most impressed him was something else:

I just want to focus on what I was truly fond of: the scenography. In the center of the upstage stood a window, outside of which the spectators were expected to see the ocean moving (a visual effect caused by illuminating different shades of light on the curtain scene). Later, spectators would also see the boat depart from the harbor.⁴⁷

Yu was struck by the way lighting combined with scenography to create a “realistic” illusion. In other words, Yu was less concerned with appreciating mimetic accuracy than with analyzing the visual trick employed therein.

Yu's account shows that a skilled scenographer could make a fixed background "alive" or dynamic, even recreating the feel of three-dimensional images produced by the binocular lenses of a stereoscope. The stereoscope, invented in 1838, was viewed as a newfangled visual apparatus that replicated the science and act of seeing. Its binocular structure, Holzapfel notes, mimicked the way "our eyes view the world from slightly different positions to produce the impression of depth in the brain."⁴⁸ Stereography developed to be one of the most popular forms of commercial photography in America, becoming a didactic family pastime and means for students to explore geography, history, and culture, including China.⁴⁹ American stereoscope companies sent photographers to cover the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901),⁵⁰ while James Ricalton (1844–1929), who had previously exhibited short films by Thomas Edison (1847–1931) at Shanghai's Tianhua teahouse in 1897, aspired to help Americans unable to travel to China to "do the next best thing and see it through that miracle of realism, the stereograph." "Sight is our cleverest sense in the acquisition of knowledge," Ricalton wrote, for "to see is to know."⁵¹ Although there is no evidence that Yu Shangyuan was directly familiar with Ricalton or had the opportunity to see how stereographic images of China depicted the "miracle of realism" in America, Yu nevertheless had already incorporated the science of vision into his understanding of theatre, seeing scenography as a means to employ the physiology of spectators' vision so as to deliver reality.

The lighting at McVickers, Yu wrote, lent depth and movement to the flat and still paintings, while an interior window frame produced a narrowed yet concentrated experience of viewing, like looking through the enlarged eyehole of a stereoscope. As a member of the audience, Yu was invited to partake in the realist illusion of seeing a boat depart for America in the distance. As an active viewer and a traveler who had just finished a long sea voyage, Yu likely took a step further, placing the memorable scene of his departure from the Shanghai harbor alongside the flat scenographic painting in *Madame Butterfly*, synthesizing the two into a three-dimensional spectacle.

Despite the reverie, Yu did not allow himself to be captivated for long. His self-identification as a theatre reformer prompted him to review the mechanisms producing the illusion. Accordingly, he detailed the process by which the stereographic scene was made, creating a to-do-list for his fellow Chinese playwrights and readers:

- (1) [With the employment of the lighting,] the flow of the ocean should constantly change and cannot be too monotonous; (2) the upstage

lighting should not be overly bright; otherwise, it will distract spectators' attention; (3) the paintings of the ocean waves, the boat, and the window, and the props of the interior of [the Japanese woman's] house should be positioned at an appropriate distance; (4) the size of the boat and that of other scenic images and stage props should be made in appropriate scale; and (5) [again] the ocean waves should be noticeable [with the aid of lighting].⁵²

Yu's technical description can be read as a suggestion for prospective scenographic designers to be prudent when calculating the distance between painted scenery and stage props. When scene paintings were positioned laterally with "appropriate" distance and lighting, eyes, the quintessential binocular apparatus, would automatically synthesize the images and view the flat paintings with depth and perspective.

In Yu's positive appraisal of Western scenographic design, the coordination between a pair of keen eyes and the skillful employment of visual perspectives became the key component of an audience's experience. Questions about how "realistic" the stage set appeared, or what "dazzling" technologies were employed, were less important. In this regard, Yu distantly echoed the position of the Pre-Raphaelites, who prioritized optical agency over technology or craft.⁵³ Yu Shangyuan's concern with the composition of stage scenography and the audience's feeling of realness expanded the relationship from the domain of objects to that between observers and the external world. Instead of being repelled by the apparent contrast between modern Western realism and the traditional Chinese presentation, Yu found philosophical and artistic commonality in their respective acts of knowing. Simply put, Yu inserted a pair of enlightened eyes in the *gewu* subject, bridging modern vision and neo-Confucian philosophy in his pursuit of realist theatre.

Many of Yu's peers likewise prioritized "seeing" in their discussions of (re)forming visual realism, such as Mao Dun (茅盾 1896–1981) and Zheng Zhenduo, who both called for "objective observation."⁵⁴ As the 1920s progressed, the goal of realism gradually shifted from "scientifically depicting reality"⁵⁵ to "approaching reality" by turning the audience into spectatorial subjects. Zhou Xiang (周湘 1871–1933), an oil painter and progressive Qing official, was an early voice in these discussions. In late 1919, Zhou founded the Association of Chinese Art Education (Zhonghua meishu hui 中華美術會) with Ouyang Yuqian and published the first Chinese academic journal

in the field of art, *Art Education* (*Meiyu* 美育), the following year.⁵⁶ A pair of his articles on scenography, which Yu may have read while in China, foreshadowed what Yu later expressed in Chicago. First, Zhou highlighted the importance of employing illusion to “approach reality”:

In the Peter Theatre, when the story of Napoleon was staged, the scenes for the Battle of Waterloo cost \$100,000. A team of painters went to the original battlefield [before painting their work]. With the help of the scenography, the audience, sitting in the theatre as if they were in the war, watched the show with great pleasure. But the theatres in our country never stressed such components. The delight of a play could be enhanced by means of the theatre scene. But if the background is misplaced, it will devalue the play. The stage background is installed to express the feeling and scenery. Thus the first and foremost important pursuit is to approach reality (*bizhen* 逼真).⁵⁷

For Zhou, “approaching reality” is best accomplished not by a photograph depicting realistic details, but by a painting that delivers an aura of “magic and marvel” (*yu huan yu miao* 愈幻愈妙). Painters, while needing to be familiar with their subject, should not be confined by historical details, as such “specifics will only fragmentize the overall scene.”⁵⁸

These concepts are fleshed out in Zhou’s second article, which expands on his subjective approach to stage design. Zhou advocated that the canopy of a production, which was quite large and usually contained pictures of mountains, oceans, waves, paths, and streets, look neither substantial nor specific, but represent “nothingness”:

When painting the canopy, one must be daring and resolute (*poli* 魄力). The so-called *poli* refers to one’s guts. Regardless of the content and the theme of the scenery, the painter should decide the tone of interest and be very clear with painting light, shadow, and distance. If one needs to paint mountains and woods, the painter should also have expertise with the principle of perspective. The canopy, ideally, should be vague, faded, and light in color. Within the nothingness (*xuwu* 虛無) and the meditative quality, the scenography should present a view from afar. In this way, the audience will enjoy the feeling of being present in the scene while forgetting sitting in the middle of the theatre. Isn’t it wonderful?⁵⁹

What needs to be precise, in Zhou's analysis, is the light, shadow, and principle of perspective, or the correlation between items painted on the scenery and the relationship between viewers and the scene. The effect of "approaching reality," often praised as "realism," here refers to the relationship between spectatorial subjects' (or the observers') eyes and an image that is only vaguely painted. Unlike the visual design of the canopy, which is left ambiguous, instructions for its material preparation are remarkably precise and directed toward craft: "The size of the canopy should be decided based on the width and depth of the stage. . . . When painting, it is best to unfold the canopy on the floor, first applying glue to make it waterproof. . . . The best glue is made from ox skin," et cetera.⁶⁰ The focus of Zhou's account, like Yu's description of the backdrop of *Madame Butterfly*, is on technical and materialist detail. Both Zhou and Yu want to unpack the complexity of realism so as to cultivate the audience's visual experiences. Realism is not a mere method for replicating objects in various forms but an understanding and further manipulation of the science, acts, and sentiments of seeing.

Vision is the persistent focus of Yu's account of McVickers. Switching in his narrative from being a member of the offstage audience to a backstage playmaker, Yu guided modern drama advocates and the broader cosmopolitan readership of *Morning Post Supplement* to see a realist theatre presentation and further reveal the empirical procedure for making such spectacles. Yu's realism differed considerably from that practiced in commercial hybrid theatres. Rather than call for complicated devices, Yu suggested that an appropriate combination of lighting and stage scenery, or a mix of theatre design, technical craft, and scientific understanding, could be an achievable goal for China's realist theatres. After all, a play did not need to feature "complicated gimmicks" if its chief "gimmick" was the spectator's own pair of naked eyes! A realist theatre need not be first and foremost capital-intensive but could be intellectually and aesthetically driven. The long-standing conflict among aesthetic pursuits, theatre viewers' demands for a new medium, and production costs could be reconciled if playmakers and audiences became spectatorial subjects: that is, if playmakers were to fabricate theatre realism with an understanding of vision and if the audience were to learn what and how to see.

Yu went on to Pittsburgh to study theatre at Carnegie. His educational plan was originally inspired by Song Chunfang, Yu's teacher and friend at Beijing University.⁶¹ Crowned with a reputation as a devoted and affluent collector of foreign books, Song actively promoted Western drama, especially the European and American little-theatre movement.⁶² It was Song's

1919 introductory essay on little theatres, which made note of Carnegie's theatre training program, that attracted Yu Shangyuan to the school. Yu quoted Song's comments in one of his "Humble Gift" essays noting that faculty and students at Carnegie "researched, in scientific methods, various staging details and dramaturgy."⁶³ These "scientific methods" that Song described, which had previously appeared vague and distant, now materialized in the minutes of Yu's everyday life.

Yu, in his detailed account of school life, explained how techniques and craftsmanship were emphasized in all courses. Yu clearly prioritized theatre practice over any sort of institutional recognition, such as a diploma, and neglected curricular requirements, enjoying "absolute freedom" to take courses he viewed as directly beneficial. These included Dramaturgy and Playwriting, taught by Thomas Wood Stevens (1895–1984), as well as Rehearsal and Performance; Voice and Speech; Scenic Design, Theatre Design and Technology; Production Management; History of Costume; and Popular Dance. While studying under Stevens, Yu felt that he did not learn empty theories: "The spirit of this course was not the transmission of the mantle and alms bowl from master to disciples. Instead, students were required to testify the techniques of playwriting with experimental deeds, charting a bloody path (*yitiao xuelu* 一條血路)."⁶⁴ Long class hours were spent sharpening the skills of carpenter, painter, technician, tailor, and makeup artist. At Carnegie, Yu approached playmaking as a science, paying heed to the techniques of composing the "aesthetic architecture" and the "practical philosophy" of a full performance, with attention to the structure, theme, conventions, and visual and acoustic potential.⁶⁵

In April 1924, just as he was about to take his spring break at Carnegie, Yu received a rather rushed invitation from his colleagues Wen Yiduo and Liang Shiqiu (梁實秋 1903–1987), two key members of the Tsinghua Literature Society (Qinghua wenxue yanjiu she 清華文學研究社), to write a play for the *Tsinghua Literature Quarterly* (*Qinghua wenxue jikan* 清華文學季刊). Within three days, Yu completed *Mutiny*, a work that recorded and encapsulated what he had been seeing and doing as a drama student at Carnegie and a cosmopolitan traveler in America.⁶⁶ The plot of *Mutiny* develops via a multi-layered trajectory of vision carefully constructed by the characters' acts and the scenographic design.

Seeing Double: Ocular Playfulness in Mutiny

Judging by *Mutiny's* theme and narrative structure, this one-act play could well be labeled another contribution to the large repertoire of Nora plays.

The female protagonist, Qian Yulan, is from a merchant-gentry family. Her engagement to Fang Jun, a typical May Fourth man of letters, is in jeopardy because the status of the Fang family has recently declined after a local mutiny. Differing, though, from the hesitancy of Ibsen's Nora and the passivity of Hu Shi's Nora—Miss Tian in *Event*—Miss Qian is characterized as an optimistic and capable new woman. With the assistance of Fang Jun, Miss Qian first fabricates a rumor of a forthcoming mutiny and then convinces her family, depicted as “feudal” or corrupt, to act out the “Empty City Ruse” (*kongcheng ji* 空城計), a stratagem that audiences would have found familiar from the universally known fourteenth-century historical novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義). In this version of the ruse, they ransack their home and then hide, tricking the expected soldiers into believing that the house has already been plundered. Seizing on the chaos they have created, Miss Qian and Fang Jun elope, leaving home and family behind.

Like Hu Shi's original designation of *Event* as a farce (*naaju* 鬧劇), Yu's authorial definition of *Mutiny* highlighted the work's playful nature, describing it as “a small plaything” (*wanyier* 玩意兒). Apart from expressing the requisite humility, the term *wanyier* intriguingly echoes the “play” (*youxi* 遊戲) identified by Christopher Rea as key to China's “culture of amusement.”⁶⁷ Between the 1890s and 1930s, newspapers and magazines offered Chinese urbanites a steady diet of literature for entertainment. New playthings, particularly optical gadgets, were similarly employed to cultivate the acts of seeing, laughing, and knowing. Yu adapted and insinuated such visual “playfulness” in *Mutiny*, drawing on his academic and life experiences in America to create a realist spectacle.

Part of what makes Miss Qian and *Mutiny* playful lies in the way Yu aspired to direct his readers and audience to “see” double, much like the two halves of a stereoscopic image. Miss Qian is a modern woman striving to be emancipated from suffocating patriarchal pressure. Her path of home-leaving, though, requires her to engage in storytelling and stage blocking, transforming her into the “director” of a chaotic scene. She reminds her father several times of the demands made by the oncoming mutineers of the Ninety-Ninth Route Army, putting him into a state of fear, while nudging her lover Fang Jun to tell a story about how his family saved themselves from a similar event by vacating their home. After twice receiving Miss Qian's cues, Fang Jun finally explains the Empty City Ruse and immediately wins endorsement from Qian's father and aunt, who rush offstage to carry away their safety boxes and hide. Meanwhile, Miss Qian issues orders

onstage while finding a hidden chamber for her aunt to avoid robbery and assault. Her father, meanwhile, has a servant scatter paper human figures, normally burned in funerary rites, around the room. Finally, everyone onstage finds their designated place, and the chaotic house quiets down. Miss Qian looks around at two kinds of “dolls”: there are the visible scattered “dolls,” the paper human figures, but there are also hidden “dolls,” the actors in this Empty City Ruse. Holding Fang Jun’s hand, the director of this farce returns to her first persona, the character of a Chinese Nora, and Miss Qian leaves home. Yu Shangyuan, in *Mutiny*, first stages a life-size dollhouse that entraps Miss Qian and remains enclosed to the audience. Then, via Miss Qian’s direction, Yu inserts another smaller dollhouse within the larger one that invites the audience to peel off the fourth wall to see how Miss Qian breaks down her own circumscription from within. Via a dollhouse within a dollhouse, Yu employs interiority to unfold the characters and conflicts of the play, which, despite its playful nature, still deals with serious themes.

Miss Qian’s resistance against patriarchal restriction in pursuit of the May Fourth notion of “free love” (*ziyou lian’ai* 自由戀愛) ensures her a place in the army of Nora-like characters who were equally eager to leave their homes. But in significant contrast, Yu’s play replaces the typically anxious or desperate Nora with a capable player who first writes the deception of an expected mutiny and then directs the subsequent chaos out of which she accomplishes her self-enlightening home-leaving. The play-within-a-play structure likely provoked a sense of *déjà vu* for Chinese audiences familiar with the Empty City Ruse, but, more importantly, it animated the dual images that pivoted upon Miss Qian. At first, she is circumscribed within the house, and her relationship with Fang Jun is subject to constant patriarchal surveillance and interference. When the other characters or the audience see Miss Qian, they see an entrapped doll, and this illusion constitutes the main dramatic conflict in the play’s first half. Then Miss Qian transforms a dollhouse into an “empty city,” aligning her vision with that of the audience, who see how the panicked patriarchal characters fall prey to her scheme, and the chief illusion becomes that of dolls trapped within their own fear. Miss Qian therefore flips the dynamic of seeing and being-seen to the audience and imbues the Chinese Nora with an explicit agency. The concerns of seeing and layers of spectatorship in operating the Empty City Ruse are distantly reminiscent of structural devices that, in Mei Chun’s interpretation, elicited an idealized vision, or the “enlightened eye” (*huiyan* 慧眼), in vernacular fictions and dramas in the late Ming and early Qing.⁶⁸

It further showcases Yu's inheritance of discourses on eyes that were fashioned in metropolitan entertainment complexes from the turn of the century into the 1920s.⁶⁹

Like his efforts at facilitating awareness of the doubleness of Miss Qian and the interiority of the dollhouse, Yu Shangyuan strives to reveal the complexity of the "Chinese Woman." The three female characters—Miss Qian, Aunt, and Sister-in-Law—are noticeably formulated as representatives of the iconoclastic, conservative, and submissive woman, respectively. While these female characters are mostly accompanied by the roles of boyfriend, father, and brother, Yu intriguingly arranges a short episode in which the women discuss a local mutiny before Miss Qian directs the Empty City Ruse. This moment also marks the first time in the play that all three women meet.

In this scene, as soon as the conservative and self-righteous Aunt steps onstage from her private worship hall, she dominates the conversation. Miss Qian sits on the flower-patterned carpet and remains clearly indifferent to the Aunt's story. The Sister-in-Law, meanwhile, sits on the nearby chair, farther away from the Aunt in the same row. Were the scene acted out in a "picture-frame" stage, most of the audience would see a line of representative Chinese women who reacted differently to the dramatic social and cultural changes of the 1920s. Such a linear stage blocking highlights both melodramatic and synchronistic comparisons. Yu, however, complicates the general audience's vision by inserting Fang Jun's perspective. The young intellectual male shifts from being a conversation participant to become a viewer, much like the spectatorial readers themselves. Sitting in the opposite chair, Fang Jun, "with one eye on the newspaper he pretends to read and the other eye glancing at Aunt [and the other two women lined up behind her],"⁷⁰ sees the gap of these three separate women as well as their "conflation." Yu Shangyuan, via Fang Jun's "one eye" perspective, positions the three woman images as if they were successively representing the iconoclastic, conservative, and submissive stances that together animate an abstract "Chinese Woman." This intriguing visual device, embedded in the script, directs readers to see the depth of a "three-dimensionalized" Chinese Woman, much as a stereoscope "projects" a unified image from multiple flat surfaces. Nevertheless, Yu hopes that his spectatorial readers will not be completely deceived by what they are told to see. *Mutiny* does not strive to critique reality as much as to "achieve an illusion of reality on the stage while simultaneously exposing the futility of such an objectivist undertaking."⁷¹ The insertion of Fang Jun's change of viewpoint, though taking place only once in the play, alerts spectatorial readers to this illusion

of realism. Indeed, Yu's conflation of three images into one Chinese Nora reads like another how-to manual for visual effects, but one addressed to spectatorial readers rather than scenographic designers.

Significantly, this scene also echoes Ibsen's own playing with images. Ibsen, between his realist drama and his public persona, seemed to intentionally invoke an effect of "doubleness" among spectators. The last known photograph of Ibsen before his death in 1905, itself made for a stereoscope, was probably the most pronounced evidence for his reflection on the act and art of seeing. "The stereoscope," Holzapfel writes, "merges the two Ibsens to produce the illusion of three dimensionality . . . [It] offers the 'reality effect' that a miniature bespectacled Ibsen animates before us—like a doll."⁷² Perhaps Yu Shangyuan and his peers would not have seen the formidable Ibsen as a doll, but his awe-inspiring personality did not prevent Yu from teasing out of the perceived ideological imperatives of Ibsenism the amusement of visioning and constructing a dollhouse on a realist stage. Yu, to some extent, rescues visual acuity from May Fourth iconoclasm. *Mutiny* was a realist play grounded on "vision" more than a "social problem."

Turning to the Plaything: A Life-Size Dollhouse

Despite its traceable Nora theme, labeling *Mutiny* a "social problem play" is problematic and even goes against the coming National Theatre Movement that Yu Shangyuan himself initiated. As a counterproposal for the future of Chinese theatre, the National Theatre Movement critiqued Chinese dramatists' "mediocre" imitation of Ibsenesque drama. At roughly the same time that he drafted *Mutiny*, Yu published another entry in his "Humble Gift" series to appraise the Irish National Theatre Movement (1899–1901), which, in Yu's view, had confronted problems similar to those the Chinese theatre faced. Yu denounced Edward Martyn (1859–1923), one of the movement's founders, for "[his] interest was not in the revival of Ireland, but Ibsen. His works only reveal Ibsen's influence, not Irish soul."⁷³ Still worse than Martyn's idolizing of Ibsen in Ireland was the dogmatic worship of Ibsen in China. "Students would be greatly embarrassed if they could not rattle off some lines from *A Doll's House* or *Ghosts*," Yu noted, "and there have been abundant rewritings of Nora by young writers. There is nothing wrong with learning from Ibsen, but how many people could match his techniques?"⁷⁴ The formulaic rendering of Ibsenesque drama into "social problem plays" was, according to Yu, wrongheaded; such efforts only represented "rectifying a faulty heart and improving one's life" at the cost of the master's (Ibsen's) artistic essence.⁷⁵ If Chinese Ibsenesque drama was only

a dull copy, then what was the essence of Ibsen's art, which Yu felt Chinese dramatists had failed to capture?

Ibsenism, Yu maintained, necessitated creative engagement with vision. After expressing his disappointment over the neglect of spectacles in amateur drama, Yu went on to denounce the overly complicated scenographic experiments on hybrid commercial theatre stages in China. For Yu, an exciting Ibsenesque "spectacle," and by extension, a self-reflection of how one might see, not only required the technology of photography but also the viewer's creative eyes. An overreliance on the former without first cultivating the latter would render the use of photography futile. Unfortunately, such futile employment had become the aesthetic "pandemic" that ruled the modern drama world since the influence of realist theatre in the late nineteenth century. Although the excessive use of photography was increasingly challenged in the West, it was fully embraced by China's hybrid commercial theatres, such as the First Stage (Diyi wutai 第一舞台) in Beijing:

Since the so-called realist theatre's success, scenographers have developed a misunderstanding, assuming that photography is the perfect realism. This pandemic spread over the world and has been dominating the foreign West over the past two to three decades. . . . Now that "the god of plague" has lost its despotic power [abroad], it has traveled to a China that can barely resist anything from the West. . . . People [in China] do not know that the photograph is actually a dose of poison; instead, they taste it and cry out. "Sweet! Sweet!" One may ask if the photograph is to evolve into stereo-sceneries (*liti shijing* 立體實景). Will it then be counted as reformation? If the scenographers do not completely fix their misunderstanding of "realism," [Chinese theatre] won't have any hope at all to be on the right track!⁶

Compared to his fondness for *Madame Butterfly's* visual effects that were actualized without complicated gadgets, Yu's criticism of the popularity of photography and stereo-sceneries in China is unremittingly harsh: it is the misunderstanding of realism and the misplaced creative energy, Yu argues, that renders Chinese new theatres decrepit. Again, Beijing's hybrid commercial theatres are to blame:

The First Stage once staged *Exchanging the Prince for a Leopard Cat* (*Limao huan taizi* 狸貓換太子), which contains one stage scene of a golden palace, with an oil-painted ceiling and dragon-decorated columns. The painter is fairly crafty. If one were to shut one eye to view

the scene, like a child looking through a peephole, he would see the palace extending far, one layer after another. A country bumpkin sitting in the first rows of the audience would feel so excited that they would exclaim [in wonder]. Well, when the gongs and drums started, stepping onto the stage, an emperor appeared, followed by two eunuchs. The emperor then sat on the chair placed on the center stage, not inside the [seemingly animated] palace. By then the audience was already disappointed. Or maybe I just hope that the audience was disappointed. It seems to me that when Chinese go to theatres, they have to carry two pairs of eyes: one pair for the stage scenery and the other for the actors!⁷⁷

The scenographic craft is wasted in “hybrid” theatres, Yu implies, because of the unbridgeable gap between the stereo-scenery and the play itself. In the above example, the emperor’s misplaced chair rendered the stereo-scenery irrelevant. Overly dazzling scenography was not a necessary spectacle to help the audience understand the play or enhance spectators’ theatre experiences. Instead, it could only temporarily entice a “country bumpkin” but would, Yu predicted, eventually fail in its illusion of realism. In contrast, the dollhouse constructed in *Mutiny* presented a different understanding and practice of realism (and Ibsenism), requiring simple stage machinery accompanied by the eyes of sophisticated readers/spectators. Eyes, Yu Shangyuan argues, are just as important as what is viewed.⁷⁸

Mutiny begins with a meticulous visual tour of the principal stage gadget: a life-size yet manageable dollhouse, the embedded gearings in which will facilitate its transformation from a Western plaything to a Chinese “empty city”:

Were the play to take place in a large room, the spectators’ eyes would be automatically fixated on the decorative materials [painted or hung] on the background wall. Thus, the room of my play is not at all large. It just appears to be roomy at first glance. Following the conventional order of spectators’ acts of seeing, we would immediately capture the door placed house right, which is closed and covered with a sky-blue silk curtain. When [the pair of eyes] moves to the left, one can see a row of windows covered by cloth of the same color. On the stage right wall there is another small window from which one can see the mirror image of a foreign table lamp. . . . Onstage left there is another closing door. The wooden panels on both sides of the door are exquisitely designed and installed as if several doors are pieced together.

(We will naturally understand the function of these fake doors.) Near the functional door there is a fireplace. Though the fire is not noticeably bright, the red light will, in the spectators' eyes, warm the room. By the fireplace there are two chairs and one round table. [Finally, we see] by the invisible "fourth wall" [the edge of the proscenium arch] are placed two upholstered chairs facing the audience at an angle.⁷⁹

Taking the viewpoint of offstage spectators, Yu guides his readers through the interiority of a merchant-gentry house, or an enlarged dollhouse. The view slowly moves from house right to house left, replicating the act of viewing a scroll painting or a cinematic pan shot. The "natural" and artificial lights, reflected in mirrors and windows, illuminate the tables and chairs that block the stage into tangible compartments.

When the curtain rises, Miss Qian and Fang Jun sit in the pair of upholstered chairs by the proscenium arch, still and mute. Suddenly, the submissive Sister-in-Law opens the door on house right and walks into the room, following the order from the conservative Aunt to keep watch on the modern couple. Without any audible sounds, a spectatorial reader's sense of vision is highly restricted, as if equipped with an imaginative stereoscope, seeing a life-size dollhouse where three "dolls" sit quietly. Later, in striking contrast to the stillness at the beginning of the play, Yu animates the entire stage when depicting how the family members—young and old, men and women, master and servant—follow "director" Miss Qian's cues to pry open hidden stage compartments to find a safe spot before the oncoming "mutiny." An exquisite dollhouse therefore falls apart at play's end with the noise of shattering pieces of decoration, the chaos of the characters' slapstick bodily movements, and the final ominous silence of scattered paper dolls. Noticeably, it is the "feudal" and "conservative" characters (Miss Qian's father and aunt) who first complete the act of "home-leaving" by squeezing into the hidden compartment of this crumbling dollhouse. The paper dolls, left on the floor to fool the mutinous soldiers, symbolize the relics of the abandoned home. While directing and observing the chaos, Miss Qian seems to have solid control of the Empty City Ruse that allows her elopement, yet she loses control of spectatorial readers, who see every step of her transformation from a passive doll into an active director. The iconoclastic gesture of home-leaving in the New Culture Movement emerges from the combination of an amusing stage gadget and the stimulation of spectatorial readers' vision. In other words, the visual structuring of scenographic and architectural space in *Mutiny* facilitates a "subversive ocular order."⁸⁰

Under close examination, the script of *Mutiny* demonstrates Yu's goal for a Chinese realist theatre, which embraces but also challenges certain dominant rhetorics of theatre aesthetics. Yu chose to construct a "dollhouse"—both the spectacle to stimulate viewers' eyes and the dramatic narrative to stir viewers' feelings—by creatively adapting Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, first as an artful installation of the mechanism of seeing. Further, while celebrating the agency of an enlightened Nora, Yu showed his awareness that Nora is only the result of a male playwright's vision of a new woman by presenting Miss Qian at times distinguished from and other times conflated with patriarchal readings of women as victims. *Mutiny* intrigues readers and viewers to reflect on the theatrical and social realities affecting 1920s China, but it does so in a way that does not monolithically perpetuate the ideological and technological misunderstandings of realist theatre, namely, intellectuals' worship of Ibsen and commercial theatres' reliance on mechanical gimmicks.⁸¹

From Realism to Modernism: The "Presentational" *Xieyi* Supplants the "Representational" *Xieshi*

The completion of *Mutiny* marked the end of Yu Shangyuan's experiences at Carnegie and the start of a new creative journey. In fall 1924, Yu left Pittsburgh for New York, taking classes at Columbia University and the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. There he met a group of like-minded intellectual youth who had studied theatre, fine art, and art criticism in the United States and Britain. Influenced by the rising artistic current of anti-realism in both America and China, this group began to inquire into the modernist aesthetics and facilities embedded in Chinese operatic theatres. By year's end, Yu wrote and directed an English-language play, commonly known as *Yang Guifei*, which preserved Chinese operatic styles in acting and costume.⁸² For this impactful work, rather than emulating realist theatre traditions, Yu drew inspiration from "our national classical drama (*guju* 古劇) that won both Eastern and Western veneration."⁸³

Yang Guifei represents Yu's further problematization of "Ibsen worship" and realism in general. Stemming from Yu and his cohort's evaluation of Chinese theatre in the mid-1920s, *Yang Guifei* provided a stylistic alternative to the social problem plays that were admired by *New Youth* contributors. Instead of presenting a theatre wherein "the causal relationship between art and life would be inverted," Yu and his colleagues asked both playmakers and audience to turn away from mere "thoughts" and toward "the purer artistic values" of the play.⁸⁴ The performance of *Yang Guifei* at the Inter-



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Fig. 6. Student productions of Yang Guifei in Japan and America. "Dong Xi chongshang zhi woguo guju Changhen ge" (東西崇尚之我國古劇長恨歌 East and West Venerate Our Chinese Old Play, Song of Everlasting Sorrow), Shibao tuhua zhouban (時報圖畫週刊 Times Pictorial Weekly), January 11, 1925. Wen Yiduo designed the costume; and Zhao Taimou (趙太侖 1889-1968) was responsible for designing the symbolic scenography and lighting. Courtesy of the Chinese Periodical Full-text Database.

national House in New York City on Christmas Eve, 1924, arguably set the stage for the National Theatre Movement, a concerted effort that “made a serious (but failed) challenge against the tenets of *huaju*’s formulating orthodoxy.”⁸⁵ Unfortunately, despite the recognized importance of this performance in both scholarship and memoirs, archival records are lacking.⁸⁶ To my knowledge, this book offers the first photographic evidence of the staging experience of this canonical yet mysterious performance.

Times Pictorial Weekly (*Shibao tuhua zhoukan* 時報圖畫週刊) intriguingly juxtaposes two productions of *Yang Guifei*: Yu’s 1924 *huaju* version in New York is to the right of a *geju* (歌劇 vernacular opera play) version, staged at Tokyo’s Imperial Theatre (Teikoku Gekijō 帝國劇場) the same year. Yet, aside from a pair of blurry photographs, scant trace of either *Yang Guifei* remains. Scholars seeking to understand Yu’s transformation from a radical New Culture youth and alleged disciple of Ibsen to “a believer of modernist efforts to break the fourth wall, in part with the help of Asian performance traditions”⁸⁷ will have to employ other sources. Accordingly, Siyuan Liu turns to “Humble Gift,” the series of essays Yu wrote between 1923 and 1924. These nineteen essays, Liu argues, foreshadow the National Theatre Movement in two ways: they not only demonstrate Yu’s questioning of the application of Ibsenism in China but also contain Yu’s first expression of *xieyi*, or “presentation,” a concept Yu “borrowed from Chinese painting to interpret Chinese theatre’s artistic essence, which led to his prioritizing theatre’s aesthetic significance over content and morality.”⁸⁸ By considering Yu’s “Humble Gift,” Liu has indeed expanded the critical study of the National Theatre Movement and revealed an alternative orientation that modern Chinese theatre may have pursued before *huaju*’s canonization.⁸⁹

However, the actual scenario of China’s modern theatre development is yet more complex than what Liu has constructed. My close reading of “Humble Gift” above, the scenographic and plotting designs in *Mutiny*, and the “artistic values” promoted in *Yang Guifei* suggest that for Yu Shangyuan, the move from Ibsenesque realism to native modernism was not a rupture but a continuation of trends rooted in visuality. I believe that Ibsenism, more specifically the Ibsenesque realism of the early 1920s, was already seen as outdated by the time of the staging of *Yang Guifei*, largely because Yu’s contemporaries in China, Ireland, and America had all overlooked the importance of ocular realism—a combination of the science, art, and the act of seeing—that was embedded in realist plays and realism in general. In Yu’s view, the prioritization of “content and morality” over “aesthetic significance” in realist theatre was ironically due to the fact that most play-makers did not really understand the aesthetics of realism or Ibsenism. Yu,

in contrast, remained enchanted by the relationship between spectatorial subjects and theatrical reality, and he saw this focus as the core of Ibsen's craft as well. Yu's early intellectual development in America was grounded in a theatrics that directed the audience to see "realness" in theatre, and his mid-1920s advocacy of *xieyi* "presentation" over *xieshi*—which Yu significantly translated as "representation," not "realism"—reflects his continued efforts in this regard.

Xieshi and Xieyi in Painting and Theatre

Advocacy for modern drama and modern fine arts occurred in tandem. Yu's modernist efforts, which were influenced by Ibsen's ocular realism as much as by indigenous aesthetics, countered the realist approach toward art put forward by Chen Duxiu in 1919. Half a year after *New Youth* had promoted Ibsenism and social problem plays, Chen Duxiu, the standard-bearer of almost all "modern" cultural forms, launched an "art revolution" where he called for the adoption of Western realism in Chinese painting.⁹⁰ Chen presented the landscape tradition epitomized by Wang Shigu (王石谷, aka Wang Hui 王翬 1632–1717) as a negative example.⁹¹ This celebrated painter, whom Chen would have known intimately through the strict classical education he received under his father, was now lambasted: "While Wang Shigu's paintings have been described as the epitome of previous schools," Chen wrote, "I would treat them as the outcome of the bad paintings" accumulated since the fourteenth century.⁹² Chen claimed that he had seen more than two hundred of Wang's paintings in his family collection, and found that only one-tenth had original subjects, while the rest simply replicated ancient works. Rejecting Wang's method of "copying" ancient paintings that emphasized craftsmanship but not creativity, Chen urged Chinese painters to "give full play to one's talent, paint one's own painting, and avoid falling into the set pattern of the ancients."⁹³

In Chen's view, the "set patterns of the ancients" included both the literati painting that celebrated *xieyi* and, surprisingly, the court painting (*yuanhua* 院畫) that aimed to "realistically" mimick objects (*xiaowu* 肖物). Chen asserts that art in the early Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) "bore some similarity to [today's] Western realism," but that literati style had come to denigrate *xiaowu* and court painting from the later Yuan onward, emphasizing *xieyi* instead.⁹⁴ Chen's construction identifies *xieyi* and *xiaowu* as competing aesthetic principles that had alternatively controlled the spirit of traditional Chinese painting, only to become the "set patterns" that strangled modern painters' creativity in the late 1910s. Wang Shigu's "ill influence" on mod-

ern painting therefore did not lie in his adopting *xieyi* over *xiaowu*. Rather, the problem was that Wang consolidated the literati painting orthodoxy that Chen and his May Fourth cohort aimed to revolutionize. By dismissing Wang Shigu's work as merely copying the ancient paintings without any dynamic creativity, Chen disparaged the use of craftsmanship to mimic the antique without creating the new.

Chen made these strident comments in the burgeoning May Fourth Movement. While recognizing Chen's ideological investment in realism as a progressive and iconoclastic force, one may also find elements in Chen's critique of the neo-Confucian concept of *gewu*. Chen questioned the worth of Wang's efforts, seeing them as akin to copying. In Chen's view, Wang's model is neither a real object (*wu* 物) nor a substantial meaning (*yi* 意) but simply other existing landscape *xieyi* paintings. The relationship between painter (observer) and reality becomes interrupted and substituted for a reliance on techniques. Chen Duxiu's unfavorable view of craftsmanship contrasts with Yu Shangyuan's experience in America, where he had excitedly seen, learned, and practiced the technological details of making theatre. At the same time, Yu only valued techniques to the degree that they could present a theatrical message. Yu's chief difference with Chen is not between craftsmanship and creativity but between representation and presentation.

In May 1924, soon after completing the script for *Mutiny* but before staging *Yang Guifei*, Yu started making conscious comparisons between the arts of performance and painting, primarily through the concepts of *xieshi* and *xieyi*. Yu Shangyuan's explicit construction unfolds in another installment of his "Humble Gift" series. In it, Yu maps out the spectrum of performance across four modes: The first was "representational" (*xieshi*), in which the actor "is whoever he plays." In the second, "role playing" (*paibie* 派別), an actor always plays the same type of role. Advocates of May Fourth *huaju* regarded "representational" and "role playing" as reflecting opposing performance modes, the former of which was employed in speech-centered modern Chinese theatre, and the latter of which, traditional opera.⁹⁵ Yu instead considered these two modes of performance to be in alignment, as both require actors and audience to believe in the "realistic" illusion and pursue representational goals. The third mode was "inner work" (*neigong* 內工), which "does not depend on costume" and could only be achieved by "great" actors, Yu opined, "such as Chaplin. These great actors could express their inner feelings and senses with syllables, facial expressions, and gestures." Nevertheless, "inner work" still did not depart from representational art. Yu considered all three of these modes to be akin to the *xiesheng* (寫生, literally "sketching the nature") tradition in painting.

Yu's fourth mode, the "presentational" (*xieyi*), merited special attention—it was "fundamentally different from the first three":

The first three performances are confined within the stage; that is to say, the actors forget that they are performing and conflate themselves with the characters. For the fourth type, the presentational, the actors are always actors who perform for the audience. Their main mission is to deliver their understanding of the play to the audience offstage, making the theatre an intrinsic whole.⁹⁶

Likewise, in the *xieyi* mode, audience members are always aware that they are watching a performance. Theatrical unity is achieved through the conscious delivery and reception of the intended message. In Siyuan Liu's interpretation, *xieyi* originates from the same impetus as "the modernist breakdown of the fourth wall," as exemplified in productions such as Max Reinhardt's (1873–1943) *The Miracle* (1911).⁹⁷ Given that *The Miracle* was revived in 1924 on Broadway, Yu likely saw the well-publicized musical while he was a student in Columbia. Norman Bel Geddes, *Miracle*'s set designer, transformed the Century Theatre into an enormous Gothic cathedral that was left "seldom illuminated."⁹⁸ The prominent shadows intentionally obscured the details of the stage set, presenting the "magic and marvel" of a cathedral more than representing an actual one. In this regard, Geddes's stage was closer to the "nothingness" advocated by Zhou Xiang than the "hyperbole" of *wenmingxi*. Audience members would not be so fixated on *The Miracle*'s backdrop that they would lose sight of the play's meaning.

It was Yu's extensive experience watching and reading American theatre, as suggested by Liu, that facilitated his initial thinking to connect *xieyi* in theatre with the *xieyi* (literally "sketching the meaning") tradition in painting: "The purpose of *xieyi* painting is to express the relationship between several forms regardless of whether these forms coincide with the boundaries of daily life."⁹⁹ The usage of these terms (*xieshi/xiesheng* and *xieyi*) is not merely due to the analogy's convenience. Rather, Yu consistently viewed scenographic design as a key aspect of theatre and carefully wove such design into his works. Further, Yu drew a parallel between painting and theatre in his exposition of realism, which focuses on the audience and readers' visual experiences—their subjective acts and arts of seeing. Yu thereby deepened the discussion of realism, moving it away from questions of representation or craft toward questions of conception and reception.

While studying in America in the early 1920s, a period that coincided with the decline of realism and realist theatre, Yu and his later National

Theatre Movement cohort found that the course of Western aesthetic development was neither completely different from China's nor entirely in advance of it. Rather, after being exposed to *Miracle* and other plays in America, they realized that the Chinese *xieyi* tradition that Chen Duxiu criticized was in fact similar to what Western modernist theatres were exploring. Thus, their journey to America to seek modernity in the field of theatre proved to be an aesthetic journey of "reprocessing the past" (*fugu* 復古). Yu and others came to view the aesthetic value and practice of *xieyi* as the predominant Asian phenomenon,¹⁰⁰ which then became the inspiration for not only modern Chinese theatre but the modernist theatre movement worldwide. Chen Duxiu's confident importation of Western realism in 1919 and Yu Shangyuan's reprocessing of *xieyi* in the mid-1920s can be seen as the beginning and end points of an intellectual trajectory that sought to synthesize Chinese and Western theatre aesthetics and gave birth to the National Theatre Movement.

The National Theatre Movement and Its Aftermath

By the end of 1924, encouraged by the successful staging of *Yang Guifei* in New York, a group of American-educated youth eagerly returned to Beijing to initiate China's National Theatre Movement. All of them had either studied at or at least visited Columbia University: Yu Shangyuan, Wen Yiduo, Xiong Foxi, Zhang Jiazhu (張嘉鑄 n.d.), and Zhao Taimou. While each bore different visions of modern Chinese drama, they collectively uncovered the aesthetic and performative modernity embedded in Chinese operatic traditions. Instead of dismissing such traditions as feudal relics, they believed the exploration and practice of modern Chinese theatre should be enriched by traditional and folk operatic arts. In particular, they saw a parallel between *xieyi* and Western modernist theatres that aspired to break the fourth wall painstakingly constructed by realist theatre.

The National Theatre Movement, though short-lived, started strong, with the laying of institutional and infrastructural groundwork, fruitful dialogue, and theatre productions in Boston, New York, and later Beijing. While still in the United States, Yu, Xiong, Zhang, and Zhao drafted a comprehensive proposal, the "Outline of a Plan for a Beijing Art Theatre" (Beijing yishu juyuan jihua dagang 北京藝術劇院計劃大綱), for an institution where "Chinese National Theatre" would be practiced and talents educated.¹⁰¹ The project blueprint called for a modern playhouse, an acting school, a theatre library and museum, a drama magazine, and even a fellowship to send Chinese students to study theatre abroad. Upon arriving

in Beijing in 1925, Yu, Zhao, and Wen Yiduo successfully lobbied to establish a theatre department at the postsecondary National Arts School (Guoli yizhuan 國立藝專), with Zhao becoming its chair, Yu a professor, and Wen serving as dean of studies.¹⁰² Meanwhile, these compeers created a regular column, the *Morning Post Theatre Supplement* (*Chenbao jukan* 晨報劇刊), in which drama reformers could discuss possible futures for modern Chinese theatre(s).¹⁰³ These young academicians disagreed with May Fourth's iconoclastic condemnation of old operatic traditions, and they also critiqued the hybrid theatres of the 1910s for their "ineffective slurring of . . . 'isms."¹⁰⁴ Instead, in their writings, they expressed a hope to build "a new form of drama that bridges the chasm between the two peaks of 'realism' and 'symbolism.'"¹⁰⁵ Yu offered an even more inclusive and daring vision:

[The stage] in a theatre is long and broad, so it is embracive. Not symbolism and realism alone, but even classicalism, romanticism, impressionism, expressionism, futurism, and all [theatre aesthetics] may find space in a theatre. A theatre gives everyone a fair opportunity to experiment.¹⁰⁶

Exactly because of its all-encompassing attitude, the National Theatre Movement flourished vividly in impassioned debates, yet little else developed. Very few plays were ever staged or even written in response to Yu's call.¹⁰⁷ The more pressing market demands felt by commercial playhouses, the rush to reform Peking opera to the status of "national theatre," and the natural disillusion these young advocates felt due to their troubled relocations, political turmoil, and difficult theatre pursuits all led to the inglorious end of this movement by 1926, one year after it began.

Yet Yu's vision for a modern and national Chinese drama did not vanish with the movement's demise. Rather, he received the endorsement of the Crescent Moon Group (Xinyue pai 新月派), which originated in a Beijing salon in 1921 and was centered on Hu Shi, Liang Shiqiu, Xu Zhimo (徐志摩 1896–1931), and other elite intellectuals with American educational experiences.¹⁰⁸ The overlap between the "failed" National Theatre Movement and the Crescent Moon Group is essential for understanding both cliques. Members of both had already formed solid networks via playmaking during their overseas educations, and then bore a similarly underrepresented status in Beijing through the end of 1926, at which time they made contact. Then, in 1927, Xu Zhimo and Zhang Jiazhu relocated to Shanghai, where they founded the Crescent Moon Bookstore (Xinyue shudian 新月書店), which was also a publishing house, and issued the journal *Cres-*

cent Moon Monthly (*Xinyue yuekan* 新月月刊). Soon Yu joined Xu and Zhang, and the three actively published essays and plays through the bookstore, in which they continuously critiqued the politicized realism that increasingly affected literature in general, as well as their anxieties of seeing and (re) presenting reality in various literary forms. For Yu and the Crescent Moon Group, the plural discussions of the future of modern Chinese theatre and the debates on realism that were cultivated in the National Theatre Movement should serve as a legacy to modern Chinese theatre, a “foreshadowing for theatre reform” and “guidance for constructing new plays.”¹⁰⁹

Yu Shangyuan and his American-educated cohort were not the only group exploring the possibilities of modern Chinese theatre in the mid-1920s. These new groups not only experimented with frontstage spectacles but also started to institutionalize the backstage practices of playmaking, fine-tuning the mechanisms of directorship and rehearsal, actor training, and playwriting. Tian Han founded the Southern Society (Nanguo she 南國社) in Shanghai for intellectual youth to develop modern theatre by publishing drama journals, rehearsing and staging plays, and practicing stage technologies.¹¹⁰ Hong Shen relocated to Shanghai in 1924 and devoted himself to constructing the Fudan Dramatic Club (Fudan jushe 復旦劇社).¹¹¹ Similarly, Ouyang Yuqian founded the Nantong Drama School (Nantong lingong xueshe 南通伶工學社) in Jiangsu to train both operatic and *huaju* performers, before going to Guangzhou in 1929 to run the Guangdong Theatre Research Institute (Guangdong xiju yanjiusuo 廣東戲劇研究所).¹¹² These key advocates of modern Chinese theatre, while widely dispersed, actively corresponded in letters and essays, documenting their struggles and achievements.¹¹³ The decline of realism in the West and China also affected their endeavors. For example, Ouyang Yuqian admitted that “the clumsy realist writing style can no longer be used,” yet still insisted on the need to “extend the scope of [expressions of] realism.”¹¹⁴ Accordingly, the late 1920s saw a shift in focus from the previous May Fourth realism toward a modernist inquiry into seeing and presenting realness.

Yu also expressed concerns about realism and modernism, or *xieshi* and *xieyi*, in the context of playmaking. Between July and December 1928, while Yu was still recovering from the collapse of the National Theatre Movement, he reportedly felt trapped by the humdrum reality of Shanghai and became almost “insulated” from writing.¹¹⁵ It was during this period of frustration and tentative rejuvenation that he composed *Statue*, a four-act play that reflects a self-referential melancholy over the fleeting movement. Fittingly, the play was serialized in *Crescent Moon Monthly*, appearing in the journal in tandem with a full-page advertisement for the new book *The*

National Theatre Movement (*Guojū yundòng* 國劇運動), which collected the aforementioned essays from the *Morning Post Theatre Supplement*. *Statue* was thus clearly tied to the end of the National Theatre Movement and represented Yu's continued efforts at developing a Chinese modern theatre in the face of temporary defeat.

Representing and Presenting “the Real” in Yu Shangyuan's *Statue*

Statue unfolds in a fictional private manor, Play-Tide Mountain, a modern “Peach Blossom Spring” that a man named Leping inherited from his ancestors.¹¹⁶ Eleven years earlier, Leping had saved Jiqing, a young lady who embodies natural beauty and possesses a knack for appreciating the arts, from her suicide attempt near West Lake. Since then, Jiqing has resided in Play-Tide Mountain as Leping's goddaughter. Leping's fondness for Jiqing, expectedly, bothers his wife, Wanzhen. However, Wanzhen still maintains her grace, since Jiqing plans to become a nun who will reside in the private temple of Play-Tide Mountain, White Cloud Convent. Unfortunately, her move has already been postponed several times, as the White Cloud Convent has not found an appropriate statue of the bodhisattva Guanyin to bless Jiqing's conversion.

While the three characters are all increasingly anxious regarding the situation, Leping's dear friend Qiufan, an accomplished sculptor, pays a visit, bringing his son Xiaofan as well. Qiufan immediately feels charmed by the isolated land and Leping's reclusive lifestyle. He takes a commission to make a statue of Guanyin for the White Cloud Convent, using Jiqing as his model, and senses an uncanny similarity between her and his missing lover from eleven years ago, Suhua. After several denials, Jiqing finally admits that Qiufan's suspicions are true—she is Qiufan's lover, who left him and their son so as not to burden Qiufan's artistic expression. After learning that the statue he is creating is indeed a depiction of his lost love, Qiufan smashes the work in hopes of changing Jiqing's decision to become a nun, begging her to return home. Jiqing seemingly agrees with Qiufan, yet she still invites the townspeople to the convent to witness the statue's unveiling ceremony.

When the moment finally arrives and the shrine curtain opens, the crowd feels awed by the statue's lifelike qualities, exclaiming that it precisely resembles a woman they know. However, the crowd's awe quickly turns into confusion as they start to question the legitimacy of this bodhisattva, which is sculptured in the Western style and looks quite different

from the other statues painted in gold. Triggered by Wanzhen's malicious suggestion, the crowd approaches the shrine only to find that it is Jiqing, masquerading as a bodhisattva. Denying any explanation that Leping or Jiqing offers, the crowd concludes that Jiqing is neither statue nor woman, but ghost. Acting out of fear, the crowd snatches Jiqing and throws her into the river. Jiqing drowns, and when Qiufan and his son finally arrive, they are greeted by an empty shrine.

Statue is typically ignored in scholarship, in part because, like many plays published in *Crescent Moon Monthly*, it was consumed as a "closet drama" (*antou ju*) and never staged. Moreover, Yu would not have had many options to stage *Statue* even had he wanted to. By the end of the 1920s, theatre stages and market opportunities in Shanghai and other metropolises were dominated by three kinds of drama. Peking opera, following a phase of experimentation with hybrid performance, now sought to refine its "pure" operatic tradition and reclaim its dominant market share. The goal was to preserve the genre's form but modernize its aesthetics, performers, and audience. *Wenmingxi* took on new life as farce (*huaju xi* 滑稽戲), one of the many entertainments for urbanites to consume. Although maintaining their spoken features, these "outdated" plays kept their "conservative" performance components, such as reliance on stage gadgets and improvisation. While not being valued by standard history narratives, these plays were in fact a major draw for popular audiences. Finally, *huaju*, due to its diminishing box-office return, struggled to find a stage. Although *huaju* was canonized in 1928 as the orthodox representation of modern Chinese theatre, its victory in historical narratives did not promise a competitive market capacity.

Indeed, Tian Han's Southern Society had only managed to stage its first public performance of *huaju* in April 1928, four years after the society was founded. This was *Tragedy at the Lake* (*Hubian de beiju* 湖邊的悲劇).¹¹⁷ The plot of *Statue* reads very similarly to Tian Han's play: a modern beauty, Suping, attempts suicide to fight against an arranged marriage and stay loyal to her poet lover, Yang Mengmei. Suping is saved by strangers and changes her name to Baiwei, living as a recluse by West Lake. Three years later, Yang comes to the lake and starts writing a novel to grieve over Suping's death. After reading the manuscript, Suping commits suicide to enhance the authenticity of Yang's work. The female protagonists in both works boldly pursue the May Fourth ideal of "free love" via unmarried relations with two male artists. However, after first serving as the muse/model for their lovers' works, their physical existence comes to threaten the artistic integrity of the male protagonists, and both women "choose" to die for it. These new

women characters are presented as mouthpieces to express what Liang Luo discerns as male playwrights' "fundamental search for artification of life and the perfection of art."¹¹⁸ Consequently, *Tragedy at the Lake* overshadows *Statue* in the public record and may have influenced Yu's work, which was written that fall.

Statue is also overshadowed by its creator's public persona. Apart from the overlapping networks and their "similar political positioning and artistic and critical sensibilities,"¹¹⁹ Yu Shangyuan and the key members of the Crescent Moon Group were brought together by their celebrity status and dramatic romances. Their amorous stories triggered paparazzi interest no less than those of Peking opera and film stars. After all, the high-profile publicity caused by their writings, prestigious families, and privileged transnational mobility enhanced such sensational reporting, directing readers to pry into possible connections between the fictional works and the tabloid reports of these modern talents and beauties. Ironically, despite Yu and his cohort's awareness of the various faulty appropriations of realism, they themselves could not avoid being consumed in a "realistic" manner by the reading public.

In fact, Yu sometimes contributed to such a reading. As if seeking to avoid charges of plagiarism, Yu explained in his published drama collection the inspiration for *Statue*, grounding the play in his domestic life:

In 1928, when I was relocated to Shanghai, my son Runan was born, and my wife was often feeling weak. I was completely bombarded by the mundane pressures of domestic life, feeling melancholic all the time. Dingfu [Chen Hengcui (陳衡粹 n.d.), his wife] once said to me, "I will run to the end of the earth and leave you here so that you will not at all be distracted. You can then solely focus on your career." I immediately responded, "Great! This is a good topic. I will turn this idea into a play."¹²⁰

Statue thus appears to be a simple allegory for Yu's personal unease, or perhaps a witty commentary on his marriage. Undoubtedly, Yu's fame affected how *Statue* was read and understood. Despite Yu's explanation and the fact that it was never staged, *Statue* still addressed the debates of the day.

Statue actually asks a question similar to that which Lu Xun raised in 1923 and 1925, first when he spoke to students at the Beijing Women's College of Education (Beijing nüzi gaodeng shifan xuexiao 北京女子高等師範學校), and then with his short story "Regret for the Past" (Shangshi 傷逝).¹²¹ How feasible is the "new woman"? Lu Xun revealed in these works that, due

to women's lack of economic independence, the only possibilities awaiting Chinese Noras who left home were to "fall into degradation or to return home."¹²² *Statue*, in this manner, can also be read as a Nora play. Jiqing, like Nora, departs her patriarchal family. Even when money is no longer an issue for Jiqing and Qiufan (or for Yu and his overseas student cohort), the Chinese Nora still plunges into an abyss. The pessimism pronounced in the play escalates to escapism when situating the doomed love story within the White Cloud Convent and the remote Play-Tide Mountain. Rather than promising liberation, *Statue* expresses a profound despair regarding the May Fourth obsession of "creating the new woman," as well as with the New Culture tactic of employing Ibsenesque realism to deliver "enlightenment." *Statue* also differs considerably from the new-woman plays and films promoted by leftists in the 1930s.¹²³

Yet the forgotten status of *Statue* and its divergence from dominant ideological trends should not obscure the play's (and Yu's) contribution to the discourse of (re)presenting "realness." The play keenly reflects the intellectual and emotional makeup of the reclusive artist in Play-Tide Mountain, and of Yu Shangyuan and other National Theatre Movement advocates who by 1928 had already dissolved into cliques. In particular, *Statue* advances debates regarding representation and presentation, soul and body, realism and modernism, and Western and Chinese culture. The statue of Guanyin is the nexus in which the plot, form, and scenographic designs of the play seamlessly intersect. Tying together individual sentiments, personal relationships, and aesthetic tenets within the process of making and viewing the Guanyin statue, or a work of craftsmanship, Yu Shangyuan revealed what he took to be the determinant principle of realism and Chinese realist theatre: the acts, art, and philosophy of spectatorial subjects' seeing, not the replication of external reality or the political function of solving social problems. *Statue* is therefore not a historical fossil to be overturned by modernism. Nor is it an elite imitation of the West alien to Chinese traditions. Instead, *Statue* represents an alternative trajectory for modern Chinese theatre, after the failed National Theatre Movement. *Statue* sits at the intersection where neo-Confucian *gewu* and Ibsen's ocular realism meet.

To Be Like or to Be Real?

Statue, in addition to drawing from Tian Han's *Tragedy at the Lake* and Yu Shangyuan's own colorful life, gains inspiration from *The Peony Pavilion* (*Mudan ting* 牡丹亭), a Kun opera written by Tang Xianzu (湯顯祖 1550–1616). *The Peony Pavilion* concerns a love affair between Bridal Du (Du Liniang)

and the painter Liu Mengmei. In it, Du, a lovestruck painter herself, makes a self-portrait in an intricate process that has enchanted generations of readers. When she decides to sketch and present the legacy of her “true self” or individual essence, she has already pined away and “ceased to be what she really is.”¹²⁴ As a result, Du can only gaze into the mirror reflection and position the tip of the painting brush on her own face, not on that of the portrait. When the self-portrait is complete, it has already grown into a realness entirely independent from the painter. Three years later, Liu Mengmei reveres it as the picture of the bodhisattva Guanyin.

Bridal Du’s self-portrait, Tina Lu argues, illustrates “the redemptive power of passion, or *qing* 情.”¹²⁵ Tang Xianzu specifically highlights the role of passion in his preface, asking:

Of all the women of feeling in the world, was there ever one like Du Liniang? Dreaming of a lover, she grew sick, and the sickness grew even worse, until she painted her own self-portrait to leave to the world before she died. Three years after her death, out of the void she was able again to seek the one of whom she had dreamt and come back to life. One such as Liniang can truly be called a person of feeling.¹²⁶

Throughout the play, the lovestruck Bridal Du experiences several transformations—from a dying gentry woman to a portrait to a resurrected human—in which the real and the representation are blurred and reconstructed. Motivated by *qing*, Du acts in ways that call realness into question. *The Peony Pavilion*’s interrogation goes beyond its plot to encompass its legacy: The illustration of Bridal Du first printed in 1617, for example, testifies to the ambiguity and philosophical complexity of a “self-portrait” (*xiezhen* 寫真), literally “sketching a likeness and sketching true self.”¹²⁷

Here I would like to draw attention to the creative manner in which Yu facilitated a dialogue between the self-portrait of Bridal Du in *The Peony Pavilion* and the statue of Guanyin/Jiqing in *Statue*. In my reading, these two mediums, the self-portrait and the statue, reflect two distinct approaches to incorporating realness/authenticity (*zhen* 真) in a theatrical frame, one being national and presentational (*xieyi*), and the other Western and representational (*xieshi*). Unlike Tian Han, who also drew on *Peony Pavilion* for *Tragedy at the Lake* but sought to rewrite the story of Du’s resurrection as a “modern play,”¹²⁸ Yu Shangyuan is predominately enchanted by the process of *xiezhen*. Perhaps finding a parallel between Du’s self-portrait and Ibsen’s use of “doubleness,” Yu further inquires into the relationship between the

real and the facsimile via the process of statue-making. Yu employs *qing* to deliver a realness that is both presentational and representational.

Prior to visiting Play-Tide Mountain, Qiufan had become increasingly sentimental. Following his lover Suhua's disappearance, Qiufan makes multiple portraits and statues of her, only to destroy each one out of disappointment. Indeed, the more nuanced are the details Qiufan captures in his portraits of Suhua, the less similarity there is between the representation and the real. Qiufan's realistic sculptures do not comfort him as a viewer; moreover, but completely shatter his illusion that Suhua might be alive. Thus, Qiufan withdraws from carving statues of human figures and exclusively focuses on making Buddhist icons, but he ends up smashing these as well. His practice and his career have reached their nadir.

Initially, Qiufan is not enthusiastic about making a statue for the White Cloud Convent. When Leping first asks that he do so, Qiufan rejects the request, as he never works for commission. It is only when Jiqing seconds Leping's request, and her principles regarding sculpture and art in general become clear, that Qiufan changes his mind:

JIQING. How do you know you won't finally reflect that person in making the statue of Guanyin? Form is just void; the void is form. I could possibly be enlightened and achieve Nirvana by looking at the statue. How do we know you won't achieve the same? I've learned that you already shifted from sculpting human figures to Buddhist icons. Aren't you already on the path to achieving Nirvana?

LEPING. Qiufan, if you are determined to shatter all your work, can't you also resolve not to destroy them?

QIUFAN. Resolve! Nirvana! Ha ha. . . . My son, isn't it true that you always complain you do not have a mother? Don't all people scorn you for not having a mother? All right, ha ha, I will now sculpt a mother for you! Suhua! Suhua! Now I finally know how to memorialize you. Statue, statue, I will start my work tomorrow morning. Give me three days. I will show you how I will complete the goddess statue of Guanyin in three days.

LEPING. Sin, sin.

JIQING. No. The Guanyin has thirty-two embodiments. . . . Statue-making should not be confined by old conventions. Instead, one can make the statue the way one feels in one's heart. Otherwise, why do we reject the sculptures made by Wang Huaiyuan and other craftsmen and ask artists to make the statue?¹²⁹

While Leping regards Qiufan's idiosyncratic artistic temperament as a "sin" (*zuiguo* 罪過), Jiping recognizes Qiufan's deep aesthetic principles. Speaking as one about to become a nun, Jiping expresses in Buddhist terms that art must not be confined within established conventions or specific forms, asserting that the "void" (*kong* 空) itself is the "form" (*se* 色). If the sculptor were obsessed with form and details, striving to align the product's verisimilitude with the dominant expectation, as does a certain Wang Huaiyuan, the statue would lose its artistic spirit and become a work of mediocre craftsmanship. Thus, when attempting to convince Qiufan to make the statue, Jiping emphasizes the abstract meaning of the statue for herself and Qiufan the sculptor, but mentions no requirements at all regarding its shape, color, and size. In short, Jiping is requesting a statue of Guanyin that is *xieyi* (sketching meaning) but not *xieshi* (sketching reality).

Influenced by and endorsing Jiping's aesthetic preference, Qiufan comes to view Play-Tide Mountain's own mimicry of the natural world as a misguided effort. When Leping gives Qiufan a tour, he proudly introduces a cherished legacy from his ancestors: the manor's exquisite garden. The bridges, pavilions, and natural elements together carve a private oasis out of the exterior world, making it an ideal "peach blossom spring" for artists and intellectuals:

LEPING. Look at my Yilang Pavilion. It sits against the mountain and faces the ocean. How spectacular! The birdsong and fragrant flowers come from the mountain; the flock of white seagulls fly over the water. Come, sit in my Yilang Pavilion, light incense in the burner, and steep tea leaves in the pot. Rank and fame, riches and privileges, all these worries will disappear. This is the ideal place!¹³⁰

Here one may discern the further development of the scenographic component in *Statue*: In addition to mapping out the composition of a scene in stage directions, Yu inserts his vision of what the readers supposedly "see" within the play. Leping's description of Yilang Pavilion takes good care of Qiufan's and the readers' visual requirements, unfolding from far to near, from colors to shapes, from natural environment to human figures, and from outlines to details, before ending with a note of sentimentality. It serves as an enticing invitation for both Qiufan and the readers (or spectatorial subjects) to enter into a framed painting wherein natural scenery, architecture, and small ornaments are carefully and realistically copied. A keen reader, even one with exposure to painting, may have trou-

ble deducing whether the “ideal place” is depicted in a Western representational style or in the Chinese “meticulous style” (*gongbi* 工筆) as the components of the space carry a hue of hybridity: Notably, the scenography of Yilang Pavilion elaborates *hua* (畫 pictorial), *ruhua* (入畫 picturesque), and *ruhua* (如畫 like a picture), three important concepts often used in Ming-Qing commentaries that “contribute significantly to the visual reading” of vernacular novels and dramas.¹³¹ Yet neither realistic painting techniques nor superbly crafted mimicries win Qiufan’s heart. For him, it is the “emptiness” (*kongkong dongdong* 空空洞洞) of the Guanyin shrine that makes Play-Tide Mountain remarkable.¹³² The colorlessness and formlessness of the shrine embodies Jiqing’s expectation of the future statue: The void is form and the form is void.

Jiqing and Qiufan associate the “void” with authentic sentiment and talent. Their appreciation of beauty rests on their objection to a representational realism that is embodied in either Leping’s Yilang Pavilion or Wang Huaiyuan’s craftsman-like skill. Their artistic evaluation comprises a distanced intertextuality with the principle of Bridal Du’s self-portrait. In Tina Lu’s interpretation, the process of Bridal Du’s gazing into the mirror and painting her own self-portrait is a form of aesthetic evaluation, or *ping-duo* 評度. *Ping* refers to “a criticism on a scale of merit (here the scale is obviously aesthetic),” while *duo* alludes to “a measure of accuracy.”¹³³ Lu asks:

Does the portrait aim to be like or be beautiful? Does Du Liniang the gazer consider how beautiful the portrait is, or does she gauge how closely she and the portrait resemble each other? The two acts of comparison might easily contradict, and in fact, both are gestured towards: her eyes—which like her mouth seem not yet to be painted—aim for felicity and to capture her individuality, while her ornaments are chosen for their fitness and charm.¹³⁴

As the self-portrait will provide the primary means for the dying Du to be remembered, she struggles to choose the best orientation for the work. She decides whether “to be like or to be beautiful” by assigning the ornaments in the portrait to represent the similitude and the unpainted eyes to present her essence, or her ideal beauty. While Bridal Du is able to arrive at such a resolution, these two aesthetic principles cannot coexist in Qiufan’s practice of statue-making. Qiufan and Jiqing both disavow the pursuit of “to be like,” focusing instead on “to be beautiful.” The finished product does not replicate other Guanyin images but captures what Qiufan and Jiqing

consider to be the essence of the bodhisattva. But how will others view the statue? Will the masses likewise value presentational authenticity over representational similitude?

(Un)Seeing the Real

Unlike *Mutiny*, where the protagonists know the truth even as they employ the Empty City Ruse to deceive the feudal patriarchal figures, nearly all the characters in *Statue* remain puzzled by the discrepancy between what they think they know and what they perceive. Their quandary stems from a pitch-black shrine where no statue of Guanyin resides. Prior to Qiufan's arrival, no one dares approach the shrine because of a mysterious sobbing voice that echoes from within at night and on stormy days. The servants and other minor characters are curious and attempt to uncover the source of the sound, but they only "see the obscure shape of bamboo leaves."¹³⁵ There is no assurance that one may see and then know the truth. Not being able to perceive "the truth" gives rise to a popular fantasy: that the empty shrine must be occupied by the ghosts of those who died unjustly. A statue of Guanyin becomes urgently needed not only for Jiqing's spiritual conversion but for quelling these hungry ghosts.

An anxiety over the unseen suffuses the residents of Play-Tide Mountain. The idiosyncratic sculptor Qiufan quickly succumbs to this sentiment after arriving, though what intrigues him most are not the rumors of ghosts but the visual similitude between Jiqing, his friend's goddaughter, and Suhua, his long-lost lover. Although Jiqing requests Qiufan to sculpt the statue in Act 1, their encounter is postponed until Act 2. It is Qiufan's son Xiaofan who first communicates with Jiping regarding Qiufan's life in recent years. The servants are immediately intrigued by the physical resemblance between the two and the natural bond they display. One servant even turns to the photograph that Jiqing often carries, declaring that the young boy in the picture looks exactly like Xiaofan. Meanwhile, just as these minor characters are employing a photograph to prove the identity of Jiqing, Qiufan is making his finishing touches on the statue of Guanyin, only to realize that the statue is a facsimile of his missing love:

QIUFAN. Suhua, Suhua, why don't you talk to me? Right, here. (*Putting more white powder on the face of the statue*) Right, Suhua is not that lean. But it has already been eleven years. Will Suhua still be plump? I . . . (*Holding his beard and shedding tears*) Ah! Isn't this Xiaofan's mother? Ha ha . . . Xiaofan has his mother! Tomorrow, once I dress

you up with clothes, Xiaofan will hold your hands and won't allow you to step into the shrine. (*Praying*) Suhua, Suhua, please let your spirit reside in this statue of Guanyin that I made. I beg you. Please show your spirit. Please bless all kinds of beings, move all kinds of beings, and pray for all kinds of beings. May all people in the world worship you and rely on you. May Xiaofan feel that he has his own mother. Suhua, let me, let me kneel in front of you and confess my sin. (*Reflected on the door is a shadow*).¹³⁶

Making the statue of Guanyin becomes a cathartic process for Qiufan to recover from Suhua's assumed death. Notably, Qiufan rejects the craftsmanship needed to produce physical verisimilitude but aspires to engrave the statue with the spiritual realness shared by Suhua and Guanyin—to bless, to move, and to pray for all kinds of beings. Qiufan completes the statue, begging for the unseen spirit of Guanyin/Suhua to endow the work with essence and meaning, or *yi*.

As if answering Qiufan's evocation of Suhua's spirit, the shadows reflected on the door turn out to be those of Jiqing and Xiaofan. Qiufan invites them in to see the completed work. As the first viewer, Xiaofan immediately points out the explicit resemblance between the statue and Jiqing, which Qiufan remains reluctant to admit. Standing side by side in front of the sculptor is the statue of Guanyin, in which Suhua's spirit resides, and the body of Jiqing, which resembles Suhua in appearance. Like Bridal Du facing her self-portrait and her mirror reflection, Qiufan encounters the spiritual realness (the presentational) and the physical verisimilitude (the representational) of Suhua and feels a tighter bond with the former. More than merely offering a modern rewriting of the plot and characterization of *The Peony Pavilion*, Yu Shangyuan here engages in a distanced intertextuality that pivots between the realness interrogated by Tang Xianzu and traditional Chinese theatre on the one hand, and the growing antirepresentational art movement in 1920s America and China on the other. The statue of Guanyin thereby presents itself as an example of *xieyi* that satisfies Qiufan's aesthetic principle. But what does it mean for Jiqing (both the model and the art critic) and the viewers? The final act takes a rather odd turn that, at first glance, seems to counter the expected plot development yet further highlights Yu's determination to discuss realism at a deeper level. It is in the conclusion that Yu calls for a realism based on *gewu*.

Despite his passion for the statue, Qiufan shatters it after Jiqing confesses that she is none other than his lost love. In shock, Qiufan takes his

son out of Play-Tide Mountain, while Jiqing decides to stay and explain the disappearance of the statue to the local villagers. Rather than revealing the whole story and possibly winning popular support for a happy reunion, Jiqing chooses to not disappoint the devout villagers and instead sits herself in the shrine to become/present the statue. The two servants who put the curtain on the statue are the first to notice the distinctive features of this Guanyin:

LABORER A. The ghost sobs again. My goodness! (*Jumps down from the shrine*)

LABORER B. Are you still drunk? What are you talking about?

LABORER A. No. I mean it. What is this? Is it a statue of Guanyin?

LABORER B. Of course. What else can it be? Silly!

LABORER A. Come here and take a very careful look. Honestly, what is this statue made of? Wood? Earth? Paste? Or human flesh?¹³⁷

The servants are clearly troubled by Qiufan's skill at making Guanyin's facial expression so lifelike. In contrast to the traditional religious statues they are familiar with, which are coated with gold, this statue presents Guanyin as a human figure. Accordingly, the servants find it difficult to associate the statue with the bodhisattva and so view it as something foreign. Notably, for the artist (Qiufan) and the intellectual critic (Jiqing), it is the spiritual similarity between Jiqing and Guanyin, namely their willingness to sacrifice themselves, that constitutes the presentational "realness" (*xieyi*) of the sculpture. But for ordinary viewers such as the villagers, such realism, which derives from combining Western sculpting techniques with a traditional subject matter, only leads to alienation. Because they lack the cultivation to discern the principle of the statue, the villagers can only respond based on what they see with their unenlightened eyes—literally, an illusion.

When the villagers gather to closely examine the eerily realistic work, Jiqing can no longer hold her breath, destroying the illusionary "realness" of the statue by the requirements of her physical body. But rather than recognizing Jiqing as a "real" person, the masses immediately identify her as a ghost. Seizing the opportunity, Leping's jealous wife Wanzhen eggs on the crowd:

WANZHEN. Hold on. Everyone, don't worship her. Do you really think this is the statue of Guanyin? Have you even seen a statue like this? This is blasphemous. It is sinful that the sculptor uses Western-style techniques to deceive us.¹³⁸

Following Wanzhen's accusation, the villagers quickly shift from awe at the Guanyin's imagined liveliness to fear. After several rounds of debate as to whether Jiqing is a ghost or the bodhisattva, Jiqing is pulled from the shrine and thrown in the river:

JIQING. Qiufan, now I finally understand! The real art won't be understood by the masses. Everything is vanity.

VILLAGERS. (*To each other*) Do you hear it? She must be the real ghost (*They all believe it*). . . .

WANZHEN. If you don't kill the ghost, it will kill us! (*Cries of "beat the ghost" come from the masses*). . . .

VILLAGERS. If we don't kill the ghost, we will be killed. The bay is deep. Let's throw it in the river.¹³⁹

The villagers interpret the statue's transformation into Jiqing as an illusion perpetuated by ghosts. They even thank their "fleshy eyes" (*rouyan* 肉眼) for being able to see through the illusion. For them, the destruction of a polluted Guanyin statue means a successful exorcism. By the time Qiufan comes back to the shrine, it is too late. The death of Jiqing forces Qiufan to see the unbridgeable discrepancy between his artistic vision and the villagers' views. Both Qiufan and Jiqing are exposed to the disturbing response: the art of sculpting, in which they place almost religious faith, is incomprehensible for the masses. The surviving characters are left with an even greater confusion as to what represents the real. Yu's sober message is that realism can only be delivered to a cultivated audience. "Enlightenment" necessitates enlightened eyes.

In sum, Yu Shangyuan in *Statue* forces his educated readers to re-view the failure of the National Theatre Movement. The play employs the allegory of statue-making to unfold the details of Yu's vision for modern Chinese theatre: (1) the aesthetic standard and principle of *xieyi*, advocated by Jiqing and Qiufan, that situates realness in "meaning" (*yi*) and spirit rather than verisimilitude and craftsmanship; (2) the process of presenting such realness; and (3) how this new artistic embodiment is received by a mass audience. These three aspects are all embedded in the neo-Confucian concept of *gewu*. To clarify his definition and presentation of "realness," Yu suspends development of his characters, rendering Jiqing, Qiufan, and the villagers into what he described in his 1924 "Humble Gift" essay as the "fourth type," or presentational performance. These characters directly express their claims on "realness" in the form of statue-making within the play and playmaking without. But because both the villagers and the wider theatre audience lacked the cultivation to appreciate such "realness,"

their observations could only be superficial. Seeing and directing the audience to see the “real” in theatre served as the major theme for Yu and, to large degree, the development of modern Chinese drama in the 1920s. Rather than signifying an abrupt shift from realism to modernism, Yu’s work reflects a continuous exploration of his audience’s visual modernity, a modernity that unexpectedly and critically synthesizes Ibsen’s ocular realism with the Chinese tradition of *gewu*.

Conclusion

By 1923, the cacophonous imagining of modern Chinese theatres had begun to quiet down. Hybrid theatres such as *wenmingxi*, commercially successful in the late 1910s, were in decline. An overabundance of visual and stage gadgets, presented by extravagant scenographic designs and installations, could no longer stimulate urban audiences bored with endless presentations of “the real” on new stages, in cinema houses, and in entertainment halls. Amateur drama, *wenmingxi*’s ideological rival, was likewise at a dead end, unable to enchant intellectual or popular audiences due to its inability to translate aesthetic and political agendas into pleasing spectacles. May Fourth dramatists’ sincere calls for “art for art’s sake” had proven to be viable in theory but not in practice.

When Hong Shen, Tian Han, and Ouyang Yuqian returned from America and Japan respectively, they encountered such stagnancy firsthand. Rather than being overcome by disappointment, these “founders-to-be” professionalized Chinese theatre by organizing modern drama troupes, systemizing procedures of actor training, rehearsing, performing, and finally, in 1928, designating the term *huaju* to represent all of modern Chinese theatre. Accordingly, 1923–1928 is commonly regarded as the crucial period when modern Chinese theatre, or *huaju*, was formulated as a distinct genre.

Yu Shangyuan was also active during this period, but on a different path. Taking part in the fleeting National Theatre Movement, Yu, along with Zhao Taimou, Wen Yiduo, and others, advocated a modern yet distinctly Chinese theatre, extolling the aesthetic and formal merits of Chinese operatic traditions as the inspiration and central component with which both Chinese and American modernists could combat a stagnant realism. This chapter has expanded the periodization of the National Theatre Movement—which typically begins with the establishment of a theatre department at the National Arts School in 1925 and ends in 1926 with Yu and his cohort’s theoretical essays in *Morning Post Theatre Supplement*—to encompass three phases of Yu’s playmaking: (1) studying and making realist

theatre in Chicago and Pittsburgh, 1923–1924; (2) envisioning and installing the infrastructure of the National Theatre Movement in New York and Beijing, 1924–1926; and (3) Yu’s developing a sullen self-referentiality in the aftermath of the movement, as shown in his Shanghai theatre endeavors, 1927–1928. Yu’s vision for modern Chinese theatre grew out of his critique of realist theatres in both Chinese and American contexts in the 1920s, crystallized in the National Theatre Movement, and was defined and realized in his represented life and in his presentations of playmaking.

Rather than denigrating realism as outdated, as was becoming the trend in mid-1920s China and America, Yu Shangyuan identified two problematic realisms in theatres: one that was heavily dependent on illusions of verisimilitude created by visual technologies but lacking coordination among drama, stage, and performance; and the other that usurped aesthetic and philosophical pursuits with a utilitarian strategy to solve social problems by means of theatre. In contrast to these two approaches, Yu grounded his realist theatre activities on vision. Yu’s careful depiction of theatre characters’ acts of seeing, his discussion of artists’ (playmakers’) techniques of directing others to see, and the theatre audience’s art of seeing, I argue, formulate an innate connection between the neo-Confucian tradition of *gewu* and Ibsenesque “ocular realism.”

This chapter has revisited and reevaluated Yu’s prolonged journey of theatrics between 1923 and 1928 by introducing dramaturgic, archival, and anecdotal materials from Chicago, Pittsburgh, New York, Beijing, and Shanghai to the interdisciplinary frameworks of theatre, art history, literature, visuality, and the culture of amusement. Building upon recent scholarly constructions of Yu Shangyuan’s intellectual transformation, this chapter has expanded the scope of our understanding of Yu and his cohort’s theatre activities by detailing the intertextuality surrounding the plays *Mutiny* and *Statue*, and the scenographic designs and techniques, intellectual discussions of world theatre and art history, and tourist travelogues that together constituted Yu’s “Humble Gift.” Once our focus moves from text to theatre, front-stage to backstage, and from China to the globe, the promising yet fleeting National Theatre Movement reveals its hidden potency.

Generally, Yu’s aesthetic endeavors have been buried under the development of social problem plays advocated by Hu Shi and his May Fourth followers on the one hand and the redefinition of *xieyi* as the unique modernity of Peking opera on the other. Returning Yu Shangyuan, the National Theatre Movement, and the realism he practiced and critiqued in the 1920s to the heterogeneous discourse of formulating modern Chinese theatre uncovers an alternative path for the development of *huaaju*, one whose

real and dynamic endeavors have, so far, remained unseen. By shedding light on the backstage, this chapter has revealed a trajectory that differs from and thereby threatens the canonical narrative of Chinese realism and realist theatres. Departing from views that hold that China's early "realist" theatre either imitated anxiously the Western Other or remained blind to the era's modernist underpinnings, this chapter has affirmed realism's vanguard nature, demonstrating how eyes—the enlightened eyes of characters, dramatists, and spectators—became the principal subject of modern Chinese theatre.

3: Out of the Box-Stage

Huaju's Relocation to the Rural Modern

Beginning in the early 1920s, the Chinese generation that “sought modernity” in America and Japan, having completed institutional degrees or simply deciding to end their sojourning status, began to come home. Hong Shen, in an essay published in 1935, recalled his 1922 return as an ambitious young man: “On the steamship, Mr. Cai asked me who I want to become, a famous actor or a Chinese Shakespeare? ‘Neither,’ I answered, ‘I hope to become a Chinese Ibsen, if it is possible.’”² While it remains unclear whether this exchange really took place, it reflects how Hong wanted to be remembered. Indeed, the uncritical use of the phrase “Chinese Ibsen” to refer to Hong Shen since 1935 has endorsed such self-serving narratives. The “Chinese Ibsen” label has established Hong as one of the “founding fathers” of *huaju*, and *huaju* as a theatre with Western realist roots.

Nevertheless, Hong’s retrospective account cannot completely displace a popular discourse about Hong’s “decadence” that circulated in the late 1920s and early 1930s. This discourse focused not on the training and thoughts he brought back to China, but on the luxury lifestyle he enjoyed thanks to his writing. For example, one critic charged that Hong, who held a professorship at Zhongshan University in Guangzhou, sold dozens of film scripts that he wrote on the side to the Mingxing Studio at five hundred *dayang* each. “If one were to estimate his total income, it must be considerable.”³ This pointed inquiry into the monetary value of Hong’s scripts stands in contrast to Hong’s self-identification as a man of theatre. Professor Hong’s expertise in drama, the writer suggests, is “wrongly” directed toward a profit-seeking enterprise. Another popular anecdote offered an explanation for his urgent need to earn a considerable amount of income: “If Hong Shen does not eat meat two days in a row, he will lament the loss of two pounds.”⁴ The awkward discrepancy between the two sides of Hong Shen—a Chinese Ibsen devoted to his country’s reform and an acquisitive writer maintaining his class privilege—suggests a potential problem

for the dramatist's relocation from America to China. Which was the real Hong Shen: a celebrity addicted to foreign luxury, or a scholar concerned with the Chinese masses?

Hong was not the only dramatist who experienced such public doubts. Suspicion was a common plight among "scholar celebrities" (*xuezhe mingliu* 學者名流) who journeyed abroad and then came back to reform Chinese theatres. Even those who demonstrated clear left-leaning ideologies underwent scrutiny, such as Tian Han, who had studied in Japan.⁵ Between 1924 and 1925 Tian initiated the independent film project "To the People" (*dao minjian qu* 到民間去) through the Southern Society (Nanguo she), a loosely structured literary group that became a leading force of the amateur theatre movement in Shanghai. Rather than reflecting the sentiments of "the people," Tian, the Southern Society, and their film and theatre projects all struck Shanghai urbanites as examples of outlandish bohemianism. In fact, the same tabloid piece that criticized Hong's hedonistic care for his weight also noted Tian's uncouth behavior: "Tian Han could recline on a sofa for three days without even taking his shoes off." Even though the Southern Society was viewed as an important site for the "most active independent theatre movement," Tian was nevertheless criticized for his "self-centered" management style.⁶ It seemed that Tian, like Hong, was destined to remain forever distant from the people he hoped to reach.

Before transforming themselves into the Chinese counterparts of the theatre and cultural giants of the West, these intellectual dramatists perhaps needed to understand more clearly the dynamics of nationalism, localism, and cosmopolitanism in which the educated youth and the people, urban modernities and rural alternatives, and *huaju*, film, and other cultural forms were in negotiation and flux. That is, Hong, Tian, and their foreign-educated cohort needed to (re)acquaint themselves with the lived realities of the Chinese masses. Accordingly, diverse intellectual forces converged on the theme of rural China, vying to conduct effective cultural movements to revitalize village society. This trend was reflected in a rising interest in folk literature and the "going to the people" movement from the late 1910s onward.

"Going to the people," while providing a direction for urban intellectuals, did not offer specific instructions. Such ambiguity might explain why the idea was manifested predominantly in nostalgic memories of the rural or as a political slogan that highlighted the twin pressures that confronted China: internal strife and imperialist aggression.⁷ Intellectual representations of "the rural" governed cultural creativity to such a degree that nearly all literary works of the 1920s could be classified loosely as nativist litera-

ture (*xiangtu wenxue* 鄉土文學).⁸ As intellectual endeavors to revitalize the rural moved beyond the discursive level, substantial “rural reconstruction” (*xiangcun jianshe* 鄉村建設) projects began to take shape.

“Rural reconstruction” was the umbrella term for a plethora of private ventures in the late 1920s and 1930s that aimed to bring “modernity” to China’s countryside.⁹ Naturally, the viewpoints promoting such an interest varied. As Kate Merkel-Hess has noted, the rural reconstruction movement grew out of an amalgamation of seemingly competing ideologies, including Marxism, liberalism, nationalism, Confucianism, and Christianity. The (re)construction of Chinese rural societies was not just an example of receiving “influences from abroad”; rather, it contributed to the transnational discourse of rural modernity and rural cosmopolitanism.¹⁰

One of the many intellectual dramatists who reformed and made theatres for rural audiences was Xiong Foxi, whom James Yen (1890–1990) invited to join the China Mass Education Movement (*Zhonghua pingmin jiaoyu cujin hui* 中華平民教育促進會, hereafter MEM) in 1932. MEM, which Yen led from 1926 to 1937, was chiefly implemented in Ding Xian, a rural county of four hundred villages and four hundred thousand people in Hebei province. MEM aimed to cure “the four root evils” that Yen diagnosed as causing China’s “rural crisis”: ignorance, poverty, disease, and civic disintegration.¹¹ Through trial and error, theatre emerged as a central site of rural reconstruction.

The American-educated Xiong was head of MEM’s Department of Literature and Visual Education (DLVE). After spending nearly three years in Ding Xian working with local peasant drama teams, Xiong and his Theatre Division (a sub-branch of DLVE) felt ready to present *Cross the River* (*Guodu* 過渡, 1935), a play staged “for, of, and by” Ding Xian peasants. The performance site was East Buluogang’s¹² open-air theatre, and its audience included over two thousand villagers, as well as VIP intellectual dramatists coming from Beiping, Tianjin, and Shanghai. *Cross the River* and Xiong’s related playmaking efforts thereafter attracted generations of domestic and international scholarly attention. Some have even seen in “Ding Xian-ism” the inspiration for Mao Zedong’s (毛澤東 1893–1976) “Yan’an Talks” on art and literature.¹³

The rural community’s positive response to “new theatre” is significant. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, *juren* (men of theatre) had typically depicted the encounter between cosmopolitan intellectuals and local villagers as reciprocally destructive. Yu Shangyuan expressed his deep mourning for the abortive National Theatre Movement by writing *Statue* (*Suxiang*). As shown in Chapter 2, that play ended with rioting villagers swarming into

the shrine to cast the “fake” statue of the bodhisattva, actually the woman Jiqing, into the river. The peasants’ chaotic anger was directed toward the “realness” embedded in the statue or Jiqing’s performance. The confrontational encounter between rural religious sensibilities and urban modernist aesthetics evolved into a mob-like clash between the peasants and artists. Scholarly characterizations of peasants’ relationships with *huaju* are similarly pessimistic. *Huaju*’s removal of operatic theatrical components and its “realistic” presentations of friendship, camaraderie, and love by a mixed-gender cast, in Chang-tai Hung’s interpretation, rendered the genre perpetually “foreign” for rural communities.¹⁴

However, Ding Xian villagers not only came to terms with modern theatricality but also in fact staged the most acclaimed “peasant *huaju*” of the 1930s in close collaboration with cosmopolitan dramatists and theatre-makers. This exceptional event unearths a series of questions: What were the mechanisms behind the seemingly unprecedented role that *huaju* played in reconstructing Ding Xian? Did the local community truly reconcile with and accept *huaju*, an essentially urban and intellectual theatre form? And how did the rural community and *huaju*, both facing a moment of transition, adapt and revise their respective agendas of modernity?

Accordingly, generations of scholars have scrutinized the Ding Xian theatrical construction of rural modernity. William Huizhu Sun in his 1990 dissertation provides a comprehensive overview of the Ding Xian theatre experiments and places *huaju* among the continuous reformation of “old scripts and old theatres.”¹⁵ Siyuan Liu narrows down Sun’s account by focusing on the productions of two signature plays, *Cross the River* and *Dragon King Canal* (*Longwang qu* 龍王渠, 1936). Liu highlights the Sinicization of Western-style theatre in Ding Xian and praises Xiong Foxi’s achievement as “a miracle in the evolution of new Chinese theatre.”¹⁶ Approaching Ding Xian from a historian’s perspective, Merkel-Hess identifies “new theatres” in Ding Xian as grassroots social activities that intellectual reformers in the rural reconstruction movement adapted to reorganize “rural republics.”¹⁷ Echoing Merkel-Hess but thinking from a media studies perspective, Yu Zhang perceives the Ding Xian theatrical activities as an urban medium brought to the countryside to construct “a space of attraction and empathy” where rural subjects were transformed into modern citizens.¹⁸ Drawing influence from the works of Martha Nussbaum, Eugenia Lean, and Haiyan Lee regarding sentiment and emotions,¹⁹ Zhang places *huaju* within a broader Chinese structure of feelings. While these studies have brought Ding Xian theatrical activities to the foreground, the scope of *huaju*’s engagement with the broader rural reconstruction movement remains ill-defined.

The exclusive focus on Xiong Foxi and what James Yen called the “social laboratory” for cultural and social reformation²⁰ overlooks important connections with other cosmopolitan dramatists’ efforts to transform village life. These playwrights’ persistent endeavors to reform *huaju* overlapped with the construction of the rural modern, making *huaju*’s development and the rural reconstruction movement inseparably entwined. Simply put, while scholarly attention has been drawn to the fruit of the Ding Xian experiment, the tangled process by which *huaju* relocated to the rural milieu remains concealed. Though uncharted, examining these “vines” is productive for us to understand the course of *huaju* and its contribution to elaborating rural and transnational modernities.

This chapter traces three playmaking projects, engineered respectively by Tian Han, Hong Shen, and Xiong Foxi between 1924 and 1935, that explored possibilities of theatricalizing rural China through the medium of *huaju*, which was, meanwhile, undergoing its own reconstruction. Specifically, it reads: (1) Tian Han’s *The Night the Tiger Was Caught* (*Huohu zhi ye* 獲虎之夜, 1924), the first *huaju* Tian wrote with a rural setting, staged in Shanghai by various student amateur troupes while Tian was preparing for his film *To the People*; (2) *Wukui Bridge* (*Wukui qiao* 五奎橋, 1930), the first installment of Hong Shen’s *Rural Trilogy* (*Nongcun sanbu qu* 農村三部曲), staged by the Fudan Dramatic Club (Fudan jushe) after Hong had conducted firsthand research into village life; and (3) *Cross the River*, written by Xiong Foxi, directed by Yang Cunbin (楊村彬 1911–1989), and staged by the hybrid cast of peasants and intellectual theatre personnel at Ding Xian. I argue that these productions serve as key nodes to map out the synchronous development of the rural reconstruction movement as well as *huaju*’s modernization between the 1920s and the 1930s.

These three *huaju* productions, each unfolding different aspects of village life, are unified by their keen sensibilities of rural space and engagement with realist and modernist theatricalities. In every production, a certain epitomic rural space, centered on a temple or a bridge, is animated from an ornamental scenographic installation to play a seminal role that facilitates dramatic conflicts by accommodating various stage blockings. The physicality of the rural space, either deconstructed or reconstructed, entangles both the dramaturgical fabric and the theatrical production. These three productions, thus, stand out from other *huaju* plays with rural themes precisely because Tian, Hong, and Xiong grounded their representations of rural China on the challenging yet promising theme of reconstruction.

As the specific materialization of the reconstruction theme varied among these three works, so do my inquiries. I first analyze how cosmo-

politian dramatists depicted rural China on the textual level in nostalgic, destructive (revolutionary), and constructive fashions. The process by which the peasants in these plays demonstrate a primitive yet romantic form of hunting, then coalesce into revolt and even acts of demolition, and finally stage the construction of rural infrastructure, mirrors the process by which the peasant community (re)constructs itself as a rural republic. Then, turning to (meta)theatrical strategies, I compare how Tian, Hong, and Xiong materialized “reconstruction” on amateur makeshift stages, (unsatisfying) proscenium stages in urban playhouses, and the open-air theatres built in Ding Xian. In so doing, I trace the intertwining experiments of *huaju* theatre space and the rural reconstruction movement. In parallel to cosmopolitan dramatists’ transformation from imagining the rural to living in specific rural locales, these *huaju* theatrical spaces moved from cities to villages, transforming rural audiences’ experiences from alienated to participatory.

The research focus and methodologies employed in this chapter vary depending on the available archival materials and the intellectual dialogues I form with previous scholarship. My examination of Tian Han’s *Tiger* focuses more on the literary analysis of the play than the historical context of its production. Thanks to Liang Luo’s thorough study of Tian’s early cultural activities in Japan and Shanghai, I can jump directly to a close reading of the dramaturgic depiction of rural space in *Tiger*. Hong Shen’s *Rural Trilogy*, in contrast, demands a significant amount of historical reconstruction given that both Hong and *Rural Trilogy* remain misrepresented in standard narratives. Furthermore, Hong, as a theatre scholar and educator, made self-referential analyses of the techniques and process of writing *Rural Trilogy* in different contexts. Thus, in the section that focuses on Hong’s theatrical endeavors, I predominantly engage in “detective work” to uncover *Rural Trilogy*’s two overriding goals: to reconstruct a rural modern in *huaju* theatricality and to reconstruct *huaju* theatre by means of peasant plays. When it comes to the Ding Xian section, I again benefit from the large volume of scholarship that focuses on the text and production of *Cross the River*. These extant conversations propel me to tease out the preparatory work of this play, the project of building an open-air theatre and then rehearsals. Unlike Tian and Hong, who both struggled to find an appropriate theatrical space to stage their plays, Xiong was invited to write *Cross the River* to fit the innovative performance space of Ding Xian’s open-air theatre. That is to say, at the center of *huaju*’s encounter with the rural reconstruction movement is a theatre stage/space that called for a play/text, and not the other way around. This discovery inspires me to emphasize process

as much as product. I thus contribute a new interpretation of Ding Xian peasants' connection with *huaju*. Namely, it was communal experiences of both constructive and performative labor that helped convene a rural republic that literally stood on the ground of "reconstruction."

Never Return: Tian Han's Early Imagination of the Rural Hometown

Tian Han returned to Shanghai from Japan in 1921, while Hong Shen settled in that city the following year. Xiong Foxi came back to China by the middle of the decade to practice his vision of "national theatre" at the National Beijing Art Academy (Guoli Beijing yishu zhuanmen xuexiao 國立北京藝術專門學校). Despite their enthusiasm, their cultural relocation was by no means easy. A particular challenge was posed by the question of how to make, reform, and rely on theatres to educate their fellow countrymen and modernize both urban and rural publics. The dominant forces behind theatre reform in the mid-1920s were represented by veteran *wenmingxi* actors and intellectual youth associated with different university theatre clubs, who either lingered in the commercial hybrid theatres or circulated among different amateur theatre societies. These so-called new theatres were far less viable than reformed Peking operas, shadow plays, and other mass media in modern entertainment complexes. The multiple frustrations against urban commercial culture along with the anxiety of separation from their own lands and people further stimulated intellectuals' long-held interest in the rural community. But would it be possible to retain one's cosmopolitan identity if they shifted their gaze, and perhaps even their residency, away from the city?

When key cosmopolitan dramatists such as Tian Han came back to China, they immediately engaged in the collective and intellectual imagination of rural China and the Chinese peasantry for an urban audience. Tian founded the literary journal *Southern Society Monthly* (*Nanguo yuekan* 南國月刊) in 1924 and continued to promote experiments in the new form of theatre that he was exposed to in Japan. He further amassed a group of young followers into the Southern Society. Upon their modern and realist stage was displayed urban intellectual sojourners' nostalgia for an idyllic rural past, a "reality" that was doubly displaced for the *huaju* theatre audience in the 1920s. Rather than "going to the people," these dramatists' early works enveloped the anxiety and uncertainty shared by May Fourth sojourners within their marginalized peasant characters. Thus, in the early phase of dramatists' embrace of the peasantry and rural society, it was the

intellectuals, romantic poets, and anxious sojourners who dressed up as peasants and stood on the *huaju* stage, not the peasants themselves.

The Night the Tiger Was Caught legitimized Tian's identity as "a concerned urban intellectual" engaged with the burgeoning rural reconstruction movement.²¹ This one-act play told what appeared to be a May Fourth "free love" story of two rural youths, Lotus Girl and Crazy Huang, fighting against arranged marriage. Although the two share authentic feelings, Lotus's father still betroths her to an accomplished hunter. While most "Nora plays" featured urban intellectual youth, Tian insinuated his stereotypical "social problem" within an imagined rural space where the soil is fertile and one might hear the roaring of tigers at night. In such an idyllic wilderness, or "the mountain life" in the characters' own terms,²² the communal connection and family structure were formed and regulated by the collective labor of farming, herding, and tiger hunting. Crazy Huang, the outcast, does not obtain approval from Lotus Girl's family to pursue their daughter, largely because he rejects Lotus Girl's father's suggestion of learning practical skills—in this case, herding cows—and chooses to instead remain a "sojourner" who lives beneath the village's temple stage. After bidding farewell to Lotus the night before her engagement, Crazy Huang wanders upon a mountain. Lotus's father is waiting nearby, hoping to capture a tiger for his daughter's dowry. Crazy Huang is accidentally caught in the tiger trap and mortally wounded. Although Crazy Huang's sincere yearning for Lotus and his longing for a "home" eventually wins him sympathy from Lotus's grandmother, the love-struck pair cannot escape separation: Huang's death is fully staged via his bleeding body, whereas Lotus is whipped backstage for her attempted elopement. Their wounded and punished bodies together indicate the cost of the pursuit of liberated love and further reflect Tian Han and other cosmopolitan dramatists' concerns with the consequences of home-leaving.

Yet simply reading *Tiger* via the lens of May Fourth "free love" is misguided. Between 1924 and 1926, at a time when *huaju* scripts were predominately read as "closet dramas," *Tiger* was staged by at least thirteen school-affiliated amateur troupes.²³ The play was unusually popular. The chief resonance between *Tiger* and its audience was, I contend, the play's reflection upon the longing felt by urban intellectual sojourners for their "native home," a rural space to which they were not able to return. Crazy Huang's death, or the climactic "alienation" of a "quintessential avant-garde artist whose deepest existential suffering arose from being 'deserted and alone,'"²⁴ is conveyed through his frustrated longing for a rural "home" rather than

for Lotus. *Tiger* is a clever variation on the “Nora play” wherein the goal is to come back to one’s original place of sanctuary.

Crazy Huang’s lingering feeling of alienation is adeptly symbolized by his lack of both family and craft. Lotus’s parents first identify Crazy Huang as someone potentially dangerous to their daughter by associating his “craziness” with his residence under the temple stage. This nuanced stage-set detail further emphasizes Huang’s outcast status and suggests Tian Han’s own self-reflection upon the alienation that intellectual sojourners encountered. Like many May Fourth youth who eschewed traditional skills in pursuit of their cosmopolitan ideal, Huang exited from the rural social structure when he stopped practicing his agricultural craft. Huang is further ostracized by his odd relationship with the temple stage. Most temple stages accommodated ritual dramatic performances that paid tribute to Buddhist, Daoist, or other folk deities and thereby served as a fulcrum for peasant sociality. Huang relates to the temple instead as a sojourner. For most of the play, Huang only wanders through the village and bypasses the temple entirely. But then at night, when the temple’s social functions are suspended, Huang finds refuge. In other words, only when the temple’s communal significance is removed does it transform from a boisterous space to an empty shelter, and Huang is allowed to reposition his own body in it. The de-socialization of the temple stage resonates with the profound marginalization of the poetic peasant, Crazy Huang, who serves as a stand-in for the May Fourth generation.

In contrast to Crazy Huang’s alienation from both the natural environment and the social milieu of the village, the local hunters transform their woods, presented as a static backdrop, into a space of solidarity where they collectively exert strength, agility, and empathy. In the scenes of “men fighting the tiger,” Tian creatively rewrites a well-known operatic stock, *Wu Song Fights the Tiger* (*Wu Song da hu* 武松打虎), transforming a celebration of individual heroism into a wishful construction of rural life. Mr. Wei (Lotus’s father) elaborates on his tiger-capturing exploits when asked by a visitor (Farmer He) from “the valley”:

FARMER HE. Mr. Wei, how did you manage to capture those two tigers?

MR. WEI. . . . we designed a better wooden cage. We set it up in the woods in the mountains. We put twigs around it, having a small path leading up to it. Behind the trap, we tied up the legs of some pigs and chickens, causing them to squeal. The squealing of these animals naturally attracted the hungry tigers that live in the moun-

tains during the winter. On the third night, we caught our second tiger. That was the one we sent to town and made a bundle on five days ago.²⁵

Neither the legendary “tiger-slayer” of *Wu Song Fights the Tiger* nor any modern tiger-hunting machinery is mentioned in Mr. Wei’s matter-of-fact account. The simple and even crude operation of a trap device reads almost like a witty self-deprecation of the makeshift stage and minimum scenography that Tian Han’s Southern Society and other amateur drama troupes employed in the early 1920s, when limitations in budget and technical expertise necessitated less-than-ideal solutions. While Mr. Wei’s description may have provoked a sense of recognition among theatre-makers, his repetitive yet rather vague references to “we,” however, do not satisfy the curiosity of Farmer He (and perhaps even the offstage urban audience), who seeks to uncover a contrast between the exciting life on the mountain and the stagnant life of the valley.

Only when Farmer He presses Mr. Wei further does he recount a more gruesome story. This time, the hunters’ and the tiger’s physicality animate the woods:

MR. WEI. Deaf Yi had intended to stab the tiger in the stomach with his knife, but when the tiger pounced, he dropped the hunting knife. Deaf Yi grasped on to the tiger’s back, butted his head against the tiger’s throat, and pushed his feet up against the tiger’s thighs. He held on with all his might and the tiger failed to shake him loose. . . . Rifleman Yuan climbed up a nearby tree, aimed his gun at the tiger, and took two shots. The tiger frantically rolled on the ground and the bullet ended up hitting Deaf Yi on the leg. Although he wasn’t hit in a critical place, he curled up in pain. . . . The tiger took this chance to let out a great roar. It then bit off half of Deaf Yi’s head and ran away.²⁶

As Mr. Wei’s monologue unfolds, the forceful bodies of the laborers and the space of the hunting community are brought into clearer focus. The “medium” of such theatrical delivery is, notably, words rather than action. By transforming the specific staging methods of “fighting the tiger” from an acrobatic operatic act (*daxi* 打戲) to Mr. Wei’s effective storytelling, *Wu Song Fights the Tiger*’s popular and traditional theme gained a new *huaju* sensibility.

Albeit with a clear hue of intellectual romanticization, as Luo argues, *Tiger* entailed Tian Han's "first serious attempt to depict his imaginary 'people' at the beginning of his Shanghai career."²⁷ In his very first modern play composed and staged after returning to China, Tian did not radically delink the emerging modern theatre from the Chinese operatic tradition or perpetuate the May Fourth polarization of new and old theatres. Rather, he recognized and then endorsed the intricate affinity between *huaju*, an urban and modern performance culture, and peasant storytelling. Throughout the play, Tian creates a productive tension between the "form" and the "content," namely, a heavy employment of *hua* (speech) to construct the theatricality of rural space and hunting actions. Relying on dialogues and monologues, Tian not only set up the performance norms to cultivate the audience's sensibility of *huaju* but also enhanced the "foreignness" that the sojourning intellectuals felt in the mid-1920s for the rural space to which they would never be able to return. True, for actual members of a rural community, *Tiger* might seem both confusing and pretentious. However, for the urban intellectual audience who were anxious for "going to the people," the challenges of repositioning one's own body in the rural space that Crazy Huang attempts to inhabit seemed both *real* and insurmountable. Instead of signaling a resolute departure, *Tiger* cultivated a sense of nostalgia, bringing back to urban intellectual sojourners their memories of the rural and the past on an amateur *huaju* stage.

But such nostalgia only resonated in the mid-1920s. By the end of the decade, urban intellectual youth grew weary of simply imagining the social minutiae and sensual details of their rural hometowns. Thanks to infrastructural developments, such as agricultural and transportation systems built to stimulate the rural economy and the educational apparatus built to modernize rural communities, a new zeal for restructuring rural China propelled urban intellectual youth to shift concerns from themselves to the peasantry, and from expressing melancholic alienation to finding ways to facilitate reforms. The goal envisioned by "going to the people," accordingly, leaned more toward materializing changes in rural communities than narrating intellectual subjectivities. The relationship between the theme of rural reconstruction and urban *huaju* practices likewise evolved. In the early 1930s, when Hong Shen threw himself into writing and staging the controversial *Rural Trilogy*, he encountered a new set of challenges to re-present rural China in and through *huaju* theatricalities.

Putting One's Body in Another's Situation: Hong Shen's Reconstruction of *Huaju* and Rural Jiangan in *Rural Trilogy*

As Zhang Zhen has argued, the Nanjing Decade (1927–1937) of right-wing Nationalist Party rule was ironically a “leftist decade” during which cultural figures drew inspiration from the Soviet techniques of realism and montage to create their own progressive works.²⁸ *Huaju*, like other genres at this time, began more consciously to espouse “radical” rhetoric for the sake of breaking China free from its “feudal” past and to defend the nation against foreign encroachment. Reflective of this cultural “move to the left” was the formation of the League of Left-Wing Writers (Zuoyi zuojia lianmeng, hereafter Zuolian) on March 2, 1930. Hong Shen, following Tian Han’s suggestion, joined Zuolian soon afterward.²⁹

Often *Rural Trilogy* is read as the final “act” of Hong Shen’s turn to the left. Scholarship highlights the dominant theme running through these three plays: the tension between poverty-stricken peasants and exploitive landlords. Indeed, this political stance inspired most socialist literary critics to identify *Rural Trilogy* as the ultimate statement of Hong Shen’s development of class consciousness under the Chinese Communist Party. But unlike Tian Han, whose turn to the left has been recontextualized,³⁰ Hong’s *Rural Trilogy* has not benefited from a thorough critique. Only recently has Xiaomei Chen offered a new reading of *Wukui Bridge* as a hybrid of a well-made play and a leftist political statement.³¹ Chen’s interpretation, though brief, inspires me to inquire further into both the structure and intent of *Rural Trilogy*. What did Hong hope to accomplish with this work, beyond making a recognizable political statement at a time when many of his peers were espousing rural modernity while also immersing themselves in leftist culture?

Such inquiries demand a thorough study of the interactions between *Rural Trilogy* and three distinct cultural products: contemporary leftist critiques of Hong Shen’s dramaturgy; Hong’s self-transformation from a theatre “celebrity” to “scholar” and educator; and the implementations of rural reconstruction projects. Once placed in the juncture of these movements, Hong and his *Rural Trilogy* appear to be discordant and even at odds with the radical sentiments that were dominant in the urban cultural milieu. Rather than being an embodiment of Hong’s “utilitarian concept of theatre,”³² *Rural Trilogy* demonstrated Hong’s political reservations as well as his continued commitment to making a democratic and inclusive *huaju*. Hong was inspired but not won over by the discourse of rural reconstruction, and so he sought to actualize a sense of sympathy that would bridge

the urban and rural, and the intellectual and the peasantry, while still hoping to preserve and further cultivate *huaju*'s popularization and professionalization in an urban environment.

Rural Trilogy: A Leftist Play?

Given that *Rural Trilogy* is often cited as “proof” of Hong Shen’s leftism, it is surprising to learn that Hong in fact attempted to distance himself from the Left just before writing *Wukui Bridge*. In October 1930—roughly six months after joining Zuolian—Hong, in the face of considerable Nationalist pressure,³³ made a public break with the Left via the rather “cowardly” act of publishing a “notice” (*qishi* 啟事) in *Shenbao* and the *New People’s News* (*Xinmin bao* 新民報). There, Hong stated that he had retired the previous month from all teaching and administration positions in the Academy of Modern Arts (*Xiandai xueyi jiangxi suo* 現代學藝講習所), the cultural institute cofounded by Zuolian and the League of Chinese Social Scientists (*Zhongguo shehui kexuejia lianmeng* 中國社會科學家聯盟) to which he had belonged. Hong announced that he would now move to Tianjin. Though Hong does not directly refer to Zuolian in his announcement, but attributes his decision to relocate to poor health, Hong’s withdrawal from the Shanghai political scene can nonetheless be read as affirming his independence from politics at a time when many of his peers were turning to the left.

It becomes even less persuasive to read *Rural Trilogy* as signifying Hong’s leftism when we analyze the dramatic tensions that eventually cause the decline of the two villages depicted in these plays. The first installment, *Wukui Bridge*, is set in a fertile Jiangnan village that is uncharacteristically facing a severe drought. The play dramatizes a heated confrontation between poor villagers and a rich gentry family over the existence of the titular bridge. Though the bridge had traditionally been seen as an auspicious feng shui locale that symbolically sheltered the gentry Zhou family and the local community, its usefulness has been cast into doubt, as the bridge blocked the only waterway along which a Western-made pump (*yanglong* 洋龍, literally “foreign dragon”), needed to provide irrigation, could be shipped. Accordingly, the poor villagers strive to demolish the bridge to rescue their rice fields, whereas the Zhou family seeks to guard it as a manifestation of their gentry status. Master Zhou, “the residual feudal force in the rural community,”³⁴ eventually flinches in the face of the villagers’ demands, and *Wukui Bridge* is demolished. The violent confrontation between villagers and the gentry class, and the ultimate resolution in favor of the peasants, quickly caused the Nationalists, who interpreted the

play as giving off a “leftist” hue, to ban productions of *Wukui Bridge* in 1933 in Shanghai and Nanjing.³⁵

Fragrant Rice (*Xiang dao mi* 香稻米, 1933), set in the same village and depicting events soon after *Wukui Bridge* has been demolished, dramatizes the saying that “great harvests turn into disasters” (*fengshou chengzai* 豐收成災), an ironic but common scenario for China’s peasants. The play focuses on the Huang family, who, along with the other villagers, have greatly benefited from the pump and their own hard labor to attain a record-setting harvest. However, the abundance of rice only leads the Huang family to bankruptcy, as governmental tax, interest owed to usurers, and rice merchants all converge to reduce the peasants’ projected profit. Even the demolition of the bridge, which in the previous play signified the villagers’ victory that would enable their future prosperity, has now become a financial burden that contributes to the Huang family’s hardships. Regretting their actions from the previous play, the villagers realize that they need a bridge after all and must now share the cost and the burden of rebuilding the bridge on top of their other obligations. Clearly, the villagers’ troubles in *Fragrant Rice* are more complicated than those in *Wukui Bridge*. Class struggle may have been able to secure a great harvest, but it did not save the peasants.

Progress on the final piece of the trilogy, *Green Dragon Pond* (*Qinglong tan* 青龍潭), proceeded more slowly than the first two. Originally, Hong Shen viewed another work, *Red Silk Quilt* (*Hongling bei* 紅菱被), as the “necessary development of the previous two plays,”³⁶ and he in fact attempted to write *Red Silk Quilt* twice. However, both times Hong felt so dissatisfied with the play’s first act that he stopped writing, and the work was never completed. It was not until 1934, when Hong returned to Shanghai, that he finished his *Rural Trilogy* with *Green Dragon Pond*. Set during the same drought as *Wukui Bridge* but in a neighboring village, *Green Dragon Pond* further problematizes the rural reconstruction movement. Mr. Lin, an intellectual who serves as the village’s resident schoolteacher, calls upon the peasants to work together to solve the irrigation problem. But in Mr. Lin’s appeal, there is no specific gentry family, or “evil and residual feudal power,” that negatively impedes the peasants’ harvest and thus requires a violent resistance. Instead, Mr. Lin takes pains to convince the villagers to chop down their cherry trees to clear the way for a public road that will connect the village with the town and thus provide the means to transport the Western pump in and, later, the harvest out. But the peasants’ destruction of their lyrical homeland, represented by the imagery of the cherry orchard, does not win them “rural modernity.” The delivery of the water pump is delayed. With

the drought getting worse and the peasants facing an inevitable disaster, the villagers return to their “superstitious ways” by planning a ritual sacrifice to pray for rain. Ironically, it is Mr. Lin himself who becomes the sacrifice. The teacher, who implored the peasants to seek “enlightenment,” is beaten to death by the villagers, including his former students.³⁷ Significantly, out of the three plays, *Green Dragon Pond* was the only one to enjoy government support. It was staged on December 25–27, 1936, by the National Drama School (Guoli xiju xuexiao) in the World Grand Theatre (Shijie da xiyuan 世界大戲院) as a major component of their eighth gala performance.³⁸ The play’s distressing theme, which casts into doubt the feasibility of rural reconstruction, suggests that *Rural Trilogy* is not a “leftist” work.

Rather than making a polemical statement, Hong’s goal for *Rural Trilogy* was to represent rural China realistically in a *huaju* theatrical space for an urban intellectual audience. Following his withdrawal from Shanghai’s left-wing milieu, Hong briefly returned to Wujin County, his hometown in Jiangsu province, to seek inspiration. While “sojourning,” Hong chatted with fishermen, peasants, and workers as often as he could to better grasp the living conditions of locals, although he was usually quickly interrupted by local policemen, who were suspicious of his intent.³⁹ Such endeavors echoed the intellectual fashion of “aiding rural society” in the late 1920s and early 1930s when young, urban, educated Chinese ventured to the countryside for academic field work, or simply to sneak a peek at China’s rural underbelly. Admittedly, these social surveys, being short, tentative, and at times a kind of “superficial rural tourism,” could not produce thorough studies.⁴⁰ Urban intellectuals rarely had substantial interactions with local villagers because the noticeable “foreignness” in their language, clothing, and social manners only aggravated the tension between outsiders and the local community.

Nonetheless, this academic fashion did allow intellectuals to interact with the peasantry, and it moved their urban-based rural reconstruction projects several steps forward when compared to those in the mid-1920s. Previously, most intellectual advocates were still based in cities and eagerly situated the markers of urban modernity—literacy, participatory governance, and gender equality—in a rural geography that existed only in their imaginations.⁴¹ Hong Shen was suspicious of the prevailing intellectual confidence in “translating” urban modernity to the rural community. His *Rural Trilogy* focused more on actual social problems in rural China than in absorbing plots and dynamic characterizations. In this regard, as Hong’s critics wrote, *Rural Trilogy* resembled an academic research paper more than a “well-made play.”

Zhang Geng (張庚 1911–2003) exemplified such critiques. Zhang was a leading leftist critic, and he issued his review of *Rural Trilogy* in 1936 after all three plays had been published in Shanghai. Zhang understood that Hong possessed long-held sympathy for the downtrodden. But he questioned Hong’s methodologies for composing these plays, charging that Hong posed “scientific” problems to his readers and audience but failed to portray the peasantry realistically. The impression of a Jiangnan village that readers got from *Rural Trilogy* was “abstract” and only the product of the playwright’s literary technique of “raising and refining” (*tilian* 提煉): “Mr. Hong starts [structuring his plays] from the spirit of seeking realness (*zhen* 真); when plays are completed, however, what his audience and himself acquire are no longer realness, but abstract [social scenarios].”⁴² As Zhang Geng reads, Hong Shen’s “academic” approach made it difficult for Hong to “love” the peasantry, which further blocks any affective communication between characters and readers. When commenting on Hong’s specific characterization of Li Quansheng, the leading peasant-reformer in *Wukui Bridge*, Zhang demonstrates his frustration: “Isn’t his sympathy with the characters a mere outcome of rational thinking? . . . Between the playwright and his characters lies a certain distance. Thus, the playwright could not guide me and the readers to get close to his characters.”⁴³ Clearly, and contrary to later critics, in Zhang Geng’s analysis, *Rural Trilogy* was not a leftist play.

Hong Shen’s Scientific Approach: Techniques for Sympathy

Hong Shen did not directly respond to Zhang Geng’s critiques. In part, Hong would likely agree with Zhang that his script was the product of research and not of emotional affinity with his rural subjects. The divergence between Zhang and Hong lies in their understanding of sympathy and their evaluation of intellectual capacity. For Zhang, the underlying problem of *Rural Trilogy* comes from the fact that “Mr. Hong does not dearly love his characters.” Thus, *Rural Trilogy* at best serves as a rendition of the “foreignness” of *huaju* to the peasantry and the distance urban dramatists felt when addressing rural China. For Hong, sympathy is not innate but arises from a series of interrelated functions of sensing and responding to stimuli, imagining, and eventually “raising and refining.” The consequent “distance” between playwrights and their characters is thus substantial but not unintended.

Weihong Bao, examining how acting evolved in response to cinema (and to a lesser extent, *huaju*), keenly reads Hong Shen’s “Techniques of Acting” (*Biaoyan shu* 演術).⁴⁴ This essay, first serialized in 1928, illuminates the

challenges of acting in a seemingly “naturalistic and spontaneous” representational mode, as well as the difficulties in securing a strong emotional response from spectators to such representations. The key to overcoming both hurdles is *sympathy*. Hong’s sympathy differs from the “sympathy” seen in moral philosophy in that it stems from imagination, training, and observation.⁴⁵ Describing the ideal actor, Hong wrote:

His senses to respond to the stimuli are exceptionally acute. His eyes can see images that do not exist at the moment and place; his tongue can taste flavors differently; his ears can hear otherwise; his nose can detect nonexistent smells; his skin can sense physical conditions (heat or cold) that are not present; his hands can also touch what does not exist here and now. . . . Even though all the stimuli are hypothetical, the stimuli he physically experiences are real. His imagination is so powerful that it materializes the stimuli; his behaviors and gestures are consequently true responses/reactions to the stimuli.⁴⁶

Hong, Bao writes, trusts that an ideal communal resonance will emerge when both actors and spectators exert their individual sympathy and become “extrasensorial”:

Hong calls this capacity “sympathy” (*tongqing*), the ability to “put one’s body in another’s situation/place” so that “one can forsake one’s subjectivity and transform into anything in the world to experience in their place . . .” To cultivate sympathy, Hong suggests an actor learn about human life and recognize powerful stimuli through observation.⁴⁷

Hong Shen’s definition of sympathy is not “love,” as Zhang Geng correctly notes. Rather, “sympathy” is an ability, an intellectuality and, specifically, a “mode of perception and relationality” that connects the self to the world “to achieve a physical transformation from imagination to experience.”⁴⁸ In other words, Hong finds sympathy to be grounded in the acting subject’s empirical, imaginative, and intellectual capacity, but not in mere sentiments. The viable methods of actualizing sympathy are through either extrasensorial observation or intensive learning, which in Zhang’s view only constitutes “rational thinking.” While Zhang is troubled by Hong’s “thin and rare” enthusiasm for his characters, Hong, on the contrary, only trusts this “academic” kind of sympathy to bridge the distance between self and others, actors and spectators, and representational and social realities.

Hong Shen’s understanding of sympathy did not arise from his lim-

ited engagement with the rural reconstruction movement. It is in fact a continuation of playmaking methods that he first developed while writing and staging a *wenmingxi* in 1910s Beijing. This much becomes clear from the preface that Hong wrote in 1920 for this play, *Poverty or Ignorance, Which Is It?* (*Pinmin canju* 貧民慘劇). Here Hong contextualizes his early theatre experience and shares the methods he employed to write a play about subjects who remained socially distant from him, in this case the urban poor. Although the methods Hong used were in no way systematic, they are tellingly similar to his expectations for an ideal actor/spectator articulated nearly a decade later. Hong relates that he composed *Poverty or Ignorance* in 1916 while a student at Tsinghua University, during which time he would chat with residents of Beijing's Xicheng district: "I have learned about their everyday life in detail, feeling that I am putting my body in their scenarios (*shenlin qijing* 身臨其境)." He relates the exceptional hardships of the laborers, as well as their hostility to study:

Those poor people are like the donkeys who walk between Xizhi Gate and Wanshou Mountain five to six times to carry passengers during the daytime and, at night, have to grind one to two *dou* of wheat. We can discern that, for the poor, the hardship of their lives and the intensity of their labor are just like this. One day, when I tried to persuade a poor child to study, the child replied: "You gentlemen read books and would get rich by becoming an official; but if we were to study [and not work], the whole family would starve to death!"⁹⁹

In the 1910s Hong Shen experimented with *wenmingxi* to address his political and social concerns. He was aware that the distance between elite intellectual youth and poor urbanites might prevent his play from resonating. But he believed in the capacity of sympathy, or "putting my body in their scenarios," in order to observe, learn, and finally stage the lives of the poor.

Hong in this preface even expects his readers—mostly his fellow intellectuals—to imagine the hardship that the Beijing poor are confronted with daily. Like an ideal actor who acutely trains his body to respond to imaginary stimuli, Hong displays his extrasensorial capacity to transform his text into the "scene" of the downtrodden. Readers are invited to hear otherwise from the child who rebukes him. They are also led to see images of suffering that "do not exist at the moment and place" via the simile of a donkey who is always working, even when out of sight. Moreover, Hong describes the donkey's daily itinerary—its path between Xizhi Gate and Wanshou Mountain during the day and its circular path when grinding

wheat at night—to register the sort of specific spatial distance and temporal change that a *wenmingxi* stage limited by budget could not represent. Indeed, were readers/spectators to follow Hong Shen’s “transformations,” their nose might “detect nonexistent smells” belonging to an exterior world inhabited by the dramatic subjects, and their “skin [could] sense [the] physical conditions” of Beijing.

Zhang Geng never thoroughly explained what he meant by the “scientific” and “scholarly” residues in *Rural Trilogy* that so displeased him, save for a few allusions to Hong’s social surveys. “Scientific,” in my reading, appears to be far more complicated than Zhang suggested. For Hong, “putting my body in another’s scene/situation” was a viable approach to playwriting that contrasted sharply with the operatic theatre practices of the 1910s. Over the following two decades, thanks in part to Hong’s efforts, a thorough understanding of the relationship between one’s “body” and (hypothetical) stimuli in a “scene/situation” became a principle by which dramatists, actors, readers, and audience could understand *huaju*, as well as a technique that could be learned or imitated.

At the same time that Hong was finishing *Green Dragon Pond*, he published *Techniques of Writing for Film and Theatre* (*Dianying xiju de bianju fangfa* 電影戲劇的編劇方法, 1935, hereafter *Writing Techniques*), a “how-to” manual for the emerging petty intellectuals (*xiao zhishi fenzi* 小知識份子) who sought a career in entertainment.⁵⁰ These petty intellectuals, young high-school and college graduates mostly from lower-middle-class families and deeply influenced by the New Culture Movement, anxiously sought opportunities to participate in theatre- and film-making domestically. Prior to their graduations, playmaking experiences at amateur drama clubs and similar extracurricular activities provided them with a gateway to some social mobility. As “students” affiliated with modern educational institutions, they could participate directly in progressive movements such as rural reconstruction. As postgraduates, their amateur experience promised tangible rewards, offering them a ladder for both monetary and social growth. Hong’s financial security and cultural capital, mentioned widely in the tabloids, made him the best candidate to pen *Writing Techniques* for the professionalization of *huaju* in an urban context. *Writing Techniques* reflects Hong’s transformation from a defensive and at times snobbish scholar-dramatist to a patient theatre-educator who sought to share the “secrets” of his craft.⁵¹

Hong drew inspiration from an anecdotal dialogue between Carlo Gozzi (1720–1806), the Italian dramatist, and Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), the German poet and dramatist. This exchange was first mentioned by the French dramatist Georges Polti in his 1895 work *The Thirty-Six Dramatic Sit-*

uations, which was translated into English in 1917.⁵² According to the story, Schiller felt rather suspicious when Gozzi speculated that there were only thirty-six situations that could be found in, and form the basis for, all dramatic stories. Schiller set out to find more, but in the end found even fewer than Gozzi. With the “endorsement” of these great cosmopolitan dramatists, Gozzi and Schiller, Hong set out to analyze the role of “sympathy” in each of these thirty-six situations. *Writing Techniques* presents a series of charts in which all thirty-six are introduced as generic “plots” (*juqing* 劇情). Hong fleshes out each “plot” with its main characters, that is, “the characters with whom the audience is sympathetic,” other characters, and specific variations. Hong further alerts potential playwrights that the application of general plots to one’s own script requires transforming them into particular social situations—his “variants”—and theatrical stimuli. The writer can only craft the situations and stimuli out of the theatre materials, including, in order of importance: (1) the playwright’s life experiences; (2) the life experiences of others that a playwright has observed and absorbed; and (3) some life experiences that are circulated in newspapers and other popular media.⁵³ While all three ventures are essentially empirical, Hong Shen’s explanation of a playwright’s life experiences is worth quoting, as it again reinforces the idea of sympathy as “putting one’s body in their situation/scene”:

These [experiences], once interpreted correctly, are the most reliable and moving [drama materials]. Haven’t the playwrights also felt economic oppression? Haven’t they been threatened by unemployment? Haven’t they suffered from angst due to lack of sex? Haven’t they been attacked by vicious forces? Carefully speculate on these experiences, all playwrights, and then juxtapose them with those of other people, referencing each other and testifying to each other (*xiangyu canzheng* 相與參證), and melting together (*xiangyu ronghua* 相與融化). In this way, the story will not just move people—one might not care about this—but also benefit the audience.⁵⁴

The process by which playwrights write their own life experiences into a story, Hong explains, is more complex than documenting or dramatizing their own memories or experiences. Rather, the dramatic situations within a play arise from intellectual analysis, comparison, and synthesis. For example, the theatrical construction of Jiangnan in *Rural Trilogy*, according to Hong’s theory, consists of the synthesis of urban playwrights’ speculations and existing social problems, but does not depend exclusively on

either. Dramatic situations create a theatricality akin to a feeling of *déjà vu*, both familiar and innovative, enchanting and estranging. In other words, while Zhang Geng complains that *Rural Trilogy* elicits a sense of distance between urban intellectual readers and the social situation in rural Jiangnan, Hong likely felt that this critique served as recognition that he opposed the total conflation of life and theatre.

Nevertheless, experiences do not accumulate and synthesize on their own. As if a reflection on his own composition of *Rural Trilogy*, Hong suggests that all playwrights develop a daily routine of reading, collecting, editing, and compartmentalizing materials even when not writing a specific play. Moreover, Hong shares his taxonomy of “experiences,” asking readers to find and cut out potential materials from popular publications, and then archive them in envelopes and folders. Hong describes having twenty-six envelopes to file materials relating to seven topics: (1) food, (2) sex, (3) external threats, (4) internal politics, (5) rural life, (6) urban life, and (7) all good things. Three envelopes (nos. 19–21)—“superstition,” “ignorance,” and “feudal power”—included archived materials that echoed the concerns of urban intellectuals who aspired to bring urban modernity to rural places. Three more envelopes (nos. 22–24)—“disease,” “luxury,” and “erosion and decadence in life”—held materials reflecting the corruption of urban modernities and their potential threats to national health.⁵⁵

The contrast between the themes of these envelopes is likely deliberate. Most of the potential readers of *Writing Techniques*, particularly “petty intellectuals,” wanted to learn to write for both theatre and film. These readers, given their potential to be “extrasensorial,” might interpret Hong’s juxtapositions of themes as the textualization of montage shots. Such a technique enhances the contrast between rural social illness (superstition, ignorance, and feudalism) and urban corruption (disease, luxury, and decadence). These taxonomic envelopes realistically transport readers into the midst of rural-urban tensions, the very sociopolitical problem to which urban intellectuals frequently returned when advocating rural reconstruction. It is precisely these tensions that also run through *Rural Trilogy*.

Even if Zhang Geng’s chief critique of *Rural Trilogy*, “lack of realness,” might be accepted by Hong, he would not agree with Zhang’s condemnation of “scientific” and “academic” methods. For Hong, these techniques allowed urban dramatists to become involved in the otherwise elusive rural reconstruction movements. Hong Shen placed dramatic composition in tandem with scholarly investigation as each other’s reference, and, by doing so, expedited the professionalization of *huaju* among the “petty intellectuals” who in the 1930s became a key literary force. Having contextualized

Rural Trilogy against the leftist critique and Hong's efforts at standardizing *Writing Techniques* of theatre-making, it is time to turn to the play (and production) of *Wukui Bridge*.

Structuring a Well-Made Play: Stage Design and Plot Development in Wukui Bridge

The large-scale theatre production of *Wukui Bridge* by the Fudan Dramatic Club at the Fudan Stadium (Fudan tiyuguan 復旦體育館) in May 1933 won enthusiastic acclaim. Yet it also raised new questions: How could one transfer a rural community into the university auditoriums and commercial theatre stages of Shanghai and other metropolitan cities? These stages provided narrow rectangular rostrums or boasted built-in mechanical sets and gadgets to enhance sensational stage realism. Within such a confined space, how could one direct, choreograph, and block actors and running crews? In this section, I inquire into these technical questions by examining the staging of *Wukui Bridge*. *Wukui Bridge* not only expressed Hong Shen's "scholarly" theorization of Chinese theatres and rural problems but also, in its staging efforts, reflected urban playwrights' continued engagement with rural reconstruction.

The production of *Wukui Bridge* was originally intended to raise money for a certain "Resist Japan Association" (Kang Ri hui 抗日會).⁵⁶ Over seventy actors rehearsed for more than two months.⁵⁷ Hong Shen, who played the leading peasant youth Li Quansheng; Yuan Muzhi (袁牧之 1909–1978), who played the antagonist landlord; university workers, who acted as the rural masses; and a large running crew. Together they finalized the stage blocking that involved, among other things, a "bridge" that was placed onstage and later demolished.⁵⁸ Several advertisements published in *Fudan University Journal* (*Fudan daxue xiaokan* 復旦大學校刊) compared the scale and complexity of the play's blocking and scenography with that of *Cyrano de Bergerac* (*Xi ha nuo* 西哈諾), an early *huaju* production that had been put on by the Fudan Dramatic Club in the Central Theatre (Zhongyang da xiyuan 中央大戲院) in 1930.⁵⁹ The director of *Wukui Bridge*, Zhu Duanjun (朱端鈞 1907–1978), proclaimed the play to be "a successful drama" that avoided the pitfalls characteristic of "struggle literature charged only with slogans" (*biaoyu pai de douzheng wenxue* 標語派的鬥爭文學).⁶⁰ Zhu, who was Hong Shen's student and loyal follower, praised the dramatic structure, characterization, and plot of the play, stating that the work realistically represented the "liveliness" (*shengdong xing* 生動性) of a genuine social problem. Another viewer applauded the distinct theatricality embedded in *Wukui Bridge*, especially

when compared to other plays driven by the fashion of “rural reconstruction” and “going to the countryside.”⁶¹

Any close reading of *Wukui Bridge’s* “liveliness,” or social problem, should begin with the bridge itself. Prior even to introducing the characters, Hong describes the bridge’s physicality and symbolism, placing it in both an imagined lyrical rural landscape and the clan-based communal infrastructure. The stone bridge, with an exceptionally low arch, crouches in the middle of the stage, preventing a boat of any significant size from passing underneath it. Two short sets of steps and a stone path allow peasants to push a wheelbarrow across.⁶² According to Hong’s stage design, the bridge forms the hub at which four roads, two on each side, converge: The broader one to the left connects to the closest town, which is six miles away from the village. The narrower one to the right leads first to an ancient tomb and then meanders to a certain gentry family’s clan shrine. On the other side of the bridge, a narrow path to the right points to a village where twenty peasant households are crowded together, while to the left a road continues to the neighboring village. These locations are visible in the distance as props. To further establish the bridge as the central site for the village and the play’s dramatic conflict, Hong illuminates it with both “natural” light sources (the glittering stars and the first rays of morning sun) and artificial ones (two white paper lanterns). The effect is to introduce urban spectators to rural Jiangnan at the beginning of the play.

Hong Shen likely designed the bridge and props for well-equipped commercial theatres such as the Central Theatre and the Hung King Theatre (Huangjin da xiyuan 黃金大戲院) in Shanghai. The stages in these theatres could accommodate large productions: The average width of proscenium was eleven to twelve meters; the average depth was over ten meters; and there would often be an additional apron four to five meters in depth. These commercial theatres also provided flying and lighting systems, as well as fire curtains that helped to further enlarge the theatrical space.⁶³ The 1933 production, however, took place at the Fudan Stadium, where the rostrum-cum-stage did not have an apron, and its rectangular acting area was too narrow to install a backdrop.⁶⁴ Judging from the photo advertisement, only the bridge’s facade was fashioned out, while the shrine, the village, and roads all vanished. The acting area was pushed to the very edge of the stage, and the spectators almost came to the actors’ feet. The bridge and the surrounding rural space were accordingly reduced.

Despite the indistinct look, the bridge’s name, *Wukui*, marks its local significance. The name is taken after the constellation representing the literary god *Zhong Kui*. The Zhous, a local gentry family, built and reno-

vated the bridge to glorify the achievements of the five (*wu*) imperial examination graduates that the clan produced during the Qing dynasty, one metropolitan graduate and four provincial graduates. However, Wukui Bridge's lower archway becomes a physical obstacle for the transportation of a Western-made pump, and thus tradition obstructs progress. The protagonist is Li Quansheng, a young peasant who received his education from the local rural reconstruction project. For Li, it is necessary to demolish the bridge, because only an irrigation project will be able to save the village's four hundred acres of rice fields. For the Zhou family, however, destroying the bridge to get the water pump is out of the question, since feng shui and prosperity for future generations are more valuable. Thus, several threads of contradictions—"feudal" culture versus rural infrastructure, the prosperity of one family versus common prosperity, and tradition versus modernity—interweave around the Wukui Bridge and its physicality, forming the predominant melodramatic conflict between good and evil.

Although the play ends with a collective act of demolition, it is Master Zhou's attempts to quench the villagers' destructive impulse that drives the dramatic tension, not Li Quansheng's mobilization. Here Hong centers Polti's twenty-fourth dramatic situation, "rivalry of the superior and the inferior,"⁶⁵ on the Wukui Bridge. In the struggle between these two forces, "the superior" is represented by Li's efforts to organize the villagers to defend their land and status. Li's mobilization to demolish the bridge and reform the village is successively challenged by Master Zhou's exploitation of the villagers' weakness—poverty, selfishness, and ignorance—that, in urban intellectuals' understanding, caused rural China's "backwardness."

First, Master Zhou hires several villagers to stand guard so that no removal of the bridge can take place. The hired hands, aware that by defending the bridge they are blocking the arrival of the water pump, feel sorry for their fellow villagers but are swayed by monetary compensation. The very bridge that worsens the villagers' economic hardship, ironically, becomes what these hired hands sell their labor to defend. The combination of economic poverty and the prioritization of self-interest over the community, a pair of intertwined rural "weaknesses," prevents them from reforming and reviving the village. Then, just as Li is imploring his fellow villagers to remove the bridge, Master Zhou hires Daoist monks to perform "odd prayer rituals"⁶⁶ for rain and heavenly blessings. A minority of young, educated villagers, including Li, ridicule the rituals as nothing more than passing entertainment. However, the rest of the community counts on the prayers to relieve the drought more than they value turning to modern technology. The ritual practices on the bridge and the "ignorance" that buttresses

them further widen the gap between the villagers who have received mass education and the rest of the community that is still to be “reconstructed.”

Master Zhou’s rhetoric further intensifies the conflict between scientific and technical modernity and superstition and tradition. While Li gives a public speech espousing the power and efficiency of mechanical modernity and again calls on the peasants to demolish the bridge, Master Zhou reminds the villagers of their emotional attachment to the traditional rural community that is land-based, reliant upon human labor, and blessed by proper feng shui. Acting as if he wants to have a casual conversation with a middle-aged peasant, Master Zhou reminds the peasant that his son, who used to sell fish in the village, now rarely comes home because of his engineering work in Shanghai. Implicit in Master Zhou’s resistance against importing an irrigation machine is the notion that the younger generation is being pulled away from the land and that the community risks being dissolved by modernization. Master Zhou, in a solemn manner, instead urges the villagers to follow the model of the legendary Emperor Yu⁶⁷ and employ a Daoist purification practice to inquire into the “heavenly will.” Then, if heaven promises no rain, the villagers should turn back to their native resources—peasant labor, animal force, and waterwheels—to compensate. Even if the “foreign dragon” or water pump were to alleviate the drought and save some human labor, mechanical modernization, Master Zhou warns, would eventually corrupt the villagers’ morality and further threaten their agricultural community:

MASTER ZHOU. Since I resigned from office and moved back to the village, I have witnessed the young fellows swarm into teahouses and gamble in those villages where foreign dragons have replaced human labor. Is this a so-called “merit” brought by foreign products?⁶⁸

Master Zhou’s skepticism about mechanical modernization is not a Luddite view. His speech reflects and further stimulates genuine concerns over the disintegration of the rural community that were shared among two sets of audience—the onstage village characters and the offstage intellectual spectators who were sympathetic to the plight of the peasantry. Traditional labor-intensive irrigation, ritual practices, and the bridge with its proper feng shui mark the key nodes of the communal structure not only in Wukui village but throughout rural China.

Although Master Zhou’s speech convinces half of the crowd to disperse, the two opposing forces then fall into deadlock. The temporary peace is soon interrupted when Master Zhou beats up an old villager for disobeying

him and trying to tear down the bridge. Having learned of Zhou's brutality, the silent majority finally lets out their cry: "What are you waiting for? Tear it down! Demolish the bridge!"⁶⁹ As if ignited, the villagers unite in solidarity and start their task. This time a mass movement unfolds, driven by the unfettered villagers' newfound agency:

Now one may hear the sound of gongs approach from afar. A peasant leads a squad of villagers, men and women, young and old, to encircle the bridge. They quickly join the group to demolish the bridge. . . . The stone blocks are taken apart and tossed aside.⁷⁰

The play ends abruptly with the bridge's destruction. The bustling commotion in the final scene seems to promise that the parched crops will soon be irrigated, the village will be reconstructed with the arrival of the water pump, and the peasants will be united by their revolutionary anger over the exploitation of the gentry class.

The arrangement of opposing forces was an essential technique of playwriting that, for Hong, found its roots first in the duality between Western and Chinese dramaturgic traditions, and then, oddly enough, in playmaking and ceramics. Song Chunfang—a contemporary drama theorist, scholar, and theatre fan—had already discerned the uncomfortable fit between "modernizing" China and the ever-abundant "social problem plays" that dominated *huaju* in the 1920s. Song deemed most such plays crudely written, stiff, and lacking in plot and characterization. Accordingly, Song advised Chinese dramatists to redirect their attention to making a "well-made play" (*jiagou ju* 架構劇),⁷¹ by which he meant "a form of realistic drama emphasizing elaborate plot construction to generate excitement and suspense"⁷² that would stand at the convergence between European realist theatre and Qing *chuanqi* plays. Reading the work of Eugene Scribe (1791–1861)—the French dramatist who coined the term—in tandem with Li Yu's (李漁 1610–1680) *chuanqi* play, *The Mistake with the Kite* (*Fengzheng wu* 風箏誤), Song found in these two playwrights a similar talent for structuring seamless plots out of universal themes immediately accessible to a wide audience. Specifically, Song observed that these works' "swift and witty" plots unfolded like "messages and errands sent from spirits and ghosts" (*guishi shenchai* 鬼使神差).⁷³ Although Song's specific form of praise was perhaps anachronistic, Hong embraced and internalized his advice about a "well-made play"⁷⁴ and thus carefully *constructed* the dramatic conflict between "feudal" and "progressive" mass mobilization while *demolishing* the dominant architecture in the theatrical space.

Hong Shen further reflected on the technology of “construction” in tandem with the understanding of materiality he received as an engineering student at Ohio State University. At roughly the same time as he wrote *Rural Trilogy*, Hong explained how he thought one should structure drama in practice. Parallel with the publication of *Wukui Bridge* as a single play in Shanghai in 1934, Hong reprinted his autobiographic narrative, “A Life of Drama” (Xiju de rensheng), in which he cited playmaking strategies similar to the calm and measured techniques he employed studying ceramics in America:

My three-year training in the ceramic engineering program has rendered my scriptwriting process [rather] stark and dull. Prior to writing, I need to minutely examine and analyze all materials I plan to employ. . . . I particularly worry about wasting [materials]; it is as if I were to make a chemical compound of which every piece of material needs to have its function—each character, every piece of plot, and all dialogues need to be necessary in the play. . . . I am also deeply worried that I may have neglected something. It is as if I were to manufacture a mechanical stove: Thousands of strands and loose ends need to be placed and arranged. If I created one hasty and careless item, the plot development of the entire play would appear to be inflexible.⁷⁵

Although not mentioning the term “well-made play,” Hong’s metanarrative regarding the writing process for *Wukui Bridge* clearly echoes Song’s advice. What is different, though, is that Hong substitutes the “swift and witty” dramatic tensions that Song identified not with the messages of spirits and ghosts but with painstaking intellectual labor built on scientific analysis and research.

Hong organizes the geographical configuration, folk customs, and human manners of his imagined Jiangnan village into a carefully crafted melodramatic structure that ties together the rural/feudal and urban/modern. Every theatrical component, as Hong suggests, is studied, weighed, and then inserted into its appropriate place to form compelling dualities of sets, characters, and plot. While an ideal *huaju* theatre would mobilize its audience via sentiments and bodily transformations, the process of scripting *huaju*, in Hong’s case, was anything but a burst of spontaneous emotion. Comparing a play with a chemical compound, Hong prioritizes the quality of accuracy in his work and thereby places immense value on the playwright’s preparation and structuring. Just as various chemical elements will interact with each other and form the compound, all characters and

subplots, Hong believes, need to fulfill their obligation to the overall dramatic quality of the piece. Hong cites *Wukui Bridge* as a specific example:

Thus, I have never completed [a play] with one puff of breath while it is still in the incandescent (*baire* 白熱) state; instead, I will always slowly accumulate. I will never fly and scatter (*feiyang* 飛揚); instead, I must have my feet planted firmly on the ground, step by step, making [my playwriting] rather slow and unwitty. For example, for the script of *Wukui Bridge*, I wrote it four times in total. . . . Scriptwriting, for me, not only cannot be hasty but is hard labor and extremely energy-consuming.⁷⁶

Neither the act of demolishing the bridge nor the process of organizing the suffering villagers is presented as an “incandescent” result. Except for the somewhat abrupt revolutionary *deconstruction* of the bridge at the end of the play, Hong patiently *constructs* the converging rivalries of “gods and man”: “those with sorcery and the commoners” (both the Daoist monks and Master Zhou “hypnotize” the villagers), “master and slaves,” “rich and poor,” et cetera, which Polti identified among his thirty-six situations and which Hong elaborated upon in his *Writing Techniques*. The process by which these “rivalries” compete over mastery of the bridge is indeed the dramatic center that Hong Shen constructs “unwittingly” with intensive labor.

Wukui Bridge revealed the dramatist’s thoughts on rural China to an urban audience, and Hong Shen’s techniques of staging the theme of “construction” dialogued with the participatory spirit of the rural reconstruction movements. However, the joint efforts between intellectual and rural participants in Hong’s *Wukui Bridge* were imbued with tension. They maintained a curiously “conservative” favor for cautious, intellectual subjectivity over spontaneous mass action. The two remaining plays of the *Rural Trilogy*, *Fragrant Rice* and *Green Dragon Pond*, both explicitly questioned the feasibility of rural reform.

By focusing on the theatrical deconstruction of village landmarks (bridges, clan shrines, and cherry orchards), Hong examined the real challenges that confronted Jiangnan villagers: disastrous droughts, the landlords’ exploitation, conflicts of interest between the village community and the national government, and peasants’ reservations about or even “feudal” resistance to both the rural reconstruction projects and their intellectual advocates. Unlike Tian Han’s romanticization of the rural milieu, where human existence was embedded in mountains, woods, and tiger tracks, Hong Shen staged Jiangnan rural communities self-organized by their

social landmarks and infrastructures. The theatrical space in Tian's play animates a rural China grounded in the nostalgia of urban intellectual youth, remaining enchanting yet unapproachable, whereas in Hong's *Rural Trilogy* the existing social structures are "interfered" with by intellectuals' reformative agendas. The tension between this "interference" and the community reflects the dualism between urban/modernity and rural/tradition, two threads often in opposition that configure both Hong Shen's peasant plays and the broader rural reconstruction movement.

Peasants Making *Huaju*: Open-Air Theatres, New Performance Methods, and Mass Bodies

Rural Trilogy and the rural milieu it represented were never fully constructed on urban *huaju* stages in the 1930s.⁷⁷ Spectators, particularly those petty intellectuals who wanted to become theatre professionals and participate in the rural reconstruction movement, could only imagine Hong's dramaturgic depictions of rural space and lament the unsatisfying stages in Shanghai that reduced the dramatic force and theatrical effects of Hong's (de)construction. The geographical and social space of "rural China" still lived predominantly as text. Meanwhile, however, peasants in Ding Xian were undertaking their own experiment of making *huaju* under the instruction of MEM's Department of Literature and Visual Education (DLVE).

Scholarship has overlooked the construction of stages and theatre as a productive site for both the rural reconstruction movement and *huaju* experiments. Because rural China usually possessed stages, while modern drama demanded theatres or playhouses, the expanding designation of performance space was near the heart of Ding Xian *huaju* efforts both by local villagers and by cosmopolitan playwrights. Villagers' communal desire for open-air theatres and their self-directed efforts to construct them inspired intellectual dramatists to create new production methods, compose new plays, and develop *huaju* that were simultaneously "for, of, and by" the peasants while still embodying modernist aestheticism. I thus place the building of open-air theatres, or the "backstage" activities of theatre design, at the center of my study.

Crossing Physical and Cultural Stages: From Indoor to Outdoor Theatres

"Reconstruction" was the essence of Ding Xian's experimental peasant *huaju*, reflecting both the recurring theme of the new plays themselves and the communal theatre-making that created them. So much is clear from an

account by Tian Qin (田禽 1907–1984), a theatre scholar who was invited to observe DLVE projects. Tian described a typical rural landscape of “stages but no theatres,” in which drama could be performed on temporary stages with thatched roofs (*xipeng* 蓆棚), on makeshift stages on boats, or on fixed stages (*xilou* 戲樓), typically built either within or opposite temple yards for staging dramas during temple fairs.⁷⁸ Tian notes that the modern concept of a “theatre” (*juchang* 劇場) derives from the ancient Greek words for “to see” or “to view,” and so encompasses both the spectators’ viewing space and the actors’ performance space. However, most rural fixed stages faced northward, Tian noted, for the purpose of displaying the dramas to the statues of deities as an act of worship, rather than “taking the natural light” and staging performances for an audience. Constructing modern theatre would mean reconceptualizing theatre and physically and metaphorically reorienting performance space.

Indeed, Ding Xian’s limited performance space might have been insufficient for the peasants’ needs. According to MEM’s surveys, the county had previously hosted a thousand local temples, although nearly all of them had been converted into schools from 1923 onward.⁷⁹ The situation worsened after 1932 when Xiong Foxi, Yang Cunbin, and other urban dramatists settled in Ding Xian to develop MEM’s high-profile Theatre Division. DLVE aspired to make modern theatre “a component of mass education” meant to raise peasants’ morale, express peasants’ emotions, introduce modern knowledge, conduct education for modern citizenship, and promote the national language.⁸⁰ That is, theatre would no longer be a mere festival entertainment or a religious activity; rather, it would become a cultural institution for (re)organizing the rural community and modernizing rural subjects. One key step that Xiong and the Theatre Division took was to introduce what they believed to be an entirely new form of *huaju*. “We adopted a spirit of experimentation,” Yang Cunbin wrote, “and actually went to rural China to give it a try. We wanted to know what kind of *huaju* the peasants really needed. In that way, a theatre was created when we were among the peasants. It did not inherit traditions, nor mimic its Western and European counterparts.”⁸¹ Creating this new theatre first required finding, renovating, and building suitable performance spaces.

Upon their arrival, Xiong led his team to renovate the Ding Xian Examination Hall, converting it into a “demonstration theatre” (*biaozheng juchang* 表證劇場) to introduce “modern” culture to the local peasants. The Theatre Division’s selection of the Examination Hall was significant. When MEM first arrived in Ding Xian in 1926, the Mi family suggested that James Yen utilize the hall as a mass education headquarters to hold literacy classes,

deliver radio broadcasts, and produce popular print and visual materials for the rural masses. In this manner, the hall, which until 1905 had been guarded as imperial property and closed to all but potential scholar-officials, opened its doors to farmer-students.⁸² Then, when Chen Zhice (陳治策 1894–1954) staged Xiong's play *Trumpet* (*Laba* 喇叭) in the Examination Hall in 1932 and attracted over a thousand spectators, this imperial-cum-Republican education center was further transformed into a public space accommodating onstage performances and offstage assemblies.⁸³ The architectural structure of the hall, with its walled boundaries, grand examination room, and open-air court, and its solemn and authoritative cultural symbolism not only brought a new theatre art to life but also provided an innovative performance space that theatres common to the rest of rural China could not match. Yang Cunbin proudly describes the theatre's contemporary features, including modern "scenography, lighting, and cyclorama," which Yang deemed "necessary for preserving the stage's artistic quality."⁸⁴ DLVE believed that it was essential both to create new *huaju* that reflected village conditions and to maintain the main components of the urban *huaju* stage, since the artistic novelty of the production space and aesthetic forms would further attract peasant audiences.

Notwithstanding its merit, the demonstration theatre was only accessible to those who lived in the county town. This particularly impeded DLVE's efforts to expand theatre education. Thus, Xiong and his team started encouraging the use of mobile theatres (*yidong yanchu*). As Yang recalls: "Any small mound or wooden boards could work as the stage. The scenography was much simplified: A few pieces of large cloth and several Chinese screens would do."⁸⁵ The team used a cart to move equipment from village to village, connecting with peasants across Ding Xian. This mobile theatre seems to have achieved its popularizing goal: Peasants not only started watching but even began performing *huaju* in their own drama troupes. Between 1933 and 1934, the Theatre Division helped to train eleven peasant troupes via MEM's Alumni Association (Pingmin xuexiao biye xuesheng hui 平民學校畢業學生會).⁸⁶ Troupes performed in the Examination Hall as well as on fixed and makeshift stages in their villages.⁸⁷

However, such rapid growth was not sustainable. When DLVE's promotion of *huaju* moved into its third year, the quantitative increase in peasant troupes' performances could no longer eclipse the more urgent demand for improving the quality of productions. The physicality of the Examination Hall further limited DLVE's reach. Yang Cunbin specifically identified the lack of a suitable theatre as the reason for unsatisfactory dramatic effects. It was at this time that the plan of designing and building an open-air the-

atre (*lutian juchang* 露天劇場) started to materialize. Yang's description of the intention behind and construction of such theatres is worth quoting in full:

The primary goal of building an open-air theatre is to find a performance space to harvest the perfect fruits of peasants' *huaju*-making activities, a theatre where spectators can hear, view, and, particularly, act. The design principle is simple: The theatre needs to return to rural nature, having no roof or walls but surrounded by trees and woods. Among the trees stands a slanted stage that serves as the audience seats and at times a makeshift stage. Sometimes peasants act on the stage, other times off the stage; sometimes they act in the middle of the audience, other times encircling the audience. The spectators may sit to watch, stand to watch, walk to watch, and occasionally become the actors. . . . As for the specific building methods, we prefer high flexibility. The request for an "open-air" theatre exactly indicates such flexibility: First, this would not be a burden for the bankrupt rural economy; and second, this design is compatible with peasants' understanding of a theatre.⁸⁸

The reason for maintaining an "open-air" environment, or "returning to nature," Yang suggests, is to offer greater flexibility for acting and viewing. While Yang notes economic and architectural concerns, he is excited more by such a theatre's liberating power. With an explicit vision of "free-floating" actors and spectators' varied interactions with *huaju* while sitting, standing, and walking, Yang celebrates the mobility and fluidity of two entangled entities in a continuous theatre space. Specifically, Yang's choreographic instructions to the peasant actors to "sometimes . . . act in the middle of the audience, other times encircling the audience" removed the dichotomous roles of actors and spectators—to view and to be viewed—and positioned these two instead as bodies that dynamically rotate around each other. The acting and spectating bodies thus simultaneously expand outward toward the other and inward toward the self, forming a new synergic force. Moving to an open-air theatre would entail a fundamental transformation of the *huaju* stage itself.

In Yang's spatial arrangement he sought to remove all possible demarcations between acting and viewing areas, between theatre and the surrounding environment, so as to render the theatre a cacophonous merging of onstage and offstage, frontstage and backstage activities. The "freedom" given to peasant actors in an open-air theatre seemed to challenge or even reject any measures meant to confine the acting bodies

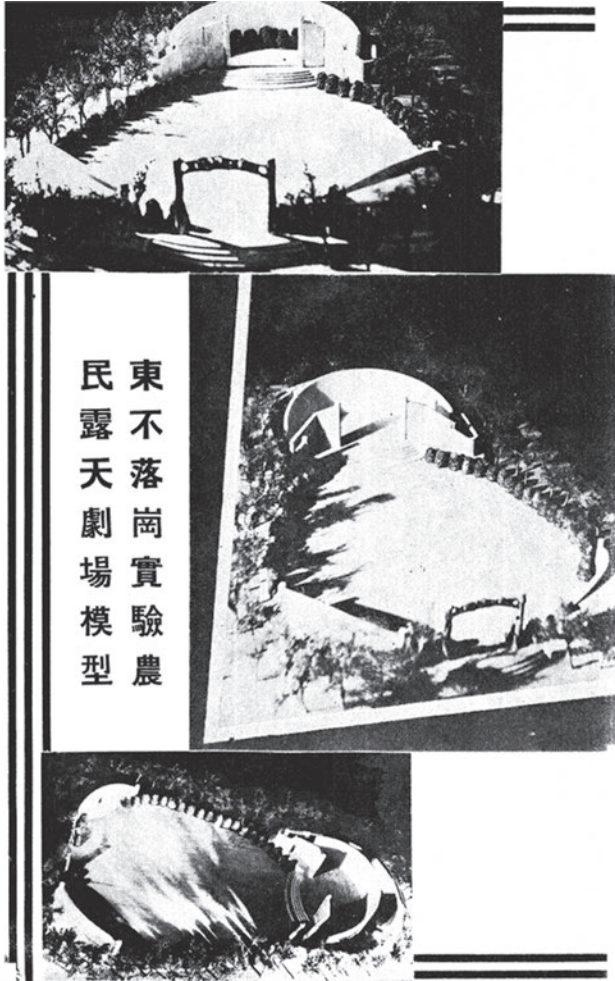


Fig. 8. Model of MEM's open-air theatre in East Buluogang. "Dong Buluogang shiyan nongmin lutian juchang moxing" (東不落崗實驗農民露天劇場模型 Model for the Experimental Peasant Open-air Theatre in East Buluogang Village), in *Guodu yanchu teji: Nongmin xiju shiyan baogao zhiyi* (過渡演出特輯: 農民戲劇實驗報告之一 Special Collection on Cross the River and Its Production: Report on Peasant Experimental Theatre, Part One) (Beiping: Zhonghua pingmin jiaoyu cujinhui, 1936). Courtesy of the National Library of China.

within the limitation of (proscenium) stages—even blocking—and, in turn, to regulate the acting bodies' movements in urban *huaju*. Likewise, rules designed to quiet and discipline an audience in a typical modern playhouse are replaced by a series of acting cues for the spectators to “sit, stand, and walk.”⁸⁹ Thus, the peasant spectators also gained the “freedom” to be enthralled and to be alienated, to walk toward and to depart from, to view and to participate in the *huaju* performance. Within the open-air theatre space, the segregated boundaries between the acting and spectating bodies become porous. Both the spectators and the actors are “set free” and placed back into a theatrical space and production mode that might easily have reminded the Ding Xian residents of *yangge* performances at temple fairs and lantern festivals.

Yang's principle of “returning to nature” was further theorized by Xiong Foxi as an ideal of “synthesizing [theatre] with nature” (*yu daziran tonghua* 與大自然同化). Synthesization, which Xiong saw as the essential difference between an indoor and an open-air theatre, became the guiding principle for making *huaju* for peasants:

Often in the middle of acting, we see the white clouds unfurl in the blue sky and stars glimmer in the dark. Faraway mountains are tinted black, and trees nearby are whirling. That such sentiment could diffuse in the theatre and then merge with nature is unimaginable for those who sit in an indoor theatre. . . . Meanwhile, as we all know, the everyday life that peasants live by is indeed in the open-air field. All year long, the peasants work their farmland, seeing the borderless sky and ground and breathing in fresh air. If we confine them in a dark house like a black box, as the indoor playhouses do, they likely won't feel such freedom. Given that the peasant theatre is a mass theatre, the open-air theatre should be its best materialization.⁹⁰

Xiong's theorization furthers the fluidity and permeability in Yang's spatial reorganization within an open-air theatre, relating the physical site of a theatre to its surrounding nature, and the actions of watching and acting *huaju* to peasants' agricultural labor. Xiong explicitly emphasized how Ding Xian's ecological surroundings, cultural milieu, and economic situation called for a new theatre space.

While the synthesization Xiong proposed was specific to Ding Xian, his call for an open-air theatre had transnational roots. Sheldon Cheney (1886–1980), the American theatre's zealous “missionary” for modernism and the founder of *Theatre Arts* magazine, published *The Open-Air Theatre* in 1918 to

offer “a comprehensive view of the open-air theatre movement with relation to both the historical background and the remarkable current revival.”⁹¹ Behind these historical and theatre production concerns, Cheney’s promotion of the open-air theatre aspired to distinguish outdoor productions, described as the “simplest, most genuine, and lit up most brightly by the joy of living,” from indoor performances, testifying to a theoretical attempt to subvert naturalist realist theatre, which had become increasingly didactic and static.⁹² For Cheney, the outdoor environment could not only bring natural and visual beauty to urban spectators, it further promised to deliver the “most spontaneous dramatic expression of the life of the people.”⁹³ Cheney further urged playwrights to take aesthetic inspiration from dramatic production done together with the masses. We see clear echoes of Cheney’s views in Xiong’s synthesization.

This synthesization was not a mere accommodation undertaken to entice a rural audience, nor was it a fraught negotiation between *huaju*’s aesthetic pursuit and the social function of mass education. Rather, Xiong’s synthesization would entail a production mode that challenges the prime concerns of representational verisimilitude in urban *huaju*-making and transforms rural spectators into participatory theatre subjects. In plays such as *Statue* and *Green Dragon Pond*, peasants were depicted as a violent mob or disinterested spectators who resisted realist theatricality. Xiong, in proposing an open-air theatre space, called instead for an experimental mass theatre (*dazhong xiju* 大眾戲劇) that unfurled peasants’ unruly bodies out of the dark urban playhouse and into the open field, offering another possibility for modernist theatre.

In October 1934, Xiong and Yang worked to turn this theory into a blueprint. They estimated that the physical site should be about two *mu* (畝 Chinese acre) in size, to accommodate roughly fourteen hundred audience members, and deemed East Buluogang, located northeast of Ding Xian, a promising location. In East Buluogang stood the ruins—a few steles and broken walls—of an abandoned temple. With the local villagers’ generous donations of time, labor, materials, and transportation, the open-air theatre was completed at the site of the ruins within just a few days. The final rectangular structure occupied 2.5 *mu* and accommodated fifteen hundred to two thousand people. The front side of the stage was five *chi* (尺 Chinese foot) in height and the back was six *chi*, while the stage in total was thirty *chi* in width and thirty *chi* in depth.⁹⁴

However, when compared to Xiong and Yang’s bold theorization of a new theatre space, its first materialization in East Buluogang seemed rather conventional and even inconvenient:

Every time the peasant troupes acted on the rectangular stage, they had to design and remake the stage substantially. For example, they used curtains to cover the left and right sides of the stage; they built shelves to make the rectangular stage . . . look like a stage with an apron; they constructed other sets of shelves on the back of the stage to hang curtains, a canopy, a stand-alone board, and screens.⁹⁵

As Xiong suggests here, the open-air theatre with a proscenium-like stage did not differ much from an indoor playhouse, only taking more time and money to achieve a less satisfying result. Moreover, the separation between actors and spectators was perpetuated, which for Xiong and Yang meant that the latent creative energies of the outdoor theatre could not be fully unleashed.

Thus, the East Buluogang open-air theatre underwent reconstruction in October 1935, one year after it opened. The theatre was changed into an oval shape large enough to accommodate four thousand people, with the audience seats arranged on a slanting slope from lower to higher rows. In this way, spectators in different rows were able to “sit, stand, and walk” without interfering with others’ viewing experiences. The stage also underwent substantial development and now could satisfy various production needs:

We decreased the height of the stage to 4.5 *chi*. . . . We further built five layers of earth walls . . . the final layer was constructed in a half circle and painted sky blue, so it could be used as the canopy. The second layer, containing two segments standing onstage left and right, was pushed further downstage, serving the stage’s front wall and leaving an apron stage with a depth of 24 *chi*. In between the front walls and the proscenium edge, we could hang front curtains when needed. The open-air theatre thus could stage indoor plays and had a (movable) “fourth wall.” The two segments of walls in the third layer, respectively, [echoed] the two segments in the second layer and formed two entrances. The top of the second and the third layers of walls were built into cylinders so that we could place lighting devices on top.⁹⁶

Arranging the walls in different layers did not just compartmentalize an otherwise unitary rectangular stage but reconfigured the theatre space into subsections that could represent various theatrical realities.

Other construction materials, labor, and time were invested in rebuilding the edges of the stage, or the physical embodiments of what were in fact fluid boundaries. In front of the main stage, the reconstruc-

tion project built five steps, with the lowest being the widest. Meanwhile, they added four other groups of stairs on both sides of the middle and rear of the main stage. Actors thus were encouraged to move “freely” in all possible directions toward the viewing area. Apart from the main stage, the renovation team further built two side stages with roofs at the left and right of the theatre entrance, diagonally opposite the main stage. Behind the side stages stood semicircular earth walls painted sky blue; in front of the stages lay stairs with three steps. The similar design principles and construction styles of the side stages nicely mirrored those of the main stage, materializing Yang’s theorization of acting amid and encircling the spectators.

Xiong elaborated on five specific “reconstructions” and their potent theatrical functions: The stairs (*taijie* 台阶) were to be the main bridge for on-and offstage communication, “deconstructing the psychological and physical barriers” between actors and spectators. The apron stage (*tutai* 突台), referring to the platform directly above the stairs, offered advantages to staging plays with complex dramatic structures that required simultaneous acts in front of and behind the curtain. Next were the “ear doors” (*ermen* 耳门), indicating the doors between the first and second layers of the walls. These were to have three functions: first, they increased ways to enter and leave the main stage; second, when used together with the apron stage, the space could be marked for staging a small-scale *huaju* play; and finally, the space between the two layers of walls could be filled with an orchestra, since it remained invisible from the audience. The canopy (*tianmu* 天幕) referred to the fifth layer of semicircular wall, which was to be the “interface” between the theatre and nature. Apart from demarcating the theatre, this wall served as a natural amplifier for sound effects and actors’ speech. Because the canopy would be placed to the south of the stage, it also kept the community warm by blocking the northwest wind in winter. Xiong was particularly pleased with this “fifth wall,” as “it stood there but seemed not to be there. It could represent and present anything or nothing in a theatre,”⁹⁷ depending on the needs of the play. Finally, the backstage (*houtai* 後台) referred to the area behind the canopy, which provided space for the actors to rest and prepare their hair and makeup and for the theatre crew to store stage props and equipment. Xiong was satisfied with the renovation and felt the East Buluogang open-air theatre embodied his ideal of building “an economical, sturdy, aesthetic, and functional theatre” that fit well into Ding Xian’s social context.⁹⁸

*Collective and Biomechanical: Regulating Unruly Bodies
in a New Production Method*

Yang, excited by these developments, prompted Xiong to expand the original goal of making *huaju* for peasants by writing a play that would showcase the liberated space of the open-air theatre and demonstrate the collective strength of the rural masses. Yang explained that “open-air” did not simply mean staging a play outdoors, but staging a new kind of *huaju* centered on the masses that would “write the peasant spectators into the play.”⁹⁹ Achieving this goal meant regulating unruly bodies through a new production method akin to the Russian theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold’s (1874–1940) theory of biomechanics. Here we return to *Cross the River*, the 1935 play produced by Ding Xian peasants that was to showcase these methods. Thanks to the open-air theatre and *Cross the River*, Ding Xian became the experimental model for rural modernity, particularly modern theatre developments in the countryside.

Xiong and Yang’s plan raised expectations for *Cross the River* and the production’s profile. Accordingly, numerous VIPs arrived to watch the play when it was first staged in December 1935. MEM’s *Special Collection on “Cross the River” and Its Production* (Guodu *yanchu teji* 過渡演出特輯) reprinted six essays written by intellectual dramatists who viewed the performance.¹⁰⁰ These urban visitors voiced an unanimously positive review of the open-air theatre, and they were struck by the dynamic and forceful energy released from the “mass acting” (*tuanti de dongzuo* 團體的動作)¹⁰¹ carried out by a hybrid cast of East Buluogang villagers and Theatre Division staff, as well as the formulation of solidarity and community via constructing a bridge on stage.

The contrast between the abundance of action and the lack of dialogue, in line with Meyerhold’s biomechanics, captured the dramatists’ attention. A certain Yuan Quanxin (袁全信 n.d.) highlighted the fight scene that takes place in Act 2 when Zhang Guoben, an educated local farmer, leads the laborers to defend their bridge against a ferry owner’s attempt to destroy it. This confrontation, despite its importance onstage, was minimally described in the stage directions:

Guoben lights the gaslight and cries out, “All, wake up!” The bridge laborers are suddenly up. Old Du [the ferry owner] lies down under the scaffold and dares not move. Little Li [the ferry owner’s helper] attempts to escape but is besieged by the laborers. Thus, the tension

between two sides amounts to a fight. After a few rounds, it is still a draw. Later, the bridge scaffold collapses, and Old Du falls into the water. So ends the fight. Some bridge laborers run down to the hill to check, and others stop Old Du's helpers.¹⁰²

The script of *Cross the River*, which was published after the production, lacks a description of the mass acting and reads as relatively flat. We can compare this to Yuan's vivid memory of the spectacle:

Zhang Guoben's outcry wakes everyone up and cues a scene of gang fighting. Several dozen people roll over on the stage, roaring and fighting; others fight on the scaffold as if they are competing to see who can climb the highest. Still another group wrestles on the bank; [a viewer may also see] some actors boxing. Standing on the stage, some actors clump together into a group of three to fight. Elsewhere, a few pairs hold each other and roll off the stage, and even over to the audience seats. At times, here, eight to ten actors, while fighting, fall and pile on top of each other. Over there, three to five actors huddle and make a circle. For one moment, everyone climbs up on the scaffold, and the next the group crawls on the ground to strangle each other. A variety of fighting scenes, far beyond several rounds, offered the most dynamic action play (*dongju* 動劇).¹⁰³

Apart from capturing the kinesthetic energy of the group fights, Yuan's review nicely unfolds the image of a stage that expands outward to the audience thanks to the blurring of boundaries between on- and offstage and even up in the air through the scaffolds. *Cross the River* appeared bold and creative to Yuan and other urban dramatists who had become increasingly frustrated by the limitations of a box-stage. The play's staging process departed from the economical use of space in urban *huaaju* productions, which often precisely designated the time for the protagonist's speech and stage space of their actions. In contrast, *Cross the River* expanded the performance horizon with a pair of diegetic materializations of the biomechanical "body" that engaged the full cast: fighting as well as laboring to materialize the bridge. After Zhang Guoben's outcry, this protagonist quickly merged with the mass acting and became no more recognizable than the supporting actors or the scaffold, even for veteran *huaaju* viewers such as Yuan.

Zhang Junxiang (張駿祥 1910–1996), who visited Ding Xian just before heading to Yale to study theatre,¹⁰⁴ was most impressed by the play's masculine strength:

The bridge-construction laborers act in unison, which is very forceful. A song of ramming (*hangge* 夯歌) is inserted at every key juncture of the play. These strong *Pageant* [English in original] elements embedded in the play fit perfectly in the rural open-air theatre. . . . All actors, on- and offstage, directly emerge from the spectators' seats, not from the doghole-like entrances on conventional stages. This breaks down what Vsevolod Meyerhold calls the "peephole theatre" and places the stage and the audience adjacent to but not opposed to each other. That is to say, [in the production,] the audience is precisely a group of peasants and onlookers who happen to see a dispute arising from building a bridge.¹⁰⁵

For Zhang, the actors acted forcefully and in unison, while the song, sung first by the actors and then together with the audience, helped excite communal sentiment, stimulate the kinesthetics of the actors, and enhance a sense of experiencing, not merely watching, a dramatic dispute. Thanks to the open-air theatre, *Cross the River* enabled a set of productive mergers: actors and audience, acting and spectating space, as well as theatricality and reality. It was these dynamic "mergers" that made *Cross the River* a "pageant" for Zhang and other visitors.

The reviews included in MEM's *Special Collection* attest to a spectacular performance. But they also raise a set of questions: What preparatory work did MEM's Theatre Division undertake to actualize the new production method? What kind of training did the peasant actors and audience receive? To what degree did Xiong, Yang, and other Theatre Division members "control" the mass acting? Or did *Cross the River*'s new production method lose "control," in both artistic and social senses, of the collective and biomechanical bodies within a "liberated" theatre space? To answer these inquiries, we return to the theme of "reconstruction," now shifting our focus to the reconstruction of space, attention, and *huaju* theatre.

While the villagers' enthusiasm was crucial for promoting *huaju* in rural China, the most artistically inspiring element that Xiong took from the rural community was the "collective force" (*jituan de li* 集團底力) demonstrated in their everyday labor. After consulting with other MEM departments and completing on-site fieldwork, Xiong settled on the theme of reconstruction. While Hong Shen's aesthetics demanded that urban dramatists and actors transport their own bodies into imagined situations, Xiong instead embedded the chief dramatic "situation" of *Cross the River*—collectively building a bridge to overcome the ferryman's exploitation—into Ding Xian peasants' everyday routine. The choice of "bridge" to sig-

nify reconstruction is effective for several reasons. The visual and symbolic representation of a bridge is, as Merkel-Hess reads, an epitome for the literal translation of the play's title "transition," and the linkage from a local community to "our Chinese national soul."¹⁰⁶ Meanwhile, its emphasis on the peasants' collective effort to construct a bridge and reconstruct a modern village critiqued and even defied Hong Shen's intellectual uncertainty, as shown in *Rural Trilogy*, about the power embedded in the peasant "mob" that could be directed either to revolution or to destruction. Most importantly, a bridge endorsed Xiong's theory of synthesizing the open-air theatre into its natural surroundings and returning a peasant *huaju* to Ding Xian's ecological and social milieu.

The natural environment was not without its dangers. As MEM's surveys elaborate, the Tang River, which meandered over seventy *li* across the north of Ding Xian, usually flooded during the rainy season and even changed course.¹⁰⁷ Given the risk, construction projects such as bridge-building were common. In fact, Xiong once led the Theatre Division staff, including a female staff member, Tong Fengren (童鳳人 n.d.; aka Tong Xiuru 童繡儒), to the Qingshui River, a tributary of the Tang, to gain familiarity with peasants' collective labor and absorb that power into their new production methods. Tong recalled:

Mr. Xiong not only observed their work but also stood in the middle of the river, shirtless with bare feet, to immerse in it and direct the peasant youth to work. [Mr. Xiong and the local peasants' work] constituted an act with good rhythm, pounding the piers and singing slogans. For these young peasants, they clearly are working as usual; for us, their work is exactly the scene that should be included in *Cross the River*.¹⁰⁸

Despite her assertiveness, Tong's description of this inspiring moment remained vague in one key aspect: Did the peasants' collective labor develop its "good rhythm" on its own, or only through Xiong's direction? How exactly was the peasants' labor reimagined into a form of masculine mass-acting?

Tong unfortunately left these important questions unanswered. Nevertheless, MEM's promotional materials allow us to outline Xiong's preparatory work. We can tell that Xiong's immersion further inspired Theatre Division staff members who would work with the East Buluogang Peasant Theatre Troupe. Although Xiong originally envisioned *Cross the River* as a large-scale production with fifty peasant actors, he was only able to recruit

twenty-five villagers, who were supplemented by ten cultural workers in the Theatre Division. To avoid any obvious differences between peasants' and intellectuals' acting, Xiong required the Theatre Division cultural workers to travel to East Buluogang every night during the six-week rehearsal season, cooking, carrying water, transporting bricks and earth, and acting together as a group. This "peasantization" (*nongmin hua* 農民化), Xiong explained, was to emphasize collectivism and aid theatre professionals' self-transformation into East Buluogang villagers in corporeal, behavioral, and psychological senses.¹⁰⁹

The peasantization of the cast was accompanied by the aestheticization of labor. In both the rehearsals and the final production, "biomechanical" (*lixue de* 力學底) acting was celebrated. As Yang Cunbin proclaimed, "The actors are peasants, and the peasants are actors," as "they seem to engage in a real construction project while acting. They all become laborers and forget they are just acting."¹¹⁰ For those who had worked closely with the peasant actors daily over the course of six weeks of preparation, Yang's claim that the cast "forget they are just acting" could be only understood as a reflection of the theatrical effect, not as an account of the backstage work. At most, the cast *seemed to forget* they were acting through their carefully crafted movements.

The rehearsals for *Cross the River*, as Tong Fengren recalled, took place in several phases in which the team helped peasant actors understand and memorize the dialogues, sing the theme song composed by Ren Zhirong (任致嶸 1900–1986) on the basis of local folk tunes,¹¹¹ and, finally, perfect their mass acting. Beginning in mid-November, all peasant actors and Theatre Division staff met at night in the open-air theatre to practice. Tong was struck by the preparations for the fighting scene that also impressed Yuan Quanxin, as it took two nights to rehearse a five-minute scene: "Dozens of peasant actors are involved in the scene and every one's actions are respectively regulated. When they act together, it seems that they fight out of spontaneity without systematic blocking. However, they presented the fighting scene in an aesthetic and always identical manner." While Tong's account lacks detail, it reveals that the "spontaneity" of the group fight was meant to be "aesthetic" and duplicated in later productions.¹¹² Tong presents the dozens of peasant actors as kinesthetic learners, memorizing individual gestures, movements, and blocking via intensive "drills." If we are to trust Yuan's and Tong's observations, the fight scene simultaneously presents several groups of bodily movements across the open-air theatre, including acrobatic skits, martial arts combat, and boxing, all of them choreographed. Thus, the evident spontaneity was carefully regulated and under "control."

At the point where *Cross the River* shifts from fighting to construction, the kinesthetic regulation of individual bodies likewise transformed from depicting righteous indignation to a zeal for labor. As the published script describes, the peasant laborers built the bridge with ever-growing energy, singing with a sonorous voice:

(SOLO). Let's build a bridge on the Daliu River!
 (CHORUS). Pound! With force!
 (SOLO). One person's strength is not enough!
 (CHORUS). Pound! With force!
 (SOLO). Let's build a bridge on the Daliu River!
 (CHORUS). Pound! With force!
 (SOLO). By pulling everyone's strength together, we can do it!
 (CHORUS). Pound! With force!
 (SOLO). Rise up! Do it hard!
 (CHORUS). Try harder! Sweat! Sweat! Do it hard!
 (Under the leadership of Guoben, the peasant laborers continue to sing and to work. The ferry owner is outraged, walking back home.)¹¹³

"Sweating," "pounding," and "working hard": These phrases, as both inspiring chants and cues for acting, were simultaneously embodied and delivered by the laborers' dynamic movements, exerting an affective bond during the performance among the actors and audience.

Notably, the explicit emphasis on "force" responds to Xiong Foxi's theoretical diagnosis, delivered in 1931 before his arrival at Ding Xian, of the two major problems in dramatic acting: "[The actors] are not familiar with the script, and their actions are rather fluttering and floating (*qingpiao* 輕飄)."¹¹⁴ To overcome such shortcomings, Xiong reminded his readers that "playfulness" required effort: "Indeed acting is playful. [But] it won't do if [the actors] do not fully exert themselves."¹¹⁵ In *Cross the River*, Xiong grounds the playfulness of acting in bodily kinesthetics. In the composition of the play as well as the theme song, Xiong relied on the peasant actors' biomechanical bodies in building a bridge, or "pounding with force," to form the theatrical language and material that could stimulate the actors, capture the audience's attention, and communicate the novelty of this forcefulness to urban dramatists.

Xiong frequently used two related terms, "exert themselves" (*mai liqi* 賣力氣) and "forceful" (*yuli de* 有力地), and these were echoed by nearly all the intellectual dramatists at the premier. Zhang Mingqi (張鳴琦 n.d.), a staff member in the Theatre Division, explicitly drew connection between "forcefulness" and Meyerhold's theory of biomechanics:

The primary idea of Meyerhold's theatre revolution is that he treats the form of a play as *theatrical* (*yanju de* 演劇的) [English and Chinese translation in original]. Admittedly, while Meyerhold borrowed the so-called biomechanism (*shengwu xue de jixie zhuyi* 生物學的機械主義) from performance norms in the Japanese Kabuki tradition, the finalization of his theatre revolution was actualized once he developed "sociomechanism" (*shehui xue de jixie zhuyi* 社會學的機械主義). In my reading, the production method that the Theatre Division adopted for *Cross the River* is largely similar to Meyerhold's sociomechanism, though the Theatre Division's goal transcends it.¹¹⁶

By including these two concepts, biomechanism and sociomechanism, without elaborating them further, Zhang assumed that his readers were already aware of Meyerhold's theoretical exploration in "break[ing] theatre's subjugation to the text and rediscover[ing] the idea of unique language somewhat in between gesture and thought."¹¹⁷ Zhang suggests that the actors' physicality in Kabuki, Soviet modernist theatre, and East Buluogang are treated in a similar manner and serve as the main generator of performance material. If we were to read Zhang's theoretical reconstruction in tandem with Tong's account of rehearsals and their endeavors in renovating the open-air theatre, we would find that the peasant actors were stimulated, with regulation from intellectual dramatists, to express both their own and their characters' indignation, and further to materialize *huaju* with their bodies and movements. As a result, the actor's body became the medium for sensory and behavioral interaction with a variety of interrelated rural reconstruction projects beyond the *huaju* experiments.

Both MEM's Theatre Division staff and the urban VIPs in the audience, all intellectual dramatists, explicitly stressed the biomechanics of the production of *Cross the River*, as well as the overall theatrical construction of modern life in Ding Xian. In doing so, they facilitated a new "medium," biomechanical bodies, for the peasant actors in East Buluogang to grapple with rural modernization, remake their communal life, and found their own "village republic,"¹¹⁸ not just cognitively but affectively. The villagers toiled together to construct the open-air theatre from brick and soil, foreshadowing the bridge-building in the play. Ding Xian's initial encounter with *huaju* was indeed grounded on the villagers' corporeal and visceral interaction with the materiality of a theatre. The production then moved to the rehearsal phase, where the peasant actors, whose numbers largely overlapped with the former theatre-builders, again encountered friends and neighbors, during which time they were asked to express their anger and empathy via regulated movements and actions.

In the final production, the physical confrontation between the unity of the villagers and the malicious ferry owner was supposed to end by relying on law to bring social justice.¹¹⁹ But the operation of law, or the cognitive approach to regulating modern public life, was quickly overshadowed by the visceral and biomechanical participation of the characters and peasant actors in reconstruction. Zhang Guoben, the protagonist, called for the local peasants to actively participate in a communal and national enterprise:

As I said, it is our responsibility to build this bridge! Each new participant will add more strength. The more people involved, the greater the strength will be! This bridge seems like the soul of China and can stand for the spirit of our nation! . . . come on, let us come together, work together, toil together and sweat together! Let us build a great foundation, from which everything new will be born!¹²⁰

The dominance of “bodily” participation in East Buluogang theatre culture is palpable. The preparatory work of *Cross the River* echoed Meyerhold’s approach and in no way trivialized biomechanical bodies as an “outer” or “inferior” level of acting.¹²¹ Rather, familiar bodies and movements, more than any intellectual or “foreign” text, reconstructed a theatrical reality that synthesized actors, audience, and environment.

Because no peasant actor’s or spectator’s direct documentation of this production is recorded, my analysis has been filtered through the perspectives of intellectual playwrights. The absence of peasant narratives prevents us from evaluating the psychological impact of Ding Xian’s theatre experiments on the rural community. Nevertheless, in order to approach the edges of those questions, I have examined the entanglement of intellectual discourses with Ding Xian theatrical activities between 1932 and 1936 as well as their connection with the broader rural reconstruction movement.

I have argued that the Ding Xian theatre experiments, as seen through the production of *Cross the River* and the space in which it was performed, were indeed quite radical. Ding Xian marked a new frontier for practicing modern Chinese theatre. DLVE first attempted a conventional project to adapt the *huaju* play repertoire to reflect the everyday life of a rural audience, but then quickly pivoted to reimagine and reconstruct the stage and theatrical space. That reimagination and reconstruction then became the dominant concern that guided subsequent reforms in playwriting, actor training, and production methods. The process of designing and materializing the East Buluogang open-air theatre liberated acting and spectat-

ing bodies from indoor playhouses and proscenium stages, and from an increasingly didactic realism. In that sense, the Ding Xian theatre experiments modernized the aesthetic rubrics and norms of representing and viewing realist theatricality, and thus contributed to the transnational exploration of modernist theatre and modernism in general.

The (re)construction of the open-air theatre was by no means an isolated or self-contained project within the Ding Xian theatre experiments. Rather, the relationship between East Buluogang villagers and the new theatre forms crystalized when local peasants employed their collective labor to materialize the theatre. From the beginning, the rural community engaged the new *huaju* theatre as participatory subjects, which determined *Cross the River's* theme of reconstruction and its production method. My reading, pivoting on the peasant actors' bodily participation in both rehearsals and final productions, illuminates the affective mode through which villagers reached out to abstract theories of rural reconstruction. In so doing, I first endorse the general scholarly observations of these theatrical constructs that reorganized the rural community; and then, more importantly, reveal the specific means by which these theatrical activities productively complicate current understandings of (rural) modernity. The rural reconstruction movement did not enter peasant consciousness via cognitive knowledge alone. More often, it settled in visceral and corporeal forms of sweat, force, movements, and voice, drilling into the collective and biochemical bodies of rural China.

Conclusion

Tian Han, Hong Shen, and Xiong Foxi returned to China in the first half of the 1920s. It was not easy for these men, who bore the reputation of cosmopolitan intellectual dramatists, to resettle into the disorderly theatre scenes of Shanghai and Beijing. Their lifestyles and theatrical activities were imbued with idiosyncratic "foreignness" and, at times, a sense of superiority, which perpetuated a reciprocal "othering" between the playwrights and their audiences. Tian, Hong, and Xiong felt bewildered and burdened by the circumscribed popularity that *huaju* enjoyed among educated urban youth. While the realist theatricality that *huaju* had attempted to unleash via witty speeches and spatial reconfigurations on proscenium stages did grow into an intellectual vogue, it failed to attract mass urban spectators, who either preferred Chinese operatic traditions or the new visual stimulations available from films and commercial theatres. The discrepancy between zealous intellectual promotion and lukewarm popular response

revealed that *huaju* had become irrelevant in the field of modern media and suggested an even bigger crisis: that *huaju* was unable to transform the Chinese people as Tian, Hong, and Xiong had hoped.

That uneasiness only deepened when *huaju* followed the commands of “going to the people” and the rural reconstruction movement, venturing from cities to the countryside while still undergoing its own chaotic reformations. Communication between the elitist cosmopolitans and grassroots peasantry was predictably difficult, as was the encounter between *huaju* and the rural audience. As a result, standard historical narratives treat these encounters as clashes between opposing forces: modernity versus tradition, urban versus rural, intelligentsia versus peasantry, and cosmopolitanism versus localism. With the notable exception of the Ding Xian theatre experiments, it is agreed that the dramatists failed in bringing *huaju* specifically, and modernity in general, to rural China in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

The resulting failures, however, should not overwrite these dramatists’ endeavors. Whereas Xiong Foxi’s *Cross the River* became a canonical *huaju* production, Tian Han’s *Tiger* and Hong Shen’s *Rural Trilogy* are largely ignored in contemporary scholarship, deemed merely the sentimental and intellectual products of cosmopolitan playwrights. The characterization of the peasantry in these latter plays strikes contemporary readers as the outcome of either a bohemian poet (Crazy Huang in *Tiger*) or a prudent academic researcher (Li Quansheng in *Wukui Bridge*) wearing peasant garb and mechanically mimicking village life. Such retrospective evaluations overlook the fact that Tian’s and Hong’s productions keenly imagined and reconfigured rural space.

Once Tian’s and Hong’s innovative approaches to aligning urban/intellectual bodies to rural space are properly illuminated, these two productions do not just facilitate our historical reconstructions of *huaju*’s development. More substantially, their theatricality laid the groundwork for the organic activities of the Ding Xian theatre experiments. Crazy Huang’s rootless wandering in the rural community captures the nostalgic feelings that cosmopolitan intellectuals, such as Tian himself, cast upon village life, namely, the anxious desire to resurrect natural ties to a lost land. Hong’s *Rural Trilogy* further complicates such anxieties by highlighting the “destructive” force that urban and technological modernity imposes on the rural space. In 1920s Shanghai, Tian Han urged intellectuals who sojourned in cities to “go to the people” and revisit an imagined idyllic hometown. Hong Shen in 1930s Nanjing alerted urban intellectual youth of an unwanted yet very possible consequence of rural modernization: destruction of the village community, if their efforts lacked an organic con-

nection to it. These two productions, *Tiger* and *Rural Trilogy*, provided the backdrop for the Ding Xian theatre reformations: dramatizing the theme of reconstruction, creating new production methods, and building theatres, all of which were accomplished by engaging peasants in reorganizing their communities. Now that we have delineated the three stages of *huaju*'s engagement with the rural reconstruction movement, Ding Xian's claim of making *huaju* "for, of, and by" the peasantry makes both historical and aesthetic sense.

This chapter has also prioritized "backstage" preparatory work over literary analysis of Tian's, Hong's, and Xiong's respective *huaju* experiments, and so has brought forward untold stories of these productions. Specifically, I have positioned published plays subsequent to their production histories, textual analysis within theatrical and historical constructs, and the backstage over the frontstage. Adjusting these vantage points gives me the perspective to critique some of the canonical labels that have unduly segregated these productions and prevented readers from finding connections among them. For example, instead of reading *Tiger* simply as a Nora play in a rural setting, I scrutinize how the tiger hunters' and Crazy Huang's positioning is determined by their mastery of hunting and agricultural skills. Rather than longing for May Fourth "free love," *Tiger* expresses a profound melancholy and nostalgia felt by urban intellectual youth in the mid-1920s due to the decoupling of urban bodies from rural communal land.

In a similar tone, I question the canonization of Hong Shen's *Rural Trilogy* as a signature leftist theatre production. I engage with leftist critiques of *Rural Trilogy* and with Hong's own metanarratives on the techniques of writing and staging, and so argue that *Rural Trilogy* reflected Hong's productive commitment to complicating the reasons for the "decline" of rural Jiangnan. For Hong, class struggle is only one factor in a set of dichotomies between urban and rural, traditional and modern, embodied and conceptual, which are intricately interwoven into the structure of a well-made play. While leftist theatre tended to view revolution as a productive end of the rural reconstruction movement, *Rural Trilogy* presented the deconstruction of rural space as a threat to rural revitalization and peasant solidarity. Hong seemingly withdrew from the monopoly of sentiments in playmaking and entrusted his readers, audience, and fellow *huaju* practitioners to understand this threatening deconstruction via sensorial experiences and intellectual labors. The (de)construction of the rural space in *Wukui Bridge* and *Green Dragon Pond* pivots on their materiality, not on nostalgia.

My backstage approach also brings new insight to *Cross the River*. Building on prior scholarship, I revealed that *Cross the River* was composed and

produced in response to a request to showcase the open-air theatre. That is to say, the physicality of a “rural space” was first (re)constructed, and then followed the play that elaborated the theme of reconstruction. The Ding Xian peasantry, Xiong, and DLVE collectively endeavored to construct the open-air theatre via their physical labor and restructure the rural community via backstage rehearsals and performance labor. My analysis departs from the many studies on the Ding Xian theatre experiments, which typically consider the end results of productions, to direct attention to the process of making a theatre in physical and discursive senses.

By linking these three productions with the theme of reconstructing rural space, I find a shared interest among cosmopolitan dramatists in re-presenting rural China. Moreover, I delineate how the theatricality of “rural space” evolved between the mid-1920s and mid-1930s from individual nostalgia to academic investigation, and then to communal labor. While cosmopolitan dramatists were seeking to actualize the rural modern by means of *huaju*, *huaju*'s aesthetic norms and theoretical visions also developed. From *Tiger*, a single-act play that substituted individual and group acrobatics with speech (*hua*), to *Wukui Bridge*, which meticulously balanced a well-made play structure to frame sentiments and actions, and finally to *Cross the River*, a play that practiced a new production method that relied on collective and biomechanical mass-acting to liberate both audience and playwrights from a realism that sought verisimilitude, these productions with their rural themes and settings were sites for *huaju* to negotiate fruitfully with realism and modernism. In short, I not only constructed the frontier of rural reconstruction movements in which *huaju* stood in the center, I found the theatrical and social reconstruction of rural China to be the “backstage” for modern Chinese theatre's development.

4: Institutional Theatrics

Techniques, Prompts, and Plays to Serve the Nation

On December 15, 1934,¹ the Association of Hunanese Students in Shanghai (Hunan lü Hu xueshenghui 湖南旅滬學生會) organized a fundraising event at the Ningbo Native-Place Association (Ningbo tongxianghui 寧波同鄉會)² where Tian Han's *Extras* (*Linshi yanyuan* 臨時演員)³ was staged for the first time. Within the space of a one-act *huaju*, *Extras* unfolds a frustrating episode in the production of a sound picture in 1930s Shanghai, during which the filmmaking process was interrupted three times: First, an inexperienced extra playing a peasant role, who is supposed to be panic-stricken due to the death of his military leader in the battle against Japan, fails to deliver a convincing cry of despair. Then, as the film's two stars perform a romantic scene, the sound technician sticks his head out from his hiding place in a trunk in the corner of the stage to remind them to raise their voices—otherwise, he whispers to them, the innovative electro-acoustic recording device will not capture their “empty talk.” Worst of all, Character C, a former soldier now working as an extra, forgetting that they are only making a film, mobilizes all the extras to dash offstage and shout unscripted slogans: “China is not dead, China won't die. . . . Go to the front line!” The actors who play these extras, inspired by the spirit of resisting Japan, break through two “frames”—the frame of the cinematographer within the play and the frame of the peninsula-shaped stage without the play—and march into the audience. Their lingering outcries completely submerge the director's orders of “Cut! Cut!”

Extras immediately drew public attention thanks to its popular theme—a behind-the-scenes peek at the film industry—and because of its metatheatrical structural complexity.⁴ Tian Han cast an established film director, Yuan Muzhi,⁵ and a well-known actress, Hu Ping (胡萍 b. 1910), as well as unnamed amateur student actors to perform as “stars” and “extras” in the play. These “extras” were further assigned the roles of professional filmmakers, peasants, and veterans within the sound picture, or the “play”

臨時B 我也沒有吃午飯，祇吃了一個大餅。

劇務 好了，好了，公司裏吃一點

虧。喂，阿士！快去買十來個

大餅來給他們做點心。

女臨時A 這麼小孩子怎麼能吃大

餅？

劇務 不吃大餅吃什麼？難道叫公

司替你僱一個奶娘麼？

女臨時B 不，周先生，我也不要

吃大餅。

劇務 (哈哈笑) 啊，你也不要吃

大餅。好，那麼我請客。請你

們吃生煎饅頭，好不好？

女臨時C 周先生！我不愛吃生煎

饅頭。

劇務 那麼你愛吃什麼？

女臨時C (嬌聲) 我和你一樣愛

吃豆……腐。

劇務 咳，混蛋，混蛋，周先生從

來不愛吃豆腐的。

女臨時B 那麼朱先生吃什麼吃得這樣肥呢？

劇務 你猜。喂，阿士！來我給你。

臨時A與B (輕聲) 媽的，不是吃

我們臨時演員吃肥的嗎？

劇務 你替我扎饅頭大餅都買一些

來。(摸了一下女臨時C的頭

走開了。)

冬毛道遜 爲湖南旅

滬學校主 辦遊藝會

胡萍袁牧 臨時B 那麼和你自己一樣，早幾

年就看見你做臨時演員現在也

還是做臨時演員。

公演之臨 臨時C 我們的頭上真像有什麼很

重的石頭壓着似的，使你想要

伸也不伸起來，我也會掙扎過

多少次，總想找個機會浮上來

，每次都給人家打沉到水裏去

了。



Fig. 9. Publicity photo for *Extras*. Xiangsheng (湘聲 The Voice of Hunan) 1, no. 1 (1935): 67. Courtesy of the Shanghai Library.

within the play. In *Extras*, film stars, corrupted by sensual pursuits, fail to act out their prescribed roles of self-sacrifice in the war against Japan, while extras, exploited as cheap labor, unite with patriotic spirit and overturn the pessimistic mood by transforming a studio set and a *huaju* theatre into an effective platform for mass mobilization. The play's intent is to highlight the melodramatic contrast between hedonistic stardom and the forceful solidarity of the people. Strikingly, this moral division is marked by the spoken words—the *hua* of *huaju*—that the characters deliver on stage. The film stars speak too softly to be recorded, while the extras shout, “Go to the front line!” thereby blending the studio noise with the sound of war, invoking the roaring voice of China!

The prominence of sound in *Extras* should not be taken as simply a marker of the “ascendance of the acoustic dominant in Chinese film history” in the 1930s.⁶ Indeed, when we position this one-act play in the Shanghai soundscape, where “technologically mediated culture” such as cinema and radio were changing popular perceptions and consumption of sound, the performed “interruptions” of a sound film presented on the *huaju* stage demand that we ask more substantial questions: What did *hua* (speaking) mean in both the practices and the discourse of *huaju* in the 1930s during the emergence of an acoustically ravenous public inundated by the gramophone, sound film, and radio? How did *huaju* actors transform written vernacular Chinese (*baihua*) into vocal expressions capable of stimulating emotional exchanges between performers and audience? Specifically, how did *huaju* actors turn a perplexing enlightenment project into “real speech” capable of rousing the masses during the Second Sino-Japanese War?

If this first set of questions relates to the sound of *huaju*, a second set could be asked regarding the genre's techniques, or *shu* 術:⁸ How did such technological and political upheaval transform everyday theatre practices and give rise to a new generation of *huaju* actors and practitioners? How were the discursive goals and mundane practices of *huaju*'s institutionalization actualized when the established theatre infrastructure—that is, professional and amateur troupes, as well as the space and time designated for regular staging, screening, and broadcasting—crumbled? Finally, how did the goals of *juven*, “men of theatre,” change in the face of a national crisis?

This chapter turns primarily to a theatre academy, the National Drama School (Guoli xiju xuexiao, NDS, 1935–1949) to probe these concerns.⁹ NDS, Republican China's only national theatre academy, receiving a state endowment and annual subsidy, was first located in Nanjing as part of the Nationalist Propaganda and Education Ministries. After the capital was invaded by Japan in 1937, the faculty and students of NDS were forced to

join the war migration and traveled to Changsha and Chongqing before finally resettling in Jiang'an, a remote town in Sichuan, between 1938 and 1945. During this period, NDS facilitated the crucial transformation of veteran actors, student actors, and new professional teachers into *juren* in service to the nation. It also experimented with the staging and direction of *huaju* and completed the process of its institutionalization. Because of these varied but interrelated functions, NDS should be conceived as the center of a series of culturally concentric arenas of pedagogical, performative, and political activities.

While scholarship by Chang-tai Hong and Xiaobing Tang has closely read signature plays of the 1930s and 1940s that were staged as various forms of mobile theatres led by left-wing dramatists and filmmakers,¹⁰ no in-depth study discusses the acting aspect and how elocution itself took on political overtones. By focusing on acting training, I identify a new site—the student actors' bodies and voices—for analyzing the porous borders between tradition and modernity, amateur and professional, script and improvisation, and national and cosmopolitan identities. I first examine theoretical discussions regarding the *hua* and *shu* of *huaju* acting that were undertaken during the early 1930s under threat of growing Japanese encroachment. I then turn to the government's role in the founding of NDS and its forced resettlement in Jiang'an. What emerged from these textual debates and government intervention was a modern genre that prioritized performance over script. Next, I consider a cluster of previously unexamined materials taught at or published by NDS—acting curricula, teaching prompts, and script notes—to unveil the “backstage” where *juren* were cultivated. I argue that these pedagogical methods—which ranged from the performing conventions in Chinese operatic traditions, to staging strategies for mobile theatre and public arts, to actors' self-cultivation in the Stanislavski system—demonstrated NDS's commitment to constructive negotiation rather than polemic debates. Formed during a time of crisis and with clear government ties, NDS's overriding goal was to employ *huaju* to rally the masses in support of the war effort. Finally, by examining *Joy of Joining the Army* (*Congjun le*, 1939), a patriotic play performed in Jiang'an's Confucian Temple, which served as NDS's main theatre, this chapter peers into how backstage acting training shaped onstage performance and off-stage reception while also consolidating a “modern China.” In short, I seek to expand scholarly discussion on *huaju*'s institutionalization from the aesthetic, discursive, and political realms to the pedagogical, redirecting curiosity about *huaju*'s frontstage productions to the backstage, where plays were made, actors educated, and drama histories documented.

Understanding *Hua* (Speech) and *Shu* (Technique) in the 1930s

In the mid-1920s, when the term *huaju* was adopted to refer generally to modern Chinese theatre, *hua* was used to “emphasize the spoken words in reaction to *wenmingxi*’s insufficient attention to dramaturgy.”¹¹ The adoption and later canonization of *huaju* reflected the victory of script over scenarios, weighing a play’s literary content, represented by intellectual dramatists’ writings, over performance, embodied by actors’ onstage improvisations. When intellectual youth in the 1910s and 1920s had written and read *huaju* as “closet drama,” they were concerned with the refinement and composition of “spoken words” but not with how they were acted out. Later, however, when *huaju*’s popularity expanded in the 1930s, and it started drawing attention from urbanites, the emphasis of *hua*, for both dramatists and audience, shifted from literary quality to performative effects. Questions of how to speak, and how to act, now dominated *huaju* discussions.

One such debate, involving Lu Daizeng (廬達曾 n.d.), Hu Shi, and Yu Shangyuan, took place in the pages of *Independent Review* (*Duli Pinglun* 獨立評論). In 1932, just as New Culture Movement veterans were celebrating the successful promotion of *baihua*, or “plain speech,” Lu Daizeng interrogated the stagnant development of both *huaju* and opera reform, asserting that “not only is vernacular modern drama not successful, but the influence of old plays has expanded day by day.”¹² Hu Shi, confronting such challenges, insisted on discussing Chinese theatres, both *huaju* and “old opera” (*jiuxi* 舊戲), within the rhetorical framework of social Darwinism, in which past styles were destined for extinction. Condemning stage speech (*binbai* 賓白), music and dancing, acrobatic components, and even emotions as “coarse” and the “remnants of history,” Hu Shi asserted that if there were to be any reform of Chinese theatres, it would require the radical act of “abolishing singing” (*feichang* 廢唱).¹³

While Yu Shangyuan claimed to endorse Hu’s general views, his own contribution to the debate in fact shifted Hu’s primary criticism. For Yu, speaking and singing were not necessarily exclusive. Yu refers to the Qing dramatist Li Yu (李漁 1611–1680) to assert the “hierarchy” of expressional apparatuses, stating that “it is natural that a theatre must employ singing and dancing. When the dramatic emotions reach the state that the language and words can no longer describe and deliver, theatre must go abstract.”¹⁴ The key problem of an “old play,” in Yu’s argument, lies in its highly regulated forms that restrict both its expressional freedom and its approachability. In other words, the real issue is not singing or the sonic feature of

theatre. Rather, the specific techniques of articulating stage speech in old plays, as Li Yu emphasized, are what preserved the essence of their phonology and musicology. The singing component thus could and should serve as the instrumental “old bottle” to accommodate the wine of new theatre. After all, Yu argues, “Learning stage speech is first and foremost about rhythm and sonority.”¹⁵ Despite Yu’s apparent utilitarianism in appropriating Li Yu, he in fact broke down Hu Shi’s rigid binary between speech and singing by placing them under the broader category of theatrical sound.

Yu then discusses the use of *baihua* in theatre. He applauds the promising future of *baihua* but with one necessary premise: *baihua* was not only a textual means for reading and writing. Rather, its sonic nature also served as a site for the meeting of inheritance and reform. *Baihua*, in Yu’s view, should enjoy the privileges of both flexible syntax and “rhythmic and sonorous” (*jiezou kengqiang* 節奏鏗鏘) acoustic power for the sake of freely expressing characters’ internal emotions and invoking sympathy. Here Yu indirectly addresses the “alienation problem” of *baihua*, which, as Hongwei Thorn Chen has argued, emerged in 1920 when the vernacular form was adopted by the national government as the official language of instruction. Chen compares the advantages of cinema’s referential power, actualized by means of visual and acoustic features, over the popular lectures (*tongsu yanjiang* 通俗演講) used in mass education, observing that the *baihua* used by public speakers was “empty of both meaning and referent.”¹⁶ The *baihua* vernacular discourse was reinforced in formal educational settings largely by means of textbooks, classroom discipline, and examinations. When the same “liberating” words were enunciated by mass educational centers and other makeshift “classrooms” in which the pedagogical apparatus disappeared, the vernacular *baihua* turned into “empty talk,” “wasted speech,” and “plain speech”¹⁷ that its audience felt wary of embracing, let alone understanding. Yu shows a keen awareness that such “empty talk” would curtail *huaju* popularization as he elaborates on the affinity of *baihua*’s expressional power, sonic quality, and theatrical emotions. If *baihua* was not articulated on stage in a “rhythmic and sonorous” manner, Yu argued, its progressive message would not resonate with a wide audience.

Yu’s disagreement with Hu Shi and Lu Daizeng suggested that May Fourth veterans would miss the key means to develop Chinese theatres if they stranded themselves within the “traditional” versus “modern” polemic. The major obstruction facing *huaju* in the 1930s, in Yu’s diagnosis, came not from the threatening legacy of old operas. Rather, it stemmed from *huaju* itself, or more specifically, the lack of emphasis on rightly *speak-*

ing in the context of theatre. To be effective, the enunciation of *baihua* on *huaju* stages needed to take into account both the characters' and the spectators' psychology. Similarly, Tian Han's *Extras* critiqued the two protagonists' dialogue about their love as "empty": Facing a national crisis, the protagonists' obsessive sentiments possessed no substantial meaning for their audience; their unsatisfying elocution, further, rendered their talk too soft to be captured by the sound recorder within the play or to invoke the attention of the public. The *hua* in *huaju* then, resided more on its expressional power than on its borrowings of neologisms or syntax from Japanese and European languages.¹⁸ Yu Shangyuan and Tian Han asserted that an effective prescription to rejuvenate *huaju* should emphasize the centrality of *hua*—a play's dialogues, actors' voices, and theatrical sounds—as both performance and architectural constituents of the genre. The sonic impact of *hua*, substituting for the textual marker of *baihua*, started to define the media specificity of *huaju*.

Not Empty Talk: Techniques and Technologies for Voice

Despite the efforts of Tian and Yu, "empty talk" remained an inescapable feature of *huaju* stages. *Huaju* reviews published throughout the 1930s criticized "dull and flat dialogues" that failed to express characters' internal sentiments, evoke public sympathy, or address social or political concerns. Xu Lingxiao (徐凌霄 1888–1961), an active member of the "Cheng clique" associated with Cheng Yanqiu (程砚秋 1904–1958), blamed *huaju* actors' "unprofessionalism":

There are many scholars yet few actors (*xizi* 戲子). What I mean by "actor" does not refer to those who can perform onstage, but to those who commit to the onstage life. . . . Their acting arts and techniques are refined and mature, their motives and interests are concentrated. . . . Only such [actors] can be successful . . . [A] colleague once said to me, quite bluntly, "The performances made in your art academies do not satisfy the cravings as much as *wenmingxi*. The civilized drama actors are all in with all spirit, all energies and forces. They are the *xizi*. Your student actors seem not to be fully committed to it."¹⁹

Actors' determination and commitment alone might vitalize the sluggish spirit of *huaju* theatre and feed the public craving for good plays. To transform such zeal into something lasting, however, required established per-

formance principles. The “arts and techniques” of acting, particularly those related to onstage speech, were needed. Surprisingly, one of the first contributors to this effort came from the traditional stage.

Cheng Yanqiu, the youngest member of Republican China’s “four famous *dan* performers” (*sida mingdan* 四大名旦), sought to demystify acting by presenting the skill in concrete terms.²⁰ Such discussions were “technocratic in nature,” similar to what Andrew Jones discerns in his construction of the Republican music field. Jones, engaging the work of May Fourth musicians and critics, suggests that we understand the music of that era as a “technology” bound up with the colonial diffusion of Western music. May Fourth music reformers and educators viewed European techniques as “superior technologies for the organization and use of sound” that could solve the stagnation of Chinese music.²¹ In this regard, Cheng and other opera reformers shared a similar aspiration and critical discourse.²²

After coming back from his tour in Europe in 1932, Cheng strove to employ Western theatre theories to rationalize the Chinese opera tradition and set standards for theatre practices. Under Cheng’s revision, the secrets of voice production, singing, and stage speech were studied, categorized, and illuminated as physical acts, sensory experiences, and scientific ways of communication. Voluminous images, essays, and manifestos on this new trend, published in *Theatre Monthly* (*Juxue yuekan* 劇學月刊), testified to the determination and efforts of both Cheng Yanqiu and the Nationalist party-state’s patronage. Expectedly, such a technocratic approach was not circumscribed within traditional opera. In 1933, roughly a year after Yu Shangyuan’s soft rebuke of the views of Hu Shi and Lu Daizeng, Cheng advised Yu and other *huaju* dramatists to professionalize actors’ speaking and other performance components by embracing the theories and practices of both Peking opera and Western theatres. Though humbly referring to himself as a “layman” (*menwai han* 門外漢), the Peking opera star offered clear strategies for *huaju*’s professionalization.

Like Yu, Cheng emphasized the aesthetic features of actors’ voices and theatrical sound. One must, Cheng argued, transform “tactful and unrhythmic words” into a “steady and moving voice.”²³ Opera singers, he wrote, were already quite skilled in this regard, due to their possession of operating principles rooted in centuries-old rhyme books:

Opera singers are scrupulous regarding stage speech. [For example], we have the Yuan dynasty song-drama (*yuangu* 元曲), which strictly observed the *Rhymes of the Central Plain* (*Zhongyuan yinyun* 中原音韻), and *erhuang* (二簧), which followed the tones of Hubei and Anhui.

Studies on voice production, including the four Chinese tones (*ping*, *shang*, *qu*, *ru* 平上去入), the five positions in the mouth-cavity where words are articulated (*chun*, *chi*, *hou*, *ya*, *she* 唇齒喉牙舌), equal rhymes (*dengyun* 等韻), and collected rhymes (*jiyun* 集韻) already reached an exquisite and profound state in the Ming and Qing dynasties.²⁴

Huaju actors, bereft of such rich traditions, were at a disadvantage in terms of understanding, let alone mastering, their own bodily apparatus of sound-making. The “lack of vitality” that characterizes onstage speech, Cheng implies, is thus to be expected.²⁵ “Although the speaking component in *huaju* is not as strenuous as that in Kun opera and Peking opera,” Cheng noted, “appropriate training is still needed.”²⁶ Accordingly, Cheng directed *huaju* dramatists’ research and pedagogical attention first to the physiological structure of voice and then to the affinity between voice and psychology. Cheng’s initial suggestion to improve actors’ voices was to strengthen actors’ bodies:

For our opera singers, we have the tradition of voice exercises, or *liu sangzi* [溜嗓子, literally “strolling one’s larynx”]. In the morning, we wake up early, get out of town, find a spacious place, and practice voice production. Look at this. Isn’t it an exercise? . . . [For one to practice] speech on the *huaju* stage, one needs first to strengthen the sound-making apparatus: (1) oral cavity, (2) vocal tract [in larynx], (3) lungs, and, of course, the indispensable air. The successful completion of a sound results in the vocal cords’ vibration by the air. The vibration travels by means of lips, teeth, larynx, tongue, oral, and nasal cavity. All different pieces react upon the air vibration and release different sounds. The first and foremost exercise one needs to do, for strengthening the sound-making apparatus, is [therefore] to strengthen one’s lungs.²⁷

The sound production Cheng describes is easily observed in an organ or a lute, but it takes imagination to see such a “scientific” process in one’s own vocalizations. In acoustic terms, Cheng identifies the lungs as an energy source, the larynx as a sound source, and air vibration as the mechanism for amplifying and harmonizing different types of sound. Literally within the actors’ bodies, as Cheng illuminates, is a “sound-making apparatus” (*fayin jiguan* 發音機關)²⁸ that is “in the shape of a long and flexible cylinder, open at one end.”²⁹ Largely correlating with the shape of an upside-down gramophone, *huaju* actors’ bodily mechanism provided a new and acces-

sible embodiment of the widely circulated sonic imagery.³⁰ *Huaju*, accordingly, could claim for itself a unique position in the modern soundscape that was largely configured by technologically mediated culture.³¹ Actors' bodies become the minimum, yet most reliable, technological apparatus of theatre sound.

Cheng's discussion of the body became a metaphor for theatre. If action and facial expression is the skeleton of theatre, and the stage set is its skin, then actors' enunciation, Cheng asserts, is the *blood* of theatre, without which it would not become an independent art.³² Cheng further explains his prioritization of sound over gestures. "While one mute character might be able to explain the plot of a complicated murder sufficiently with gestures," Cheng supposes, "it will be difficult for the character to aptly address and express the [characters'] psychological issues with mere body language."³³ For Cheng, the technique of articulating dialogues with the voice most suitable for each character is the key to overcoming audiences' agitation and moving their sentiments.

Cheng's text requires a careful reading. Essentially, his treatise on *hua* in *huaju* divides language's referential functions into the narrative and the substantial—respectively, plot and inner voices. The narrative function of language may easily be replaced by another referential system, but the internal voices cannot live without the sonic feature of language. Simply, one may "tell" a story without using any voice, sound, or language. Yet, with that method alone, one cannot reach human internality: the psyche and emotions, identified as the core of characterization in both modern fiction and drama since the late nineteenth century. Cheng clearly embraced such tenets of literary modernity and entrusted the possibilities of self-expression to actors' capability to "sound out" and the audience's willingness to "listen in." The audience, accordingly, should not just ask whose voices are inscribed in the play, but how those voices are inscribed.³⁴

Yu Shangyuan also identified performers' mastery of sounding out characters' sentiments and psychologies as key for *huaju*'s development. Between 1939 and 1942, Yu published several essays titled "Abstracts" (Tiyao 提要) to discuss the technologies and arts of various components of *huaju* theatre, including directorship, stage design, and dramaturgy, in a systematic way. Unlike other essays of this series that offered predominately empirical guidance,³⁵ Yu's 1941 "Abstract of Performance" (Biaoyan tiyao 表演提要) presented a combination of theoretical tenets alongside the strategic appropriation and creation of technical vocabulary for performance.³⁶ Although Yu wrote this essay while he was president of NDS, the themes it explores build on debates from the late 1920s and early 1930s. In this work,

Yu sought to construct the genre discourse or media specificity of *huaju*, presenting *hua* as a product of actors internalizing the phenomenal world and then externalizing their senses and sentiments for their audience. The delivery of *hua* is no longer a playwright's subjective outpouring but an interactive communication between characters and audience.

Like Cheng Yanqiu, Yu realized that only the performers' bodily sound-making apparatus would ensure the sonic qualities of a theatre. Yet maneuvering this apparatus is unpredictable: A minor physical discomfort—a scorched tongue or a dry mouth—may drastically change the voice's expected timbre, and this will lead to mistakes in performers' postures, movements, and actions.³⁷ Further, when sound is made and delivered via the medium of air, any unsatisfactory results cannot be withdrawn. Unlike drama scripts, musical notation, or brushstrokes, which may always be subject to revision, the delivery of onstage dialogue is produced only once, by performers' vocal skills. Such capabilities, Yu reveals in his discussion, are technologies that one may understand and manipulate.

Yu's essay explicates the technologies of breathing and speaking to his fellow *juven* in ways that responded to long-standing debates over the production of sound and voice. In the early 1930s, when the radical May Fourth legacy still largely shaped the modernization of technologically mediated cultures, it had been the norm to rebuke traditional theorizations of vocal production and sound-making. For instance, a certain Shuyun (曙雲 n.d.), writing in the journal *Drama* (Xi 戲) in 1933, argued the need to make sense of theatrical sound-making in scientific terms:

In the era of flourishing science, we should apply the scientific method to analyze and research all issues. Voice production, unlike what people once imagined, is not something mysteriously gifted. . . . Nor should we describe it in puzzling phrases, such as “use the spirit to control energy” (*yi shen yu qi* 以神馭氣) or “voice produced by the energy center” (*fayin dantian* 發音丹田) in the most advanced textbook for performers.³⁸

In contrast to Shuyun, Yu identified points of compatibility rather than confrontation between modern science and “puzzling” Chinese phrases. He created terms for sounding *huaju* that may have appeared odd to May Fourth radicals but nonetheless hinted at something tangible. For example, breathing requires the cooperative movements of the physiological and material foundations of voice and sound with “mysterious” energy (*qi* 氣):

Theatrical voice production is significantly different from everyday speech patterns. As some of the audience might sit far away from the stage, the sound and speech delivery may appear to be unnatural, and the theatrical illusion would likely be interrupted and crumble, were the performers not to master vocal skills, [or more specifically,] were the performers not to stretch and contract [their voices and sound-making apparatus] freely. Thus, the performers' voice production cannot rely only on lungs. Instead, performers must deploy the vital energy of the cavity (*zhongqi* 中氣) that is originated from the energy center (*dantian* 丹田). The *qi* then passes through the throat, staying in the oral cavity, where it can be further adjusted. Otherwise, if the initial capital for breathing, that is, the volume and potentiality of breathing, is already insufficient, how can performers aspire to respond to different onstage scenarios?³⁹

Only once voice is produced and controlled well, Yu argued, could performers turn their attention to understanding and delivering language.

Language, for performers, is not limited to words written in scripts that merely document dialogues. Rather, Yu urges all performers to perceive language in its four aspects: sound without words (*wuzi zhi sheng* 無字之聲), words without sound (*wusheng zhi zi* 無聲之字), sound with sight (*yousheng youse* 有聲有色), and sight without sound (*youse wusheng* 有色無聲).⁴⁰ The first two aspects stimulate and regulate performers' improvisation. Some words, though not clearly written in the script, should be articulated onstage for the purpose of "completing and polishing [sketchy] plots." Most examples of "sound without words," as Yu suggests, are onomatopoeia that make characters' stage presence more dynamic but will not divert significantly from the play's structure or delay the unfolding of dramatic conflict. Compared to the first aspect, the improvisation of silence, or the delivery of "words without sound," demands closer and deeper understanding of the play. Performers should first identify the places hidden in the script where characters' monologues and dialogues are exhausted but their inner emotions still long to spill out. In such places, a poignant pause is required. While it is easy to understand the principle of "silence is at times more powerful than sound," it is difficult to master the practical skills to find the right place and to calculate the right amount of time to pause. Yu provides a unique analogy for improvising pauses: "One takes out a knife to cut the water, but the water does not stop running" (*chou dao duan shui, shui mobu fu liu* 抽刀斷水, 水莫不復流).⁴¹

What makes Yu's 1941 essay most relevant for our discussion is his promotion of the final two aspects where sound and sight—the sensuality of hearing and seeing, and how the theatre interacts with its audience—are presented in the context of *huaju's* development and the emergence of sound pictures. We see in this coupling further evidence of *huaju's* recognized position within China's modern media field. The Chinese word *shengse* (声色, literally “sound and sight”), which refers to objects perceived by the five senses and sensual pleasure, often carries connotations of distraction or even danger in poetic and Confucian moral traditions. The Qing poet Shen Deqian (潘德潛 1673–1769) opposed *shengse* to *xingqing* (性情 nature and feeling). Shen equated *shengse* with the superficial culture promoted by Southern dynasty poets of the fifth century, and he worried that it had “eclipsed” the genuine expression of *xingqing* coming from “within.”⁴² When Yu appropriated this culturally loaded term, he accepted its ties to a culture of superficiality, but he dismissed Shen's dichotomy of *shengse* and *xingqing*, seeing the terms instead as paired. To Yu, it is the surface of theatrical reality, embodied by sound and sight, that entails effective communication between the *huaju* audience and the “nature and feeling” of characters. “What I mean by *se* (sight) refers to what one's eyes can see. It is also the ‘mood’ in gauging one's words and watching one's disposition (*chayan guanse* 察言觀色),” Yu explains.⁴³ He continues to opine that the melding of an actor's voice with expression and action provides an organic performance, and that this pursuit of authenticity and naturalness has specifically high stakes for *huaju* because its “medium specificity” lies in its illusionist stage atmosphere that relies on body and voice together to express emotion. “Sound with sight” thus constitutes a defining quality of *huaju* that avoids the problem of mechanical storytelling in folk performing arts and, perhaps more importantly, the problematic integration of mechanically reproduced sound and image on-screen that arose when sound pictures were introduced to Shanghai.

Yu's designation of the *huaju* theatre as the dominant venue for *shengse* echoed the opinions of earlier film critics. In December 1928, a special issue of *Film Monthly* (*Dianying yuebao*) was devoted to the impact of sound pictures. While three out of five essays published in this special issue “celebrate the primacy of the reproduced human voice on-screen and the integration of image and sound,”⁴⁴ it is worth noting that the authors' excitement was largely for the technology itself but not the application of such technology to pictures in China. Included among the mixed reception that greeted the arrival of “film with voice” (*yousheng yingpian* 有聲影片)⁴⁵—

curiosity, admiration, and possibly fear for the uncertain future of silent film—was reservation for the mechanically reproduced human voice on-screen and the possibility of integrating image and sound.

Zhou Jianyun (周劍云 1893–1967), one of the contributors to the volume, explicitly pointed out the disadvantages of film for synchronizing authentic voice/sound and image/sight when compared to *huaju*. Zhou recalls his early encounters with technologically enhanced entertainment:

It was at age nine when I came to bustling Shanghai that I was first exposed to material civilization. I was most impressed by two items: the gramophone and the shadow play. . . . In my childish appreciation . . . I had a minor regret, realizing that the gramophone has sound but no shadows, whereas the shadow play only has shadow but not sound. One day, if people can shoot a film and at the same time record the sound, and display the film while turning on the gramophone, don't we have both sound and sight? Don't we have visual and sonic entertainment?⁴⁶

It was likely this childhood memory that propelled Zhou to organize amateur Peking opera performances, found new play societies, and eventually run film studios in the 1920s and 1930s. However, Zhou's regret lingered, as his experience enhanced his aesthetic expectations of different media, which we might understand as the “medium specificity” of each:

Worldwide there are three major types of dramas. Song-dramas prioritize songs and dances. *Huaju* equally stress dialogues and expressions. Shadow plays purely emphasize expressions and actions. These three types of plays, with distinctly different natures, should stay within their respective territories and respect mutual nonaggression (*hubu qinfan* 互不侵犯). We should let audiences worldwide approach, appreciate, choose, and consume the medium based on its nature and their preferences. It is certainly not necessary to destroy the borders [of each medium]. If one forces these media to blend into one, it will display unavoidable fissures, and it will render all media to lose their original spirit and color.⁴⁷

Zhou Jianyun aspired to defend the “medium specificities” of song-dramas, *huaju*, and shadow plays, even as he worked across media. Song-dramas and *huaju*, in his conception, ought to remain on stages, while movies obviously belonged in cinemas. Zhou's distinction was predicated upon the effects of

technology on the human voice, which was inevitably distorted by recording: “Even if one day sound technology makes great progress, and there is no static noise [in sound film], the [difference between the] human voice and machine voice will still be noticeable.”⁴⁸ Zhou’s reservations about sound pictures were not assuaged by the films shown at a demonstration presentation by one Dr. Roberson in November 1926, though they did impress him with “the power of electricity.” Compared to the clarity of diegetic sound effects, the mechanically reproduced voices remained indistinct: “Among the sounds I’ve heard, the barking of dogs and [mooring of] cows are most realistic. As for the actresses’ singing and the speakers’ speech, they all remained blurry.”⁴⁹ Moreover, Zhou, perhaps anxious about making silent films in the advent of sound pictures, expressed worry that the integration of image with “impure, not entirely authentic sound” would dilute “the delicate, nuanced, silent, and evocative spirit” of film.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, Zhou implicitly reserved for *huaju* theatre the right to an integration of image and pure, authentic sound. Thus, what Yu Shangyuan in his 1941 essay defined as the sonic feature of *huaju*—sound with sight—had been well established in discussions of visual and sonic features of film and theatre.

Following the integration of sound in Chinese cinema, critical attention shifted from technology to cinematic effects, as shown by a 1930 special issue in *Art Monthly* (*Yishu Yuekan* 藝術月刊). The sound picture’s potential threat to silent film now promised “the enrichment of silent film aesthetics rather than its annihilation.”⁵¹ Contemporary film critics, as Weihong Bao argues, distanced themselves from an obsession with synchronization and instead became interested in the contrapuntal use of sound. For these critics, especially those who embraced the aesthetic and political potential of montage as represented by Soviet films, it was the interplay between sound and image that enriched the principles of cinematic art in a way very different from the Hollywood “talkie.”

This discursive turn in cinema found, intriguingly, a similar tone in Yu Shangyuan’s theory of the *hua* discourse in *huaju* theatre. “Sight without sound” was his fourth and final tenet for actors’ understanding of *huaju* language and performance. Being “without sound,” he wrote, did not mean “asking actors to stay silent.”⁵² Rather, he explains, *huaju* can direct its audience toward actions or facial expressions through the strategic use of silence. The organic synchronization of sound and sight, in Yu’s formulation, was *huaju*’s advantage over the mechanical synchronization in film or other media, as actors could creatively employ their own voice (sound) and body (image). *Huaju*, lacking cinematic techniques, thus seemed to be more flexible, as actors could synchronize, divide, and even deliberately

mismatch their dialogue, expressions, and actions to provide the audience with all possible interplays of sound and sight. Only then might the natural “flow or continuity” (*mianyan* 綿延) of plot and emotion be guaranteed. Only then would *hua* move beyond the realm of “empty talk.”

Acting in a Time of Crisis

The early 1930s had witnessed multiple attempts to understand and develop *huaju*'s sonic features, enriching the connotations and the discourse of *hua* in the process. However, by the mid-1930s, simply promoting a technocratic approach to *huaju* was not enough. In February 1935 Hong Shen published *Techniques of Acting for Film and Theatre* (*Dianying xiju biao'yan shu*), a theoretical work in which he expanded substantially on essays that had previously been serialized in *Film Monthly* in 1928. Here Hong synthesized three disparate sources into one “scientific” system for training actors: the experiences garnered from his sojourn in Boston, especially at the Curry School of Expression; his exposure to behavioral psychology from both America and China; and the knowledge of theatrical speech accumulated from his passion for Peking opera and Kun opera.⁵³ Hong's intellectual debt to these sources is explicit in his borrowed and translated terminology, diagrams, and charts instructing actors how to understand their enunciating organs, muscular movements, gestures, and psychological and cognitive learning processes.

Acting Techniques' unprecedented depth and thoroughness ought to have evoked interest and discussions among Hong's cosmopolitan peers. His radical “disavowal” of old drama resonated with the core of May Fourth iconoclasm. Hong's combination of scientific theories, instructional manuals, and visual illustrations showed the potential of teaching the craft of acting and cultivating a new generation of actors. At the same time, in 1935, political and public expectations for modern theatre had begun to shift. In fact, in December 1934, the month *Extras* made its debut, Tian Han wrote a preface for *Acting Techniques* in which he bluntly expressed his concern for the book's poor timing. Tian praised Hong's theory and practice of acting, placing it on a par with the established Peking opera actor Zhou Xinfang (周信芳 1895–1975):

In the past, around 1927, I often ran to the backstages of Shanghai theatres with friends who enjoyed old plays, including several Japanese amateur dramatists who were fellows affiliated to the Shina Play Association (Zhina ju yanjiu hui 支那劇研究會). Sitting on the costume

trunk while observing the operatic performers' process of masking, we exchanged opinions regarding Chinese theatre. . . . According to a certain Mr. Ding, "Although many operatic performers in both North and South can sing well, the one who understands *acting* [English in original] most thoroughly is Zhou Xinfang" . . . [O]ur Hong Shen is the one who most understands the "techniques of acting" of new drama in both theoretical and practical senses.⁵⁴

Had *Acting Techniques* been published "in the past," Hong Shen would likely have been invited to take part in such backstage discussions with Tian Han and the Japanese dramatists he had once known. However, following Japan's bombing of Shanghai in 1932 and the proclamation of the Empire of Manchuria in 1934, such casual exchanges on the acting craft were unlikely. Tian implied that Hong's strictly technical approach to *huaju* did not meet the moment during a period of national crisis.

Specifically, Tian called upon Hong to redirect the techniques of acting from theatres to the battlefield, "leading youths to participate in the righteous war against Japan":

All acting should observe this content [China resisting Japan's invasion]. People often refer to Mr. Hong as the expert of the techniques of acting. Mr. Hong could figure out several specific methods to deliver a gesture on stage. However, the essence of acting is not to list myriad ways, but to appropriately decide the only way to act under a certain situation. . . . Now, in the scenario between China and imperialist Japan, the excellent theatre artists could only choose one method—wage a war!⁵⁵

By articulating his definition of the highest form of acting in the political climate of the Japanese invasion, Tian invited Hong to join him to *act* in the war, linking the intermediality of performance (i.e., the intersection of traditional operatic theatres, new drama, and film) with political activism.⁵⁶

It was in *Extras* where Tian Han dramatized his theoretical vision on *acting* during a time of national crisis. The three theatrical "interruptions" of that play carried over into contemporary debates in which Tian identified the "essence" of acting to be mass mobilization but not technical improvements. The unsatisfactory vocal delivery by the first extra and the two film stars suggested that their problematic acting would not be fixed either by implementing a director-centric rehearsal system or by employing advanced sound-recording technologies. The solution for mak-

ing a sound picture within *Extras* and, Tian implied, for making *huaju* theatres in China in the mid-1930s lay in the emergence of a new concept and practice of acting. Character C, the former soldier turned extra, embodied Tian Han's ideal. Though just as inexperienced as the first extra, Character C was imbued with patriotic fervor. When facing the national crisis, he chose not to act according to the script or what the director ordered but to improvise political agitation in order to motivate the masses to contribute to the resistance effort. *Extras* ends with the triumph of the masses' collective action over the director's failed attempt at restoring a technique-based order of filmmaking and acting. Tian Han, thus, reemphasizes the critique he raised to Hong Shen in his preface.

The differences between Hong's and Tian's theorizations reflected a new round of disavowal and realignment in the institutionalization of *huaju*. Hong's *Acting Techniques* marked a conscious departure from the fashion of improvisation on *wenmingxi* stages to place acting into an interdisciplinary framework grounded on behaviorist psychology and the acting system of the Curry School of Expression. Tian, in contrast, called for acting that would tear down not only the "fourth wall" but all theatre walls, bringing new theatrical experiences to diverse communities and rousing patriotic sentiments among them. Essentially, their views rested on a pair of opposing demands for *huaju* acting, namely, the need for technical discipline of an actor's body and voice and the aspiration to *act* for the ultimate liberation of the body and the nation. NDS would draw from both these poles while giving birth to a new generation of *juven*.

Made in Academy: Institutionalizing *Hua* at the National Drama School

NDS had an auspicious beginning. On October 18, 1935, Yu Shangyuan had recently returned from a trip to the Soviet Union and Western Europe, where he had served as the associate chair of Mei Lanfang's cultural delegation. Now he delivered a presidential speech at the opening ceremony of NDS in Nanjing's Qu Yuan Memorial Temple.⁵⁷ Yu promised NDS's sixty new students, carefully selected from 567 candidates from Nanjing, Shanghai, Beijing, Wuchang, and elsewhere,⁵⁸ that he would "make every one of you China's next Mei Lanfang," and he enjoined both faculty and students to diligently "research modern dramatic art, train practical theatre talents, and assist the social education."⁵⁹ Yu's proclamation not only identified a Peking opera star as a model for *huaju* practitioners but also reaffirmed *huaju*'s role as an "enlightening" venture. The *juven* Yu hoped to produce

need not reject the past as “feudal.” Rather, they could selectively employ tradition in pursuing the twinned “modern” goals of theatre development and state formation.

That NDS was able to operate at all, let alone with government support, was quite remarkable. While China was in the thick of a national crisis, developing an infrastructure for *huaju*, which for most Nationalist policy-makers meant nothing more than entertainment, was deemed by officials to be a “less urgent task.”⁶⁰ Indeed, the minority of government officials who did recognize *huaju*'s political power were more likely to view the genre as a subversive threat than as a constructive tool. One of the first actions the Nationalist government took after purging itself of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1927 was to shut down the theatre department of the National Beijing Art Academy (Guoli Beijing yishu zhuanmen xuexiao), which was then the flagship program of *huaju*, because the government suspected its connection with Communists.⁶¹ Some institutions and networks with links to *huaju*, such as the Academy of Modern Arts (Xiandai xueyi jiangxi suo), were also forced to shut down because of their loose ties with left-wing culture and the CCP. Since that time, *huaju*, simultaneously deemed as politically irrelevant to nation-building and too politically dangerous for the Nationalists, had remained conspicuously absent from the government's cultural policies.

In the face of that precedent, Zhang Daofan (張道藩 1897–1968), a major architect of the Nationalists' propaganda and education programs, initiated a petition asking that the state patronize a new National Drama School in Nanjing. In his 1935 proposal, Zhang explained the rationale for positioning *huaju* within the apparatus of nation-building at a time when China was facing foreign invasion, particularly crediting *huaju*'s accessibility to all Chinese people due to its linguistic, performative, and theatrical advantages. Zhang believed that *huaju* theatre, if “deployed appropriately,” could generate a powerful response while propagating Nationalist Party ideology among the masses. In fact, Zhang ranked *huaju* first in terms of cultivating vigilant and patriotic citizens, higher than explicit textual propaganda and other cultural undertakings. Written propaganda's burden of literacy would be eased by theatre's orality. *Huaju*'s transformative power was largely attributed to the genre's combination of realistic dialogue, acting, and staging. Peking opera, Zhang implied, while being appreciated as a pure and refined theatrical art, could impart far less influence on commoners' lives since the arias were “either too elegant to understand or too vulgar to bear.”⁶² Moreover, Peking opera's “unrealistic” performances made it difficult to understand new stories, let alone the goal of mass enlightenment.

In contrast, *huaju*'s usage of the "national language" (*guoyu* 國語),⁶³ with local dialects if needed, promised a clear correspondence between everyday reality and staged theatricality. This meant that staged *huaju* could not only be understood by a mass audience but imitated. The idea of founding a drama school to spread patriotic ideas and professionalize *huaju* theatre was therefore both tantalizing and feasible. Zhang made clear that he envisioned NDS would cultivate gifted students who would become the writers, directors, actors, and stage technicians of the future; stage public performances and establish the foundation of a modern drama movement in order to assist nation-building; and, finally, implement the institutionalization of modern theatre.

Ironically, the hope Zhang placed in NDS foreshadowed the participatory nature of China's Communist Revolution. As Jie Li keenly argues, 1949 was "a participatory mass media revolution, whereby the party reached the masses *with* media and turned the masses *into* media."⁶⁴ Zhang intended NDS to be a drama network that linked together established dramatists, student actors, and mass audiences. If *huaju* enabled spectators to mimic the languages and actions of patriotic characters who actively took part in the coming War of Resistance, then NDS, in Zhang's rationale, would be the catalyst that fermented contagious nationalism. At the time of Zhang's writing, the Nationalist party-state had a firm hold on urban media, with traditional operas, printing presses, radio stations, and films under its control. It was also committed to expanding this media infrastructure to the countryside. However, the Japanese invasion disrupted the material conditions needed to consolidate these forms of media: Radios and films demanded stable electricity, while the printing press and Peking opera needed sufficient time to improve their practitioners' literacy or proficiency. In comparison, the minimal technology that *huaju* required remained easy to access, no matter the circumstances: after all, voice and body are "technologies" that everyone possessed. *Huaju* was indeed the ideal mass media to turn the masses into media!

Zhang's proposal gained thirteen significant endorsements, including that of Chen Lifu (陳立夫 1900–2001), who directed the Confidential Section of the National Military Council in the 1920s and would soon be promoted to the position of minister of education in 1938, and Luo Jialun (羅家倫 1897–1969), the most prominent May Fourth veteran and *New Tide* (*Xinchao* 新潮) member of the Nationalist Party who served as president of the National Central University (Guoli zhongyang daxue 國立中央大學). Zhang won government permission to launch NDS in July 1935, with an ini-

tial founding grant of thirty thousand yuan plus a thirty-six-hundred-yuan monthly subsidy. This amount was far from sufficient, but it granted NDS an air of official legitimacy without tying it directly to the Nationalist state.

During its short time in Nanjing, NDS regularly staged both student productions and public performances in Zhongzheng Hall, and it drew upon renowned dramatists with various backgrounds to offer interdisciplinary classes on literature, citizenship, drama history and theory, acting, scripting, technical design, directing, and so on.⁶⁵ However, as China drifted ever closer to war, Yu Shangyuan's promise to produce cultural icons was replaced by the more urgent need to train practitioners who could exert the social-educational function of *huaju*, linking theatre with China's impending national crisis. The *jueren* that NDS would cultivate would not be celebrities, but cultural soldiers. When full-scale fighting broke out in 1937, NDS's faculty and students joined other war refugees in migrating to the hinterland. NDS lived briefly as an itinerant troupe in five boats traveling down to Changsha and then to Chongqing before it finally settled in Jiang'an, Sichuan, a small rural town tucked away from the wartime capital. Jiang'an, in Yu Shangyuan's view, possessed a pleasing "archaic style" (*gufeng* 古風).

Upon arrival, the institution first had to find an appropriate space to accommodate teaching, stage public performances, and provide shelter for the dramatists, student actors, and theatre personnel. The Jiang'an local government and gentry families granted NDS permission to use their Confucian Temple, which was made to serve different functions—dormitory, classrooms, library, and theatre. According to Yu, such an unusual stage design lent vitality to performances by forcing them to make creative use of space. More importantly, the "allegorical space" of a Confucian Temple made the building significant. Yu recalled the effect that this new residence played upon the school:

When first migrating to Jiang'an, we used the Confucian Temple as our school building. Every day, faculty and students ascended the steps and entered the sage's hall and temple. The sound of reading never stopped. As for our Ultimate Sage and First Teacher [Confucius], we especially felt [we might] cause certain offense. Moreover, faculty and students studied next to scholars of the past, looking up to the high mountains, and increasingly strove with a more determined effort to study. Based upon all these factors, [we] felt it necessary to perform the ritual to "Praise the Temple" (*songmiao* 頌廟). Thus, on

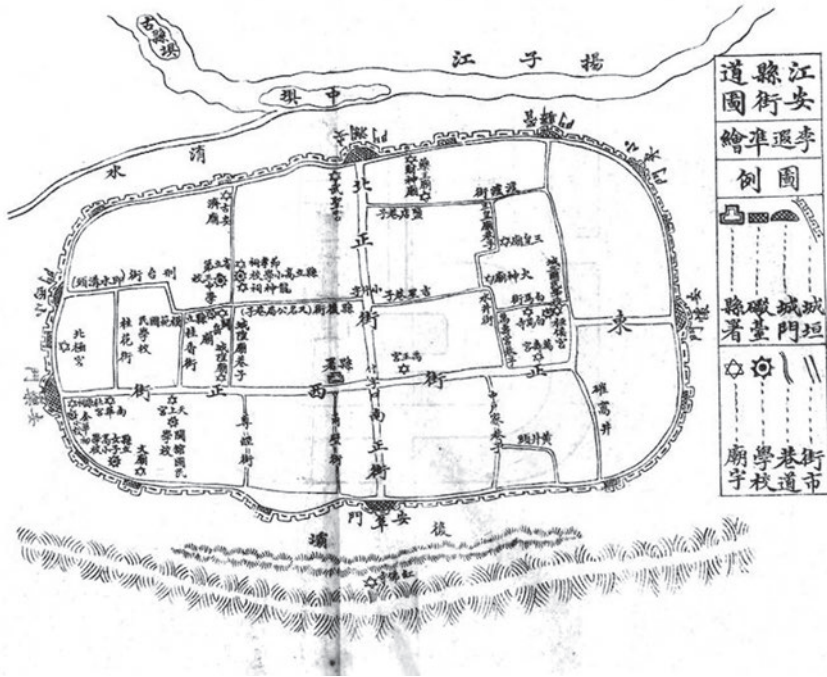


Fig. 10. Map of Jiang'an with the Confucian Temple at the left corner. *Jiang'an xianzhi* (江安縣志 Gazetteer of Jiang'an County) 1 (1923). Courtesy of the National Library of China.

May 5 [1939], [I] led all the faculty and students in performing the ceremony of worshipping Confucius. Officials from all disciplines, senior gentry men, and established scholars all participated.⁶⁶

Since the locals invested the temple with a scholarly air, NDS gained legitimacy when performing its social-education functions. By recognizing traditional symbols of authority, NDS and the local political power formed a harmonious relationship, as “inseparable as water and milk” (*shuiru jiaorong* 水乳交融).

Between 1938 and 1945, NDS staged over 144 plays, mostly in Jiang'an's Confucian Temple, but also on streets and in teahouses, as well as in Chongqing's Cathay (Guotai 國泰) Theatre. NDS played an active role holding performances in “creatively formed public spaces” and thus further intensified “the theatricalization of public life.”⁶⁷ Despite suffering from geographic isolation and economic hazards due to the war, NDS fostered a pedagogical, performative, and institutional space in which established

dramatists and student actors mingled, theatrics and realities were conflated, and the local community and the nation-state consolidated. Zhang Daofan's multilayered vision for a national theatre was actualized not in a modern playhouse, but in a Confucian temple.

Developing a Curriculum

NDS sought to transform student actors into *juven* capable of resonating with a mass audience. The step-by-step, "scientific" curriculum that NDS employed drew not only upon traditional opera practices but also the latest in Western theatre techniques. The chief designers of the curriculum, Jin Yunzhi (金韻芝 b. 1912) and Wan Jiabao (萬家寶, aka Cao Yu 曹禺, 1910–1996), prioritized developing actors' understandings of human kinetics and voice production.⁶⁸ Their methods largely responded to the introduction of the Stanislavski system in the late 1930s through its English translation.

Scholarship has argued that the methods of Konstantin Stanislavski (1863–1938) predominantly constituted theory, not practice, in Republican China.⁶⁹ However, Jin and Wan's curriculum suggests otherwise. As Jin clearly noted in her introduction of the system:

We do not need to accept [Stanislavski's system] completely. Fundamentally, Stanislavski's system grew out of what he learned from [performance theories] in France and Germany, his own research on performing arts, and long-term experiments. Now, Stanislavski is dead. We should mourn his passing on the one hand but, on the other, aspire to build up China's [realistic] acting system.⁷⁰

Stanislavski believed if an actor's body, voice, imagination, and attention were well trained, the actor would easily control their aspiration, just as an engineer can deploy the wind and the air and transform them into energies. Jin Yunzhi and Wan Jiabao wholeheartedly embraced Stanislavski's analysis of the connection between abstract inspiration (*linggan* 靈感) and actors' specific capabilities to "rule" (*zhipai* 支配) their vocal inflections.

The NDS curriculum was divided into five phases. It required students to complete twelve class hours per week in acting, with the remaining hours dedicated to world and Chinese literatures, history, psychology, and so on.⁷¹ In the acting classes, students from phase 1 to phase 4 were expected to do voice-production exercises (*shengyin xunlian* 聲音訓練) and five-senses exercises (*wujue xunlian* 五覺訓練) for two hours each per week, as well as daily morning voice exercises, which were similar to what Cheng Yanqiu

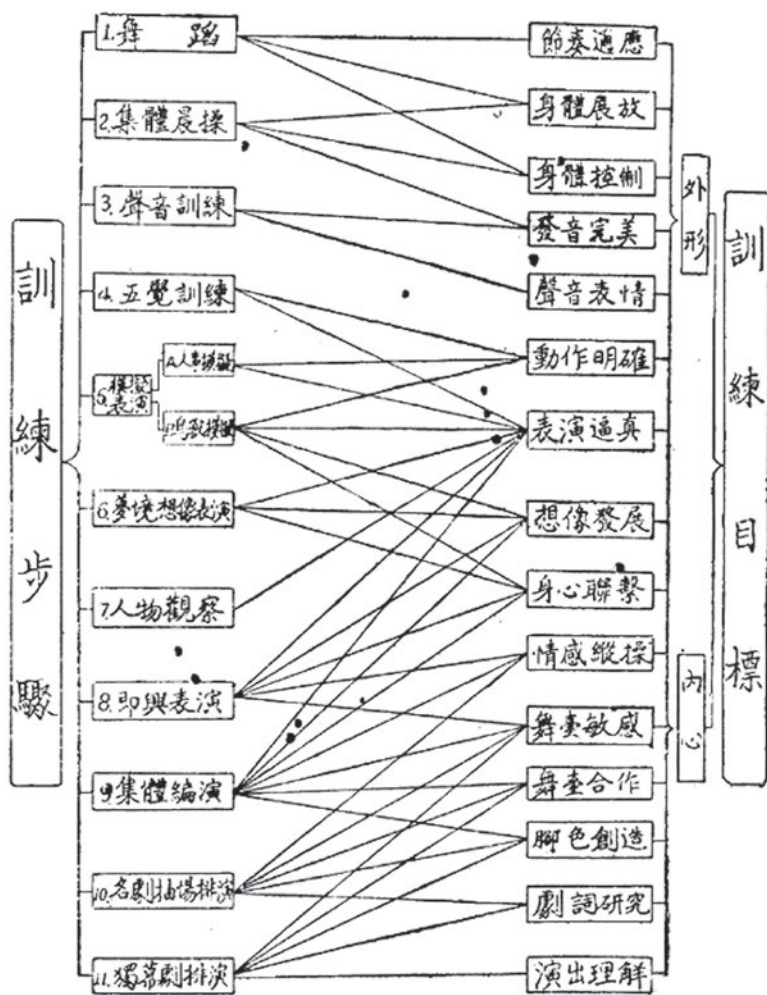


Fig. 11. Relationship of the NDS curriculum to actor training objectives. Jin Yunzhi, "Shitannisilafusiji de yanyuan xunlian fangfa" (斯坦尼斯拉夫斯基的演員訓練方法 Stanislavski's System of Training Actors), in *Biaoyan yishu lunwen ji* (表演藝術論文集 Collection of Essays on Performing Arts) (Nanjing: Zhongzheng shuju, 1946), 95. Courtesy of the National Library of China.

referred to in 1933 as operatic voice exercises, or *liu sangzi*. Those in the first two phases also practiced dancing and collective gymnastics two hours per week. Further, students in the first phase were not allowed to be involved in any play rehearsals but could only focus on developing isolated performance techniques.⁷² Building on Stanislavski, Jin and Wan developed their own acting system, correlating external (*waixing* 外形) and internal (*neixin* 內心) goals with rigorous physical training.

The process of acting, under Jin and Wan's instruction, has a rigid order that is to be carefully followed. In the left column of the curriculum, the chart lists eleven training steps, each of which corresponds to multiple pedagogical goals listed in the right column. The first four steps give students the opportunity to practice "external" technical tools before coordinating them as a whole: dance (step 1) ensures that an actor adjusts to rhythm; collective gymnastics (step 2) unfurls and controls an actor's body; voice-production exercise (step 3) sharpens an actor's elocution skills; and five-senses exercises (step 4) facilitate accurate movements that are "approaching reality" (*bizhen*). Once external technologies are mastered, students enter the phase of mediation, adjusting their corporeal bodies to ever-changing realities via mime, imagination, and observation. Mime (step 5), which includes the imitation of humans and animals, allows practitioners to acquire more proficiency in movement and acting, while mimicking animals contributes to developing the imagination. When "objects" (*shiwu* 實物) are removed entirely, acting out a dream scene via pure imagination (step 6) consolidates and intensifies those effects. A student actor completes the stage of mediation by carefully observing characters in plays and people in real life (step 7). By doing so, the goal of "approaching reality" is elaborated by realistic characterization. Only after completing the first seven steps may one take on roles, work on difficult texts, and, ultimately, reach the "internal." Improvisation (step 8), listed as the "first real acting" (*diyi ci zhende biao'yan* 第一次真的表演), has two assigned goals: to manipulate emotions and to develop certain stage sensibilities. The "hierarchy" of performance climbs higher when a student actor is to participate in collective composition and rehearsal (step 9). In addition to developing the goals from steps 7 to 8, step 9 aims to transform a student actor into an integral part of the theatrical world by emphasizing two forms of cooperation: with other actors, crew, and the stage; and between actors and characters. Next, student actors are allowed to rehearse selected scenes (step 10) and stage one-act plays (step 11). Here they are asked to research the dialogues and speeches in the play and reflect upon their own rehearsal experiences. They have now become *juven*—men of theatre.

Table 3. Lecture Courses for the Fifth Class of NDS. Jin Yunzhi, “Shitannisilafusiji de yanyuan xunlian fangfa” (史坦尼斯拉夫斯基的演員訓練方法 Stanislavski’s System of Training Actors), in *Biaoyan yishu lunwen ji* (表演藝術論文集 Collection of Essays on Performing Arts) (Nanjing: Zhongzheng shuju, 1946), 98

“Our Guiding Principles and Training Methods for Acting” (Benxiao biaoyan jiben xunlian de fangzhen ji fangfa 本校表演基本訓練的方針及方法)	By Jin Yunzhi and Wan Jiabao
“On the Art of Actors” (Lun yanyuan de yishu 論演員的藝術)	
“On Unfolding and Controlling Emotions” (Lun zongcao 論縱操)	
“On the Fluctuation and Shifting of Emotion” (Lun qingxu de tandong ji zhuanhuan 論情緒的彈動及轉換)	
“The Disciplines of Actors” (Yanyuan de jietiao 演員的戒條)	
“Several Dozen Items of Common Stage Knowledge” (Wutai changshi shushi ze 舞台常識數十則)	
“Research on Action, Gestures, and Facial Expressions” (Dongzuo zitai biaoqing yanjiu 動作姿態表情研究)	
“Thirty-Nine Vocal Expressions” (Shengyin biaoqing sanshijiu zhong 聲音表情39種)	By Chen Zhice
“Six Lectures on Acting Technique” (Yanji liujiang 演技六講)	By Yan Zhewu (閻哲吾 1907–1988)
“Special Investigation Report on Social Life” (Tezhong shehui shenghuo diaocha baogao 特種社會生活調查報告)	

At NDS, characterization no longer rested in the hands of the playwright but in the voice of the actor. The requirements for NDS’s fifth class, which remains its best-known cohort for their 1942 graduation performance of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*,⁷³ included ten lecture classes (Table 3), ten studio practice seminars (Table 4), and one seminar on voice production (Table 5) within one forty-week academic year. Yu Shangyuan’s idealization of the four components of language—sound without words, words without sound, sound with sight, and sight without sound—found its embodiment in Jin and Wan’s dynamic curriculum.

The NDS curriculum also fulfilled the propagandizing role envisioned by Zhang Daofan by requiring students to engage with the experiences of wartime China and articulate a sense of nationhood. The voice-production seminar required weekly drills in consolidating the force of the voice, such

Table 4. Studio Practice Seminar for the Fifth Class of NDS. Jin Yunzhi, “Shitannisilafusiji de yanyuan xunlian fangfa” (史坦尼斯拉夫斯基的演員訓練方法 Stanislavski’s System of Training Actors), in *Biaoyan yishu lunwen ji* (表演藝術論文集 Collection of Essays on Performing Arts) (Nanjing: Zhongzheng shuju, 1946), 99

“Collective Gymnastics and Martial Arts” (Zaocao yu guoshu 早操與國術)	No specific descriptions
“Dance” (Wudao 舞蹈)	No specific descriptions
“Observation” (Renwu guan cha 人物觀察)	Students are required to complete fieldwork observation (five times) and memorization (three times).
“Five-Sense Training and Mime” (Wujue xunlian ji ren shou moni biaoyan 五覺訓練及人獸模擬表演)	Content: return from a snowy night, chase a butterfly, listen to sound from afar and nearby, differentiate taste, fire, drink tea and wine, move a rock, drown, impersonate teachers and classmates
“Animal Imitation” (Qinshou moni biaoyan 禽獸模擬表演)	Imitate the movement of a mouse, cat, dog, rooster, monkey, tiger, duck, and leopard
“Improvisation” (Jixing biaoyan 即興表演)	Topics: guerrilla, abolish superstition, mental institution, and brothel
“Rehearsals of Selected Scenes” (Chouchang paiyan 抽場排演)	Scenes selected from the following plays: <i>Thunderstorm</i> (<i>Leiyu</i> 雷雨, Cao Yu, 1934), <i>Sunrise</i> (<i>Richu</i> 日出, Cao Yu, 1936), <i>A Pattern of Perfection</i> (<i>Yishen zuoze</i> 以身作則, Li Jianwu [李健吾 1906--1982], 1936), <i>Phoenix City</i> (<i>Fenghuang cheng</i> 貧民慘劇, Wu Zuguang [吳祖光 1917–2003], 1937), <i>Joy of Joining the Army</i> (<i>Congjun le</i> , Yu Shangyuan, 1939), <i>The Witness</i> (<i>Yuanye</i> 原野, Cao Yu, 1937), <i>The Flying Hero</i> (<i>Fei jiangjun</i> 飛將軍, Hong Shen, 1937), <i>Under Shanghai Eaves</i> (<i>Shanghai wuyan xia</i> 上海屋檐下, Xia Yan [夏衍 1900–1995], 1937)
“Developing Imagination” (Xiangxiang fazhan 想像發展)	Students are asked to improvise a skit based on four groups of prescribed key words: (1) grass, gun, and woman; (2) screen, sunglasses, and photo; (3) telephone, newspaper, and letters; (4) tools for committing suicide.
“Rhythmic Exercises” (Jiezou xunlian 節奏訓練)	(1) Pulling plow dance, (2) shaman dance, (3) bride dance, (4) unemployed dance
“Rehearsals of Multiple-act Plays” (Duomuju pailian 多幕劇排練)	Students perform <i>Woman’s Apartment</i> (<i>Nüzi gongyu</i> 女子公寓, Yu Ling [于伶 1907–1997], 1939).

Table 5. Curriculum of Voice Production. Jin Yunzhi, “Shitannisilafusiji de yanyuan xunlian fangfa” (史坦尼斯拉夫斯基的演員訓練方法 Stanislavski’s System of Training Actors), in *Biaoyan yishu lunwen ji* (表演藝術論文集 Collection of Essays on Performing Arts) (Nanjing: Zhongzheng shuju, 1946), 99

<i>Drills for Voice Production</i>	Exercises on diaphragmatic breathing
	Exercise on enunciation
	Exercise on range, volume, and stress of voice
	Exercise on vibrant voice technique
	Exercise on crying and laughter
	Exercise on yawning and sneezing
	Exercise on onomatopoeia
	Analysis of dialogue and emotion
	Correcting exercise on nonstandard national language
	Poetry recitation

as its breath, strength, range, and volume; mimicking sounds; reading emotions out of a text; but also practicing the national language. In other seminars, Jin and Wan unfolded nuanced scenarios in which a “sense” takes shape within a specific context. “Return from a snowy night,” for example, acts out the sense of touch, yet it further characterizes the sensorial subject by placing the person within the framework of returning. A simple instruction transforms one of the universal “senses” into an experience that was specifically relevant for the student actors, who were themselves war refugees longing to “return” home. The war thus remains invisible in this acting prompt while affecting memory, imagination, and emotion. Likewise, in the seminar “Developing Imagination,” students were told to improvise a skit based on such prompts as “grass, gun, and woman”; “tools for committing suicide”; “screen, sunglasses, and photo”; and “telephone, newspaper, and letters.” Two scenarios confront the students with death and violence, which were ever-present in the early 1940s. The other two refer to a variety of communications media. Letters, phone calls, photos, newspapers, and films (screens) were used by Chinese urbanites to formulate interpersonal, familial, and societal bonds before the war. Now these technologies were militarized to aid in the circulation of frontline news and state secrets. NDS, too, was part of this wartime media infrastructure, one relying on the technologies of body and voice.

Among the many exercises in the curriculum, the voice training offered by Chen Zhice stands out. Chen, after studying theatre at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in the 1920s⁷⁴ and experimenting with peasant mobile performance in Ding Xian in the 1930s, joined NDS in its opening year and traveled with the school to Jiang’an. There he sought to

discover and ultimately deliver *huaju*'s vitality by means of acting, or, as he put it, to make "dead and stagnant writing signs" (*wenzi fuhao* 文字符號) of a script live by interpreting it, imagining the author's intention, and realizing it through speech and posture.⁷⁵ For Chen Zhice, vocal expression (*shengyin biaoqing* 聲音表情) was a crucial acting skill. He defines "voice" as a combination of tonality, spoken language, acoustic performance, and the authorial production that was "owned" first by the playwright and then by the actors. *Huaju*'s communication path is thereby completed yet complicated by the metamorphosis of voice: A playwright's authorial voice in the text first encounters the subjectivities of the actors. The actors then understand, internalize, translate, and create, ultimately delivering the textual voice into vocal expressions in the theatre. Finally, the audience receives the "vocal expression" via the actors' creative employment of their voices, which are meant to express the inner emotions of the playwright's characters, and which in turn will resonate with the audience's own subjectivities. Through this process, an individual playwright's voice evolves into the emotions collectively owned by the theatre community. Chen recognized the tension between naturalist acting propelled by the emotional flow "from inside then outside" on the one hand and pedagogical attempts to program actors' vocal, bodily, and emotional output on the other. However, he disregarded the popular myth that "performance is not teachable," instead insisting that suitable acting exercises are necessary to enable "average actors," that is, the students at NDS, to master techniques.

The essay "Thirty-Nine Vocal Expressions" (*Sanshijiu zhong shengyin biaoqing*) systemized Chen's thoughts. First published in *Drama Post* (*Xiju gangwei* 戲劇崗位), the essay later became a lecture course at NDS. Chen identifies and then classifies common vocal expressions, combining techniques with example dialogues, and instructs "average actors" to condition their emotional output to produce anger, laughter, and tears. The composition of each instructional paragraph shows a clearly defined three-layered formula, presenting vocal expression as a science, act, and art of speech. For example:

When an actor aims to express emotions of indignation, malice, or resistance, one should use a high-pitched voice, stretch the vocal cords, and release air from the lungs. Or one should gnash one's teeth and speak slowly. For example, [the character in *Sunrise*] Li Shiqing: "Ugh. I will stand up. I will free myself. I will become a hard rock; I will not care about anyone."⁷⁶

Chen starts nearly every paragraph by explaining the science of voice, imposing upon his readers his knowledge of anatomy and vocal acoustics. The next move employs more common terms to shift the voice from a subject of science to an act, addressing speed, force, stress, and gestures in speech. Finally, Chen offers an excerpt, usually from the “most popular plays for *huaju* theatre fans and amateur practitioners” such as Cao Yu’s *Thunderstorm* and *Sunrise*, and occasionally from world classics, including Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*. These examples embody *huaju* vocal expressions and theatrical emotions. Chen Zhice’s efforts at institutionalizing performance theories into the everyday theatre practice of NDS students expanded from the domain of vocal expression to a corporation of voice, body, and act.

At roughly the same time, Chen produced an acting score (*yanpu* 演譜) for novice actors and directors with three years’ training. Calling this work a “preliminary experiment,” Chen loosely followed the format of a score (English in original) for music and Western opera and may have been inspired by Yuen Ren Chao’s (趙元任 1892–1982) experiment of creating a drama score (*xipu* 戲譜) in 1930.⁷⁷ The acting score for *huaju*, Chen believed, should replace the “rambling and poorly organized” directors’ and actors’ notes popular in European and American theatres. This score would need to be more complex than a simple musical score, which Chen found “not meticulous enough.”⁷⁸ Instead, Chen’s acting score would include “three components: signs to indicate the voice; signs to indicate actions and expressions; and diagrams to indicate the stage blocking.” In light of the need to stage resistance plays (*kangzhan ju* 抗戰劇) in both urban and rural areas in the second half of the 1930s, Chen chose to score the script of *Crossing the Yellow River* (*Du Huanghe* 渡黃河), a play for mobile drama troupes first published in the periodical *Resistance War Drama* (*Kangzhan xiju* 抗戰戲劇).⁷⁹

In one inconsequential scene, the character of Boss Ding balances his accounting book when Daju, his daughter, approaches him, saying, “Dad, please try the rice cake soup. Mom made this. If you like it, she will cook more.” Daju, receiving no response, gently complains, “Don’t want to talk to me? All right, I will go talk to mom.” Boss Ding then raises his head from the books and asks Daju to stop. Although this simple scene only constitutes two to three lines in the original script, Chen scored the father-daughter conversation so that the actor playing Daju would know exactly when, where, and how to speak. We can see these features on the score itself: On the left are indications for voice, while the right has indications for postures, actions, and stage blocking. Numbers inserted in the main dialogue

·期一第卷一第·

必須能夠演譜入手。

以下姑試作一段話劇的演譜。劇本是採用「抗戰戲劇」半月刊，第二卷第一期，「渡黃河」，因為演譜的寫法太為簡樸，所以只譜了以下的一小段。

劇本原文，省略（本戲抄出，以資閱者比較，因為以下的譜上與原文的文字，標點符號等，是大有不同的，但為節省篇幅起見，只好不抄。）

渡黃河的演譜（供編演員用）

看譜須知：

（一）對話的左邊文字是指示聲音表情。

（二）話的右邊文字是指示姿態動作表情與面部部位的。

（三）凡文中，中，插入的數目字是表示數目字前應停頓的時間，即說到數目字時，心裏應默數該數的數目字，或默數1或1.2，或1.2.3，或1.2.3.4，等。默數的快慢，與話的快慢相同。

（四）聲音表情所註的「情感的」，是指除應表示或喜，或怒，或……等外，還應用「氣」音，或平氣音說話。至於「音高」，「音速」，「音力」，「音調」，以及「突弱音」，「平流音」，等，都是步演術中聲音表情一部分的名詞。

（五）語著以「音」標準。

（六）本「演譜」只供研究表演術有三年以上基本訓練的人的應用。否則，他是不會看和聽，自然他也就更不會應用。

面台舞為「河黃渡」

大菊： 爸爸（1 2） 嚙嚙演碗湯年糕吧（1 2）

開幕時，丁老板戴着花鏡，坐在竹椅上，右手接眼本，左手打算盤。

兩手捧一——立於甲寅處
由丙內走——
丙——
丙——
丙——

停頓等——邊說，邊向丙已處用
於默數——正常的速度走，仍是
時——的——到說完，笑臉的。走
時——

頭斜歪，對
着丁老板，
舉箸稍高，
半舉。

一停頓
一姿態如同。

「媽作得」（1 2） 說讓您「嚙嚙」（1）要是好呢（1）

「音速」，音力，
「得」是輕聲

一舉箸同前，出手舉
給丁老板半姿式，
笑臉，口略張開。

「音速」，音力，
「呢」是輕聲

「音力」，音速，音高，
同前。

「兒」，「嚙嚙」字，應與「點」
說成一個音。

就照支多作一點兒（1 2 3 4）

7

Fig. 12. Crossing the Yellow River as an "Acting Score." Chen Zhice, "Huaju de yanpu: yige chubu shiyan" (話劇的演譜：一個初步的實驗 The Acting Score of Spoken Drama: One Preliminary Experiment), Xiju gangwei (戲劇崗位 Drama Post) 1, no. 1 (1939): 7-8. Courtesy of the Chinese Periodical Full-text Database.

list the lengths of pauses. The section for the voice includes instructions for emotions (joy, anger, etc.), the usage of aspirated voice (*qiyin* 氣音), pitch, rhythm, force, staccato (*tufa yin* 突發音), legato (*pingliu yin* 平流音), and so on, for individual phrases or even characters. Following the acting score, actors are supposed to move to the designated blocking spot while delivering dialogues strictly defined by their acoustic or sonic features. Here Chen translates the theoretical synchronization of voice, body, and act into an instructional diagram directing a specific, concrete coordination for actors to embody.

From Jin Yunzhi and Wan Jiabao's class preparations to Chen Zhice's acting scores, established *huaju* practitioners concretized theories of speaking in formal pedagogy. Rather than simply repeating the Stanislavski system in a Chinese context, the instructors at NDS creatively developed the system to make it accessible for both students and often illiterate wartime audiences. The rational and rather rigid curriculum covered external and internal training, but it clearly emphasized the external in both lecture courses and practice seminars. At NDS, vocal and other sensual expressions were not opposed to psychology and emotions but were the means to deliver these internal phenomena to an external audience. The way to move the masses was through pure, authentic speech.

To Move the Masses

NDS's curricular development and pedagogical practices yielded fruitful results. Among the most explicit endeavors to wield *huaju* for utilitarian purposes was a four-act comedy, *Joy of Joining the Army*. *Joy* fulfilled the Nationalist imperative that *huaju* devote its efforts toward mass mobilization, as well as NDS's self-imposed obligation to do "conscription propaganda" (*bingyi xuanchuan* 兵役宣傳).⁸⁰ The process of creating *Joy*, in both textual and theatrical forms, is worth careful consideration. *Joy* reflected the theatre-making process at NDS in which established dramatists and students, popular appeals and avant-garde deliveries, pedagogical training and improvisation, and modernism, leftism, and nationalism converged. On December 16, 1939, four years after Tian Han had staged an improvised mass mobilization in *Extras*, the students and faculty of NDS occupied the newly built open-air theatre in Jiang'an's Confucian Temple to redefine the nature and outlook of conscription: it was something to be done enthusiastically, with joy!

Yu Shangyuan, credited as *Joy*'s producer and cowriter, explains the practices of writing and staging the play in his postscript (Houji 後記). In

September 1937, at the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War and while NDS was migrating to the hinterland, Yu learned of Zhang Junli's (張君勱 1887–1969)⁸¹ alarming calculation of Japanese military forces in China. Yu immediately decided to write a play that would aid in the war effort, but he also realized the difficulties of completing such a task alone, given that he was already occupied with NDS's relocation. Finding a suitable partner in Wang Sizeng (王思曾 n.d.), a 1937 graduate of the English department at Nankai University who had both playwriting experience and the necessary time, the two began a collaboration reflective of the scenario preparation in 1910s *wenmingxi* theatres: Yu provided the story outline and left Wang to patch up the details. While recognizing Wang's contribution to the play, Yu maintained that it was his three demands that determined the essential structure of the work: (1) to only create archetypal characters; (2) to make sure that each act could be staged individually as a single-act play; and (3) to allow each potential staging endeavor absolute flexibility in terms of set design and performance norms.⁸² The merits that intellectual dramatists carefully cultivated in *huaju* during the past two decades—characters' psychological depth and the art of plotting, which relied heavily on textual elaboration—were noticeably lacking in Yu's rubric.

However, from the perspective of an inexperienced mass audience, left-wing dramatists, and rightist cultural cadres, respectively, it was precisely this “lack” that reified the aesthetic and political expectations for resistance plays. Rural audiences often felt confused by *huaju*'s subtle yet complex psychological turmoil and lengthy monologues. Recall how public speeches delivered in *baihua* alienated listeners, seeming to be little more than “empty talk.”⁸³ In contrast, while Joy's “archetypal” characters might appear “tepid” and predictable to urban intellectual *huaju* audiences, for spectators in Jiang'an and other distant rural communities, they were reminiscent of the roles found in operatic theatres. These archetypes' formulaic characteristics and simple and colloquial language, or what Hong Shen called “hometown language” (*xiangtu yu* 鄉土語),⁸⁴ allowed rural audiences to grasp what was performed easily. Further, the requirement to structure a multiact play as four stand-alone acts fitted in well with the folk and operatic tradition of staging individual acts or scenes extracted from longer plays.⁸⁵ Staging such extracts, Yu proposed, would not burden the masses, who were used to enjoying the ephemeral boisterousness of theatre but were not concerned with the structural integrity of lengthy performances. Perhaps most importantly, Yu's call for “absolute flexibility” in staging scenarios bridged the rhetorical division between “spoken” *huaju* and “sung” traditional or folk theatres. This can be seen as another exam-

ple of Yu's pledge to (re)define *huaju* as an integrative genre incorporating "old" folk and operatic components. In contrast to the challenges that other intellectual-led itinerant drama troupes faced when staging existing *huaju* plays in rural areas,⁸⁶ *Joy* promised the audience affinity, not hostility, to their accustomed theatrical experiences.

Beyond foreseeing the demands of rural audiences, Yu's three "conditions," particularly the latter two, made *Joy* a fitting addition to the growing wartime repertoire of mobile theatres (*yidong yanchu*). Left-leaning dramatists and young theatre practitioners had first advocated for mobile theatres in the early 1930s, but now they had gained support from different political affiliations as "the best and only reliable means"⁸⁷ to rally the nation against Japan. Although the ideological and political divergence between left and right was subdued under the Second United Front (1937–1945), leftist rhetoric did not disappear.⁸⁸ Instead, as Xiaobing Tang has uncovered, young left-leaning theatre practitioners who formed troupes and traveled across the country often viewed mobile theatre as "guerrilla war by means of theatre."⁸⁹ Such a comparison, inspired by Mao Zedong's 1938 writings on guerrilla warfare, underscored the tactical adaptability and flexibility of mobile theatre while also reflecting its leftist origin.

Yu's playmaking efforts would have won support from such troupes. Although Yu (and Wang) did not explicitly endorse Mao's wartime strategies in their play, Yu's vision of the structural flexibility and staging adaptability of *Joy* imbued the work with two potential but complementary outcomes: as a four-act comedy when adequate staging and reliable theatre personnel were available, and as agile one-act mobile theatres that could be performed in streets and on front lines by troupes with limited resources. In other words, Yu "ordered" *Joy* to feature both "regular" and "guerrilla" staging modes, which echoed Mao's discussion of the coordination of "regular" and "guerrilla" warfare against Japan. Yu's vision was materialized in Wang's set design. *Joy* was positioned in four distinctive "stages": a bourgeois living room, a teahouse, a battlefield, and a small town where street theatre, folk theatre, singing, and dancing are either frequently referred to or staged as plays-within-the-play. When performed in the "regular" form, *Joy* propagandized both conscription and the varying methods of propagandizing conscription. At other times, when NDS troupes were sent to remote areas, the heterogeneous nature of the sets would facilitate immediate adaptations as one-act plays in their given environment.

Wang Sizeng actively responded to Yu's three requirements when developing *Joy*'s details. The two households depicted in the play, the

Dings and the Zhaos, are confronted with the choice of fulfilling the responsibilities of being patriotic citizens or Confucian subjects. In each case, national responsibilities take precedence. The play ends by inviting all audience members to set aside their family-centered goals and contribute to national defense.

Act 1 offers a unique twist on the Nora narrative. It focuses on Ding Zhendong, the second young master of a comprador family and a law student, who believes the most urgent task is to join the army. Ding's parents, fiancée (a college student majoring in biology), elder brother, and friends (a poet, a journalist, and a chemist) all gather to celebrate his twenty-second birthday, but they end up debating the necessity for intellectual youth to go to the front lines. Despite the objections from patriarchal figures, Ding's parents and his elder brother, Ding gains the unanimous support of his intellectual peers. All his male friends agree to enlist, while Ding's supportive fiancée waits patiently at home. Between maintaining the family lineage and the survival of the nation, Ding "walks out" and chooses the latter.

Act 2 then turns to the "lower" social stratum, the Zhao family, whose petty bourgeois teahouse outside the city is suffering from the economic disruption caused by the war. Reversing the contradiction between the elder and younger generations depicted in Act 1, this time it is Zhao Bonian, the teahouse owner, who also works as a part-time laborer for the Dings, who is determined to go to the front lines despite his age and his daughter's concern. Zhao even persuades Yang Shaokui, his daughter's young suitor, to give up his dreams while the nation is under threat. Zhao will only agree to the betrothal if Yang joins the army with him. In front of the teahouse, Zhao and his future son-in-law, as well as Ding and his friends, meet to sign the conscription list.

The climax occurs in Act 3 when Ding, Zhao, and Yang, now three soldiers fighting together, are interviewed by Ding's intellectual friends, the poet Li Chaohong and the journalist Du Yiming, on the battlefield. Substituting for the familial tension that defined the first two acts are the soldiers' bonds, which transcend class and age differences, as well as the solidarity expressed between the masses in the hinterland and the troops on the front lines. The community that modern theatre aspired to create in real life appears in idealized form onstage. Notably, while the act clearly glorifies these soldiers' bravery and the nation-state's support, no real battle occurs. Rather, it takes place in the dawn after an unspecified victory, when the soldiers, poet, and journalist together sing and dance, transforming the

front line into a makeshift stage for singing rallies and variety shows. Joy and laughter out of national confidence and military victory, rather than tears and blood, become the signs for resistance against Japan.

The aftermath of the “joy” of the front lines occurs in Act 4. Ding Zhen-dong makes a brief return to his hometown to visit his parents and fiancée. Receiving a warm welcome from the local community, Ding gains public recognition as a national hero and affirms his determination to continue fighting for the country. Turning from the mass gathering within the play to the actual audience of the play, Ding exclaims, “Farewell, see you all in the battlefield!” This time, the heroic youth’s call to arms does not go unanswered. “Long life to the victory of the resistance war,” the masses respond with similar zeal, breaking through the fourth wall and turning themselves from onlookers to participants. Ding’s decision to go back to the front lines and continue the war until the final victory becomes the most effective form of mobilization for the masses. After such a stirring exchange, audience members would also feel compelled to aid the war effort.

Joy certainly met the expectations Zhang Daofan and other Nationalist cultural policymakers had for *huaju* when lobbying for a national theatre academy in 1935. The archetypical characters and flexible staging modes made Zhang’s hopes of employing *huaju* to rouse the illiterate and semi-literate Chinese masses a reality. *Huaju*’s advantage in wartime, Zhang had implied, lay in its mobilization, or specifically its emotional contagiousness. Archetypical characters, “flat” and “tepid” as they might be, were not only feasible avenues for novice student-actors to actualize the knowledge they had accumulated at NDS but were also a means to connect with a mass audience who valued directness over subtlety. Meanwhile, thanks to Joy’s mix of “regular” and “guerrilla” productions, NDS students gained opportunities to “imitate” the cosmopolitan dramatists who had converged at their school as full- or part-time teachers. Then, after performing for “experts” at Jiang’an’s Confucian Temple, these young actors would travel in their mobile theatres to demonstrate to the rural masses how to bravely *act*—both on stage and off—in a period of national crisis, which further inspired the masses’ participation and imitation. Joy’s “archetypical” characters and staging possibilities constituted a reliable foundation upon which established dramatists, student actors, and the rural masses could build.

Joy not only fostered community bonds but also provided a model for *huaju*’s future development. Although Yu openly described Joy’s plot as “tepid,” he was reluctant to provide specific criticisms in his postscript. Rather, Yu’s self-reflection shifted from regret over an unsatisfying script

to elaborating how *Joy* adapted “a new method” of staging modern theatre and propagandizing the military draft. Yu describes the “common vision” he shared with director Yang Cunbin and set designer Chen Yongliang (陳永偉 b. 1914) to use this new performance method to enhance propaganda, draw out the spirit of the script, and, importantly, provide an opportunity to “experiment with and exercise this new ideology in the performing arts.”⁹⁰ Yu summarized this “new performance” with one word: synthesis (*zonghe* 綜合). It is worth comparing Yu’s use of “synthesis” with that of Xiong Foxi, who, as we saw in Chapter 3, called for the synthesis of theatre with nature. Whereas Xiong’s synthesis referred to performance space and led to the creation of Ding Xian’s open-air theatre, Yu’s synthesis relates to the performance itself. Modern theatre, in Yu’s view, was a synthesis of singing, dancing, and musical elements, as well as folk and operatic traditions:

Under the principle that theatre is an art of synthesis rarely stands clear supportive examples. It is not an easy thing to put together a performance that synthesizes three aspects—singing (or sound and spoken words), dancing (or action and gestures), and music (the noticeable or nuanced)—in one unified piece. It is even more challenging if such a performance is further integrated with the staging space, lighting, and all aspects of a theatre that can be seen, heard, and felt, and further evolves into a piece of art, being both independent and seamlessly organized. . . . The possibility that *Joy* has shown, I hold, reaches such a level. I believe that if we are to use *Joy* as an inspiration and a foundation, we will chart a new path [of performance] with our continuing efforts.⁹¹

The antidote for *Joy*’s thin plot is the “new method” of acting and staging that was implemented in the concentric spheres of pedagogy and performance at NDS.

To ensure that his “new method” was fully delivered, Yu “drafted” Yang Cunbin as *Joy*’s director. This choice was no surprise given Yang’s past experiences with mobile theatres in Ding Xian in the 1930s. Following the success of *Cross the River*, Yang again collaborated with Xiong Foxi in *Children’s World* (*Ertong shijie* 兒童世界), a spectacular production performed in Chengdu in April 1938. Yu likely believed that Yang’s creative modification of Xiong’s minimal script credited him as able to turn a simple story into an effective piece of propaganda. Weihong Bao notes that *Children’s World*, eschewing a conventional narrative structure, “works more as a plan or an itinerary, orchestrating the movement of several simultaneous per-

formances both within a specially constructed theatre and on the streets of Chengdu.”⁹² Yang’s impressive stage design skills were on display when he built a “roulette wheel-shaped” theatre in a public park and hired over thirty thousand elementary students to gather in this theatre and in Chengdu’s streets. Yang thus demonstrated his “agile” ability to “reinvent acting, staging, and spectating,” and he would build on both these traits in *Joy*.

The play’s flexible narrative structure not only enabled Yang to mobilize both the performers and the audience in Jiang’an but also allowed him to experiment with innovative staging techniques beyond that which may have been possible in a conventional, text-heavy *huaju* production. According to Li Naichen (李乃忱 n.d.), a student actor from the third class of NDS who played the role of Ding Zhendong’s elder brother, Yang Cunbin removed all realist stage designs and props that would conventionally signify, at least for a mature urban *huaju* audience, a living room, teahouse, and front line, relying instead on large, abstract cubes. Yang also forewent the “modern” box-set stage common for *huaju* in cities. Although the three-dimensional rooms embedded in such box-set stages enhanced verisimilitude for urban spectators, having a “realist” stage design was less relevant for rural audiences unfamiliar with such conventions and for mobile actors who performed on makeshift stages. Li Naichen described the new performance as representing a “hope” and even “liberation” for Chinese theatre:

I agree that joining the army itself is not necessarily joyful. But our hope relies not so much on the success or failure of the script as the further impact of [*Joy*’s] new performance on Chinese theatre. *Joy* charted a new path for performance possibilities and liberated Chinese theatre from the box-set stage, removing all conventional realist theatre traces and leaping to a new impressionist (*yinxiang de* 印象的) and expressionist (*biaoxian de* 表現的) method. This is our hope.⁹³

Li was tasked with promoting *Joy*, which likely explains the enthusiasm he felt for the play’s avant-garde features. Exaggerated as his comments might be, they help us to appreciate further the manifold influences embedded within Yu Shangyuan’s definition of a “new performance.” Yu and the staff at NDS wanted not only to synthesize modern drama with aspects of China’s past but to position the genre for an unfolding future.

Compared to the “altar-like” stage constructed for *Children’s World*, which took the shape of a giant roulette wheel, the structure and scale of *Joy*’s stage was greatly reduced. The main acting area was limited to a small circumference in the middle of a rostrum. Starting from the edge that faced

the audience, two spike-like pathways were added for the actors to move on- and offstage. Although this similar floor-plan rendered *Joy* a miniature version of *Children's World*, albeit one seemingly without an “altar,” Yang’s reconfiguration of the performative space in fact did not come up short. Rather, there was already a built-in “altar”—the entrance hall of the Confucian Temple where statues of Confucius and some of his disciples were traditionally placed for worship.⁹⁴ The makeshift stage, which physically extended from the Hall of Great Achievement, therefore became integrated within the solemn space of the temple. The historical and ritual gravitas that the temple assumed granted further legitimacy to *Joy*’s goal of mass mobilization for community and national defense. Moreover, the synthesis of singing, dancing, and music that Yu had emphasized was accordingly ritualized.

For Yu Shangyuan and Yang Cunbin, this synthesis did not question the aesthetic principles and norms of a modern theatre or, specifically, of a *huaju* theatre. Such a position would have seemed controversial during the heated debates between May Fourth iconoclasts and operatic traditionalists in the late 1910s and early 1920s. However, the synthesis found in *Joy* clearly echoed Yu’s vision for modern Chinese theatre put forward in the National Theatre Movement of 1925–1926. It also reflected the peasant experimental theatre that Yang practiced in 1930s Ding Xian. Indeed, Yang specifically credited the synthesis of singing and dancing for the success of his 1936 peasant *huaju*, *Dragon King Canal*:

Talking about *huaju*, people generally think that it has nothing to do with the nature of music. However, *huaju* is in fact also musical. . . . Not a single form of theatre is not musical. Theatre and music have been inseparable since they were born. Theatre was born from music and dance. Thus, if one wants to demonstrate a perfect theatre, the component of sound or the issue of music should be solved, to some extent, in addition to addressing the visual concerns. In Ding Xian, after the open-air theatre architecture was completed, every single public performance naturally has contained the component of singing. Because the open-air theatre can accommodate a large audience, the singing component can attract and even satisfy the majority’s aural sensibility.⁹⁵

Yang’s pronouncement here reads much like the “new method” advocated by Yu Shangyuan. Instead of presenting an entirely “new” method of staging theatre, Yang and his colleagues brought forth the modern theatre

practices they had developed in the backstage at both Ding Xian and NDS. These included the pedagogical space that served as the physical and cultural backstage of the “regular” and “guerrilla” performances of resistance plays, and well as the lingering aesthetic principles and theatre practices of integrating singing, dancing, and music in modern Chinese theatre which were subsequently rendered into “backstage” disruptions within the canonization of *huaju*.

When Yang staged *Joy* for a large local audience at the open-air theatre in front of Jiang'an's Confucian Temple, the components of “music” and “dance” became further enhanced, thanks to the assistance of established composers and choreographers. In Wang Sizeng's script, the poet character Li Chaohong, in order to raise morale, alternates between reciting his own incomplete modern poems and *shulai bao* 數來寶, the improvised rhymed verses originally performed by beggars with clapper accompaniments. Ultimately, though, Li settles on singing as the best way to express his patriotic joy. Zhang Dinghe (張定和, aka Ding Huo 丁火, 1916–2011),⁹⁶ credited as musical adviser, composed the theme song, which was performed twice: first in Act 3, when most of the male characters regroup on the battlefield, and at the end of the play,⁹⁷ when the masses onstage and offstage bid farewell to Ding Zhendong. The “evolution” of Li Chaohong's literary creations flips the May Fourth genre hierarchy, prioritizing a collective sing-along over an individual modern poem, and the spirit and effect of mass mobilization reaches its climax.

In both acts where the song appears, the simple stage directions—“sing collectively” and “the music continues until all audience members are out of the theatre”—registered a sense of camaraderie for both actors and audience. Considering that the ending notes of the song simply repeat the onomatopoeia “ding-dong-ding” 叮-鐸-叮 that starts the tune, and which also imitates the structure of *haozi* 號子, or working songs, a rising sense of “sonic nationalism”⁹⁸ would not be difficult to achieve. Moreover, the activity of singing shared by established dramatists, student actors, and their local audiences further expanded the new “sensorial experience” that, as Xiaobing Tang puts it, was first cultivated in the leftist culture of 1930s Shanghai.⁹⁹ In fact, Zhang's composition might easily remind cosmopolitan war refugees of “Pathbreakers” (Kailu xianfeng 開路先鋒), the popular theme song of the 1935 progressive film *The Big Road* (*Dalu* 大路), which was composed by Nie Er (聶耳 1912–1935).¹⁰⁰ The melody and musical structure employed to celebrate the solidarity of laborers in *The Big Road* had been incorporated into “national-defense music” (*guofang yinyue* 國防音樂) in *Joy*.

Bodily movements were also made to serve the nation. *Joy*'s “danc-

ing” component was directed by Wu Xiaobang (吳曉邦 1906–1995), the first artistic dancer in Republican China, who developed modern dance in the 1930s¹⁰¹ and only stayed at Jiang’an for a short period of time.¹⁰² The lack of archival materials regarding Wu’s specific choreographies at NDS, unfortunately, prevents us from reconstructing the detailed features of the dance. However, the available memoir from Li Naichen endorsed Yu Shangyuan’s appraisal of Wu Xiaobang’s contribution: Wu’s choreography complemented Zhang Dinghe’s upbeat martial music to express the joy of joining the army in the sense of plot, or joining the masses in the sense of performance, and remedied the “crudeness” of the script.¹⁰³ Immersing themselves in the music, as Li Naichen recounts, the actors moved their bodies with the beat in an “exaggerated” (*kuada* 誇大) and “dance-like” (*jinhu wudao* 近乎舞蹈) manner.¹⁰⁴

Prior to his short stay at Jiang’an, Wu Xiaobang had already acquired frontline experience mobilizing the masses to join the war via choreographing and dancing for the Fourth Branch of the Anti-Japanese National Salvation Performing and Theatrical Troupes (Kang Ri jiuwang yanju dui 抗日救亡演劇隊) between 1936 and 1938. As Nan Ma has reconstructed, Wu choreographed eight anti-Japanese mobilization songs that were written by leftist musicians, including Tian Han and Nie Er’s “March of the Volunteers” (*Yiyongjun jinxing qu* 義勇軍進行曲).¹⁰⁵ In his choreography, Wu adapted martial arts moves and body postures from woodblock prints to visualize or “kinestheticize” the content of the lyrics line by line.¹⁰⁶ We can assume that the choreography of *Joy* reflected Wu’s theories of “kinesthesia” and “unmediated body movements.”

For example, during the energetic reunion of the male characters on the battlefield, there is inserted a magic show called “The Final Victory” (*Zuihou de shengli* 最後的勝利). Ding’s friends jokingly announce that they will present a magic show exclusively for the troops, as they had just turned down invitations from the Carlton Theatre in Shanghai, the Radio City Music Hall in New York, and the Opera House in Paris.¹⁰⁷ The so-called magic show consists of asking five soldiers, divided into two teams with four members on one team and only one on the other, to hold five ropes that are tied together. The goal is to see whether the team of four can defeat the lone soldier in a tug-of-war. The pulling takes place in two rounds: For the first round, all five characters pull the rope in their respective directions, only to find that no side can win. For the second, when the team of four collaborate and pull their ropes in one direction, they easily achieve the “final victory.” The description of the magic show, lasting three pages in the script, reads more like a lengthy stage direction that prepares the actors

to act out, rather than proclaim, the political message of forming national solidarity. This episode offers the script's most explicit description of a collective body movement, including the simple stage blocking that directs characters to walk and pull in opposing directions, and counting cues for the exaggerated tugging. The quality of the script, if evaluated as drama literature, remains weak. However, these directions largely resemble the "acting score" that Chen Zhice promoted to teach NDS students, suggesting a higher degree of craft behind the choreography. A certain episode may read "crudely" in a script but still be effective as a performance.

Singing along and immersing themselves in the spirit of agitation, the audience, as both established dramatists (Yu Shangyuan and Yang Cunbin) and student actors (such as Li Naichen) recalled, joined the theatre and the wider community through their stage experiences by embracing the synthesis of singing, dancing, and music. With *haozi*-like cries circulating between the actors and the audience, a kind of work cry turned roar for mobilization, *Joy* embodied the inquiry that Tian Han had asked Hong Shen and all established dramatists to answer in 1934: how to move the masses to resist Japan. Differently, the agonizing roar in Tian Han's vision was now a joyful mass song, and the backstage of a sound picture studio in Shanghai was unexpectedly relocated in a Confucian Temple.

Conclusion

This chapter has reconstructed a discourse on "acting" put forth by leading dramatists, and then shown how passionate amateurs, educated youth, and veteran entertainers received professional training in understanding and embodying the acoustic features of *huaju*. Using pedagogical materials as the primary source for studying *huaju*'s institutionalization, I have examined various theoretical inputs in making *huaju* and training actors in the 1930s–1940s, so as reveal the hidden negotiations through which the process of actor training and community building took shape—negotiations between the written script and the sound of *huaju*, intellectual and performative labor, and professionals and amateurs. Further, by placing the "techniques" (*shu*) of speaking and acting at the center of *huaju*, I have shown how the genre's psychological and emotional realities were embodied and delivered. The emphasis on the performative features of delivering spoken words in *huaju* facilitated emotional communication between onstage actors and offstage publics, aiding in the creation of a shared patriotic spirit.

In mid-1930s China, front- and backstage were changing places, sound pictures and modern theatre were becoming more closely interrelated, and theatricality was becoming reality. The advent of sound cinema brought Chinese people new conceptions of themselves and the world, while growing tensions with Japan threatened China's future existence as a nation. Meanwhile, *huaju*, previously understood as "closet dramas" by intellectual youth, enjoyed widespread popularity as staged performances, competing with cinema and other popular attractions in major cities. The overlap between commercial, national, and artistic desires drove to the forefront two interrelated questions: how to *speak*, and how to *act*, in a time of crisis.

The National Drama School became a central space for this introspection. Importantly, the goal of NDS was not only to cultivate *juren* and develop *huaju*, but to comfort and inspire an audience suffering from war. Students there worked closely with established dramatists and film and theatre talents who had migrated from Nanjing, Shanghai, and elsewhere. They engaged in a variety of theatre activities as actors, backstage technicians, playwrights, and directors, staging cutting-edge mobile theatre in the Confucian Temple and in the wider Jiang'an community. They immersed themselves in an original curriculum that synthesized traditional opera techniques with the Stanislavski system. These student actors, taking on the identity of *juren*, learned how to employ *huaju* theatre to move the masses.

Joy of Joining the Army is a representative example. Its innovative structure fits perfectly with NDS's teaching and performing needs and was easily imitable by other traveling drama troupes to adopt and act on their own. The goal of the play, Yu Shangyuan explained, was to stage a performance that combined "songs" (or sound and spoken words), "dance" (or action and gestures), and "music" (the noticeable or nuanced) to make a theatre that was "seen, heard, and felt."¹⁰⁸ Joining the army, the play affirmed, was not only the right thing to do but the greatest joy to enact collectively. Tian Han's patriotic call in *Extras*, the techniques of elocution proposed by Yu Shangyuan, Cheng Yanqiu, and Hong Shen, and the propaganda potential of *huaju* envisioned by Zhang Daofan were at last realized. The institutionalization of *huaju* could not help but be tied to China's survival as a nation.

5: Canonizing the Backstage

Gossip, *Annals*, and the Politics of Making Theatre History

Parallel with *huaju*'s professionalization was the genre's entrance into the commercial field. Both sensational family dramas such as *Thunderstorm* (*Leiyu*, 1935)¹ and revolutionary theatres such as *Roar, China* (*Nuhou ba, Zhongguo* 怒吼吧, 中國, 1933)² earned box-office success. Indeed, by the 1930s, *huaju* was no longer relegated to "amateurism" but constituted a significant share of the entertainment market. This shift entailed two results: First, *huaju* productions became increasingly focused on monetary concerns. Second, *huaju* itself ceased being a modernizing project led by the May Fourth generation to become instead a professional occupation for actors of all generations.

The Hankou Education Bureau in 1930 conducted the first state registrations of commercially driven performative cultures and actors. With the threefold intention of expanding state power over the theatre world, policing the potentially subversive energies generated by entertainers, and gaining extra tax revenue, the Hankou government stipulated that only those who passed the city's official examination could receive acting licenses. The final exam, as recorded in a report entitled *The Process of Drama Actors' Registration* (*Xiju yanyuan dengji zhi jingguo* 戲劇演員登記之經過), consisted of forty "common sense" questions about current events and (self-)cultivation, such as explaining the concepts of "national revolution" and the "Three People's Principles." Other questions raised issues of actors' self-identification, their understanding of the social-educational role of theatre, and the relationship between theatre and revolution. For example:

3. As a drama actor, what specific responsibilities [do you] need to assume?
4. Why is drama part of social education?
9. The ideal drama actors should be teachers for the masses. But how to achieve such a goal? Do you aspire to become the masses' teacher?

34. If the government places an order forbidding singing on the [modern] theatre stage, do you think such an order is correct? Why?
35. Is there any relationship between drama and revolution? What relationship specifically?
39. Do you think that an actor-training class offered by the government would serve as a necessary means to reform drama?³

As these questions show, the Hankou government viewed theatre as an important tool for mobilizing the masses to participate in social transformation and so sought to impose political control upon the theatre profession. However, *xinju* (new drama) actors—a broad term that included both *huaaju* and *wenmingxi* performers—only accounted for a minuscule 5 percent of the 687 actors who passed the exam, or thirty-one men and five women. As for how new drama actors answered the questions, *Process* does not elaborate. But the report does indicate that, as a group, *xinju* actors were outscored even by dancing girls, who acquired their knowledge of sociopolitical issues through their interactions with educated patrons. Although we do not have archival records of subsequent tests, the Hankou government's attempt at institutional control via this exam marked a new relationship between the nation-state and theatre culture. Actors, traditionally stigmatized as selling both art and body, were now assigned important social roles as “teachers” and “reformers” to educate the masses and facilitate the development of a modern nation.

Nevertheless, while the state proclaimed the institutionalization of modern drama, it was still developing strategies to achieve that goal. For example, actors were expected to take on social “responsibilities” (Questions 3, 4, 9, and 35), but what such responsibilities entailed remained undefined. Likewise, Questions 34 and 39 reveal considerable uncertainty surrounding the government's role. These open-ended questions read more like solicitations of actors' opinions than techniques for actors to follow. Perhaps this ambiguity stems from one of the registration's implied goals: to spur actors to formulate and internalize a new history of modern drama that overlapped with, or was subjugated to, Republican China's national history and modernization agenda. The Hankou government aspired for modern theatre to be at once the *medium* and the *content* to transform spectators and actors into modern citizens, but there was not yet any consensus as to the path of modern drama's development. What had been modern drama's successes? What were its unfortunate stylistic and ideological detours? *The Process of Drama Actors' Registration* marks the beginning of an explicit

institutional demand to write a history of modern drama that reinforced a political program that could also be embraced by actors.

The Hankou government was not the only hegemonic force seeking to define a canonical narrative for modern drama. Two such attempts are well recognized in standard accounts: The first is Hong Shen's introduction to his compilation of the drama volume for the 1935 *Compendium of New Chinese Literature* (*Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi*). Here Hong offered the first teleological overview of the "evolution" of modern Chinese theatre from the hybrid (and therefore inferior) *wenmingxi* to mature *huaju*. It further secured a position for *huaju* in May Fourth literature alongside fiction and poetry. The second attempt, undertaken in the People's Republic (1949–present), shifted from compiling *huaju* scripts to collecting historical records of *huaju*-making. Tian Han, Ouyang Yuqian, Xia Yan, and Yang Hansheng (陽翰笙 1902–1993) proposed in 1957 an editorial committee to gather "valuable and reliable" materials for researching "*huaju* history and Chinese revolutionary history."⁴ The first volume of *Historical Materials on the First Fifty Years of the Chinese Drama Movement* (*Zhongguo huaju yundong wushinian shiliao ji* 中國話劇運動五十年史料集) was published in 1958, followed by two more volumes in 1959 and 1963, collecting over seventy-five biographical accounts, production photographs, and a catalog of performances at Communist-controlled Yan'an (1938–1945). This long-term project carried a clear preference for left-wing *huaju*. Despite such political leanings, it was still aborted due to the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976).

These two accounts, both of which sought to canonize *huaju*, contained significant lacunae. Hong Shen's introduction demonstrates the diverse beginnings of modern Chinese theatre by juxtaposing vernacular plays written by May Fourth intellectuals such as Hu Shi, progressive drama reformers from the Spring Willow Society such as Ouyang Yuqian, *wenmingxi* veteran-cum-amateur drama activists such as Chen Dabei, and Peking opera reformers such as Wang Zhongxian (汪仲賢 1888–1937). While Hong argues that *huaju* was a collective art demanding the talents of poets, performers, and painters, he nevertheless emphasizes playwrights and their signature works when mapping out the field.⁵ The key players in Hong's canonization are those whose contributions lay in modern drama's literary repertoire. The People's Republic project likewise warrants criticism. A certain Bei Feng (北風 n.d.), writing at the time of publication, recognized that the first volume "offers a fair evaluation of the decline of *wenmingxi*" and reflects how *huaju* activities adapted and responded to the changing political environment, led by the League of Left-Wing Dramatists (*Zuoyi xijujia lianmeng* 左翼戲劇家聯盟) in Shanghai.⁶ Yet the first vol-

ume mentions no other *huaju* movements in Shanghai or in the hinterland. As one might expect, the editorial committee excluded Nationalist Party-led *huaju*. Moreover, all three volumes demonstrate a striking reliance on dramatists' personal accounts more than archival documents. That reliance has contributed to the noted "serious lack of historical materials"⁷ that makes contemporary efforts to revisit *huaju*'s canonization so difficult.

This chapter illuminates alternative accounts that provide a fuller picture of *huaju* history. It examines three efforts to document modern drama's achievements and evolution that have largely been overlooked. Namely, I read histories of *wenmingxi* and *huaju* that were excluded from canonical narratives due to the political or economic stance of the writers and publishers, book collections of modern theatre and published catalogs that were compiled in the hinterland, and a *huaju* production that dramatizes the backstage activities and the history of *huaju*'s development. In so doing, I fill in standard history's neglect of important *huaju* endeavors in "minor" cities such as Qingdao, Hankou, and Chongqing to reveal a multitude of techniques and strategies for *huaju*'s self-canonization.

I first call attention to various practices of writing histories of *huaju*. Standard narratives note the "minor role of drama in the initial period of modern Chinese literature" and *huaju*'s "surprisingly late develop[ment]."⁸ Yet, despite the belated maturity of *huaju* as a literary genre, theatre practitioners' efforts to write their own histories began much earlier than those of other modern genres. By reintroducing "missing" histories such as *The History of New Drama* (*Xinju shi* 新劇史, 1914) and *Historical Materials on Early Professional Huaju* (*Chuqi zhiye huaju shiliao* 初期職業話劇史料, 1942), both written by the *wenmingxi* veteran Zhu Shuangyun, I attest that modern Chinese theatre's early institutional endeavors were more advanced than commonly recognized. Even during the Second Sino-Japanese War, when *huaju*'s status as a political movement was confirmed, endeavors were being made backstage to guarantee *huaju*'s postwar viability as a profession. Such attention redirects our focus from the published works of "genius dramatists" toward the work of building and training that took place in the shadows.

I then turn to other means of documenting *huaju*, examining drama libraries put together by Song Chunfang, the erudite scholar in correspondence with Yu Shangyuan and Hong Shen,⁹ and Shu Weiqing (aka Shu Chang 舒暢), a prominent modern theatre collector and bibliophile who gathered a plethora of *huaju*-related materials in letterpress, lithograph, mimeograph, and manuscript form.¹⁰ In reading others' accounts of these two collectors along with Shu's 1938 *Catalog: Books of Modern Drama* (*Xiandai xiju tushu mulu* 現代戲劇圖書目錄), I place Qingdao and Hankou on the

map of *huaju*'s development. I argue that Shu's collecting, compiling, and promotional endeavors in Hankou reflected broader *huaju* professionalization efforts in the Nanjing Decade. Shu's popularizing efforts also differed markedly from the "elitist" approach to drama collecting pursued by Song Chunfang in Qingdao. By drawing attention to Shu Weiqing and Song Chunfang's cataloging endeavors, I bridge the gap between playmakers' self-canonization and professionalization.

Finally, I turn to an unusual *huaju*: a five-act, seven-scene spoken drama called *Annals of Theatre* (*Xiju chungqiu*). *Annals of Theatre* was collectively written in wartime Chongqing by Xia Yan, Song Zhidi (宋之的 1914–1956), and Yu Ling, the three leaders of the League of Left-Wing Dramatists, and debuted during that city's "fog season" in 1943. *Annals* is the first meta-theatre, or *huaju* about *huaju*-making, to present a general history of the genre's formative decades. Yet, instead of pivoting upon well-known leftist productions, *Annals* retells the theatre experiences of Ying Yunwei (應雲衛 1904–1967), the director of *Roar, China*. Xia, Song, and Yu's decision to trace the entanglements of an individual dramatist's life story with *huaju*'s history was not unusual, given that *huaju*-makers were both the agents and objects of *huaju*'s development, but the choice of Ying Yunwei was a surprising one. As a dramatist famous not for his dramaturgy but for his networking skills and pragmatic approach to fundraising, Ying's engagement with *huaju* was more akin in temperament to what Christopher Rea calls the "cultural entrepreneur" than to conventionally defined intellectual or revolutionary dramatists.¹¹ By highlighting Ying's entrepreneurial skill during several crucial moments in *huaju*'s evolution, *Annals* differs from both standard (leftist) narratives that document *huaju*'s political maneuverings and from revisionist scholarship that focuses on *huaju*'s aesthetic experiments and mass mobilization efforts.

Annals dramatizes the backstage struggles of *juren* (men and women of theatre).¹² In my analysis, I focus on three significant yet controversial "episodes" in *huaju*-making history, as well as how *Annals* depicts and canonizes these episodes onstage: the substitution of "gender-aligned casting" for "men playing women," which had been *huaju*'s performative norm in the 1920s; the divergence between bohemian-cum-revolutionary left-wing dramatists and Shanghai-style cultural entrepreneurs that arose while making *huaju* in the 1930s; and the uniting of the modern drama field in 1937 for the goal of national defense. I argue that Ying Yunwei was the ideal candidate upon whom Xia, Song, and Yu could base their lead character, Lu Xiankui, and deliver their backstage account. Not only did Ying reflect the left wing that Xia, Song, and Yu wished to promote, he was capable of winning the

audience's sympathy, as Ying's backstage efforts to balance the demands of money, art, and politics would remind Chongqing viewers of their own struggles to eke out a living in the wartime capital. I further posit that staging a *huaju* about *huaju*-making was a clever way to bypass Nationalist censorship and earn needed income. With *Annals*, a group of left-wing *jueren* produced a work that effectively fulfilled the three pressing—but often contradictory—goals that had driven the *huaju* movement since the 1920s: professionalization, popularization, and politicization.

Annals' prioritization of playmaking over play-staging, the backstage over the frontstage, and behind-the-scenes struggles over canonized performances celebrated in “official” narratives—or, as James C. Scott calls it, “the hidden transcript” over the visible performance—allows me to align the play with the “backstage discourse” that Scott first developed in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, his study on confrontations between the powerless and the powerful.¹³ Klaus R. Scherpe develops this concept, arguing that the “backstage discourse” is constituted by gestures, words, and tales that cannot be performed in the face of power.¹⁴ Unlike other attempts at *huaju* canonization, all of which relied on published written materials, *Annals* focused on the staging of performances and gossip. By “canonizing the backstage,” *Annals* effectively challenged the narrative of *huaju* history. Instead of presenting *huaju* predominately as a literary genre and *jueren* as bohemian playwrights, *Annals* affirms a performance-centered understanding of *huaju* where *jueren* are cultural entrepreneurs. This new, “revisionist” perspective allows us to place Chinese modern theatre alongside fiction and film, genres whose “official” histories were also shaped by May Fourth discourse but have since been rewritten to better reflect the lived realities of key players. Faced with hegemony, *Annals* reminds us of the right for the silenced to be heard.

The Still Missing *Huaju* History

Wenmingxi as Early Professional *Huaju*

Huaju's capacity for mass mobilization understandably sparked the interest of the Nationalist and Communist Parties, who authorized “official histories” of the genre to be written in the late 1930s and early 1950s, respectively. However, neither of these attempts was completed. In 1939, Zhang Daofan, vice minister of the Nationalist Ministry of Education, appointed Shu Weiqing to compile *The Draft History of the Chinese Huaju Movement* (*Zhongguo huaju yundong shigao* 中國話劇運動史稿), likely because Shu pos-

essed a voluminous collection of related materials.¹⁵ Shu's sudden death that year, along with the disruptions of war, caused the end of the project. Then, in the early 1950s, Zhang Geng, the active leftist theatre critic, attempted to edit *The History of the Chinese Huaju Movement* (*Zhongguo huaju yundong shi* 中国话剧运动史) on behalf of the CCP. Given his own experiences and records he had collected, Zhang may indeed have been able to offer, as Tian Benxiang argues, a comprehensive *huaju* history.¹⁶ However, Zhang never completed the work due to the harsh criticism he received for his first few chapters. The official history of *huaju* in its formative decades, from both Nationalist and Communist perspectives, was left in suspension.

Had they been finished, both works would have likely presented *huaju*'s development through a political, rather than economic, lens. I regard such frameworks with skepticism and so turn instead to Zhu Shuangyun's 1914 *History of New Drama* and 1942 *Historical Materials on Early Professional Huaju* to revise misrepresentations of spoken drama's formative period. Like most *wenmingxi* pioneers, Zhu first experimented with the new theatre form as a young intellectual, when he was exposed to spoken theatres in extracurricular activities while studying at modern educational institutions influenced by Western learning. However, his relationship with what was then called *xinju*, or new drama, gradually drifted away from the intellectual path of amateur student productions. Having dropped out from several reputable high schools in Shanghai due to his poor grades in English, Zhu came to critique both Western learning and amateur drama clubs as elitist, and saw commercial drama troupes as a more reliable apparatus for mass education and training.¹⁷ Embracing actors, students, and cultural entrepreneurs, Zhu founded, ran, and promoted several professional *wenmingxi* troupes, even when other amateur veterans turned against commercialization in the 1920s. Zhu's pragmatic, market-oriented approach complicates scholarly narratives of *wenmingxi* that rely mainly on canonical accounts.

History of New Drama is duly recognized by revisionist scholarship.¹⁸ However, Zhu Shuangyun's stubborn devotion to professionalization, expressed most clearly in *Historical Materials*, is rarely examined, probably because Zhu's claim has been seen as "self-promotion" and therefore inconsequential to the history of *wenmingxi* and modern Chinese drama in general. But the celebrated careers of a handful of dramatists, as well as the frequent interventions of political parties, cannot explain *huaju*'s evolving trajectory from an intellectual theatre in the late 1910s to an apparatus of mass education and mobilization by the 1940s. Seeking to present a more comprehensive account of *huaju* history, I foreground both *History of New Drama* and *Historical Materials on Early Professional Huaju*. The occupation of

actors, burdened by social stigmatization in 1914 and almost destroyed by war in 1942, constitutes the subject of both works, which together present an alternative reading of modern theatre.

Zhu's *History of New Drama* was the first chronicle of its kind. Apart from writing biographical sketches for more than thirty-four *wenmingxi* performers to evaluate both their acting strengths and personal moralities, Zhu sought to "rectify names" (*zhengming* 正名).¹⁹ That is, he invoked the Confucian tradition to typologize the acting profession into four groups: First, *xinju jia* (新劇家 new dramatists) were "those whose performance inspired their cohorts and were studied by their followers." Second were *juren*, men of theatre, "who had neither achievements nor bad reputations, but only followed others without establishing their own styles." Third were *xizi*, defined by Zhu as "players," who "mastered singing, speaking, dancing, and acrobatics and could merge completely into their roles."²⁰ Finally, he listed *yi yuan* (藝員 entertainers), "whose singing, speaking, dancing, and acrobatic skills are unsatisfying and who only want to obtain fame by means of acting."

Zhu's terms were not new, but his definitions were. At the time of his writing, many key figures of *wenmingxi*, whom Zhu termed "new dramatists," were joining with intellectual reformers to request that the press and the public stop referring to professional actors as *xizi*.²¹ Traditionally, *xizi* were seen as akin to prostitutes, capitalizing on their sex appeal and entertainment abilities to make a living. However, rather than presenting "players" in contrast to "new dramatists," which was what drama reformers advocated, Zhu opposed *xizi* to "entertainers," suggesting that it was the lack of dedication to professional acting, not an actor's sense of "playfulness," that caused theatre's moral and aesthetic failings.²²

Zhu Shuangyun's involvement with the production, operation, and marketization of *xinju* brought him into frequent contact with another group of theatre-makers: *juren*, who were overlooked in most historical narratives for their supposed "mediocrity." *Juren*, per Zhu's use of the term, did not possess new dramatists' artistic or political vision, nor did they, like *xizi*, master professional acting skills. But, unlike the opportunist "entertainers," *juren* were devoted to their craft and wished to receive professional training, or, in Zhu's words, to "follow others." These marginal yet central figures, neither ushering in nor deviating from broader *xinju* developments, have remained absent from both revisionist accounts that praise new drama's artistic experiments and the canonical narrative that faults new drama for its commercialization.

Zhu's gesture joined his cohort's efforts to ask the public to stop depre-

cating new drama. Yet, by turning around to analyze actors and the profession itself, Zhu captured the complexity and diversity of new drama more fully than his peers. *Xinju* no longer appeared solely to be a theatre form for amateur and intellectual dramatists to practice their artistic and social aspirations. Instead, Zhu directs his readers to understand how new drama participants from different social classes converged to form the acting profession. As *xinju* went on to develop more fully as *wenmingxi* and later *huaju*, the meanings behind Zhu's terms changed. *Juren*, for the men and women of the *huaju* stage, took on connotations similar to Zhu's "new dramatists," while *xizi*, despite Zhu's efforts, fell into disuse. In contrast, the professionalization that Zhu identified remained central to the evolving enterprise of new drama, even when commercial interests seemingly took second stage to artistic or political demands.

When Zhu wrote his second comprehensive history in 1942, he did not waver in his claims, even though *wenmingxi* by that time was thoroughly stigmatized and had yielded its place to *huaju* as an "exquisite means to agitate people's spirit of resisting Japan."²³ Zhu now characterized *wenmingxi* as "early professional *huaju*," and he supplemented his earlier account on three fronts: First, while *The History of New Drama* focused on Shanghai and Beijing up to *wenmingxi*'s 1914 "revival," Zhu's second account traces *wenmingxi*'s development from the late nineteenth century until 1930 in an expanding milieu that covers more than sixty metropolitan centers and small towns scattered across eleven provinces, ranging from Shanghai to Xiantao Town in Hubei.²⁴ Second, where Zhu in 1914 traced *wenmingxi*'s major productions, his 1942 work analyzes the operations of thirteen professional *wenmingxi* troupes. This analysis provides new and sometimes striking counternarratives against standard *huaju* history. Chief among them is Zhu's description of the practice of men and women acting together (*nannu heyuan* 男女合演) as early as the 1910s in the Prosperity Society (Minxing she 民興社) in Shanghai's French Concession. This arrangement predated the standard canonization of Hong Shen's implementation of "men and women acting together" in *The Most Important Event* (*Zhongshen dashi*) in 1923.²⁵

Although Zhu later judged his 1914 publication of the *History* as "too childish" and disorderly,²⁶ it was certainly timely, given *wenmingxi*'s rising commercial success in the 1910s. In comparison, Zhu's decision to retrace the trajectory of *wenmingxi* in 1942 appears confusing, given that by the late 1930s it was *huaju*, not *wenmingxi*, that had "attracted patriotic youth," "awakened the people," and thereby become the most dominant theatre form.²⁷ Zhu, who was aware of this shift, in his preface offered a rationale

for why the “failing history” of *wenmingxi* remained not only relevant but also crucial for the future development of *huaju*:

In the past twenty-one months [July 1937–April 1939], quite a lot of *huaju* talents have emerged. Once the War of Resistance against Japan succeeds, what will these new-born *huaju*-makers do? I predict that most will start on the path to form professional troupes. . . . The youth who have practiced *huaju* [during the war] likely won’t be able to find a better alternative but can only cling to what they are already familiar with and move onto the path of professionalization.²⁸

Zhu reminds his readers that *huaju*, after temporarily fulfilling its role as a political movement, would resume its trajectory as a profession. Zhu’s assertion is surprising, given that professionalization was roundly stigmatized even before the war due to its association with *xizi* and *wenmingxi*. Unlike “amateurs” who were celebrated for their avant-garde experiments in *huaju*’s artistic and political fronts, professional actors were considered commercially and morally corrupted. Most accounts of *huaju*’s professionalization therefore focused on developing the techniques of acting, directing, dramaturgy, and so on,²⁹ but shunned monetary concerns, not even discussing issues of actors’ income or the cost of operating a troupe. Zhu Shuangyun provides one of the first analyses to go against these trends.

Zhu identifies two distinct social groups that converged in early *wenmingxi* to chart an inevitable path toward commercial theatre professionalization: intellectual youth whose leisure interest in acting became their only means of livelihood, and opportunists and “tramps” (*youshou haoxian* 遊手好閒) who viewed *wenmingxi* as a promising means to achieve money and fame.³⁰ Zhu carefully distinguishes their various motivations and uneven levels of devotion. Intellectual amateurs, despite their original social distance from the class of *xizi*, had already collected ample theatrical experience in student performances. They were forced to undergo the process of professionalization primarily because of financial pressure after graduation. Some were even abandoned by their elite yet conservative families. Opportunists, on the other hand, had scant acting experience but viewed acting as a set of casual improvisations that they could easily master without training. In Zhu’s account, “tramps” at least saw the need for training but followed the dishonorable practice, normalized since 1914, of paying money to secure an internship in a troupe. They then became full-time actors in supporting *dan* (young female) and comical roles. It was these

untrained amateurs-cum-professionals, or the opportunists and tramps, who, Zhu asserts, eroded *wenmingxi*'s performance quality.³¹ It was thus not professionalization but the lack of professionalization that caused *wenmingxi*'s artistic decline. Zhu hoped that *huaju* would avoid such a fate after the war.

Zhu then turns to the economics of troupes and productions, as well as the urban commercial culture out of which the profession emerged. Here Zhu supplements well-known stories of the founding fathers with a general survey of *wenmingxi*'s actors, scenario-writers, and expanding repertoire of productions. "The Table of Actors," the first appendix included in Zhu's history, is a comprehensive list of theatre personnel, categorizing 164 actors by the roles they typically play.³² Under *dan*, the largest category, fifty actors are listed. There one finds critically established male *wenmingxi* veterans such as Ouyang Yuqian, Xu Banmei, and Chen Dabei, mixed with lesser-known actresses who also played *dan* roles, including Shen Nongying (潘濃影 n.d.) and Liang Yixiao (梁一嘯 n.d.) from the Prosperity Society, as well as the most commercially successful *dan* performer of them all, the male Ling Lianying (凌憐影 n.d.) of the New People's Society (Xinmin she 新民主社). Zhu, when explaining *dan* practices, details the careers of these "forgotten" celebrities, rather than highlighting male *wenmingxi* actors whose "progressive spirit" is the focus of canonical narratives.

Zhu tracks monetary details to indicate the existence and even popularity of women playing women in *wenmingxi*. By quoting box-office figures, Zhu suggests that, despite women actors' visibility in productions, their market value was much lower than that of a male player of female roles. For example, daytime tickets to see Shen Nongying and Liang Yixiao, "the two most well-known women actors in the Prosperity Society," ranged from one to two *jiao*. In contrast, the Prosperity Society once encouraged the male *dan* Ling Lianying to leave the New People's Society and join their troupe with an alluring monthly stipend of 250 yuan, plus a two-month payment in advance.³³ One can easily imagine the potential market value that Ling represented and the wage discrepancy between female and male *dan* performers in 1910s Shanghai.

Market demands also increased the need for scenario- and scriptwriters. Zhu presents fifty-four writers who were paid by and thereby maintained a long-term affiliation with ten professional Shanghai troupes in the 1910s and the 1920s, ranging from as many as nine writers working for the Progressive Troupe (Jinhua tuan 進化團) to only two for the Peace Society (Heping she 和平社). Although *wenmingxi* was known for improvisation,

it was not untamed or unregulated. Troupes that emphasized production quality, such as the Enlightenment Society (Kaiming she 開明社), staged signature plays with full-length scripts. Even for productions that relied more on improvisation, actors were required to improvise upon key lines written in scenarios.

Zhu's compilation of over three hundred *wenmingxi* production titles is yet another sign of a vibrant market. Zhu labels these plays according to costuming: "ancient costume plays" (*guzhuang ju* 古裝劇), "banner costume plays" (*qizhuang ju* 旗裝劇), "Japanese costume plays" (*Riben zhuang ju* 日本裝劇), "Western costume plays" (*xizhuang ju* 西裝劇), and "contemporary costume plays" (*shizhuang ju* 時裝劇).³⁴ While this categorization may seem archaic today, it was a convenient way to introduce the main troupes to readers in terms they could easily understand. For example, the Enlightenment Society's early repertoire was all translations from European theatres, and the troupe was known best for their Western attire.³⁵ Zhu's list affirms that the *wenmingxi* market was, as early as the 1910s, divided among several main troupes, with room for growth in each.

A professional theatre, in Zhu's reflection, relies on stable and organized troupes, an expanding production repertoire, and a healthy level of profit. Zhu's account pivots on the operational mechanism of *wenmingxi* troupes, detailing the ticket price, budgets, and box-office returns of notable productions; the income of leading actors as well as the *baoyin* 包銀, or packet of silver, given to the entire troupe;³⁶ the market division among major troupes; as well as these troupes' traveling expenses. Zhu does not view commercial practices as corruptions of the political and artistic progressiveness embedded in *wenmingxi*. Instead, he upholds monetary concerns as one of the three components of professionalization, along with technical and technological experiments in acting and staging, that wartime *huaju* might learn from *wenmingxi*. Compared to hegemonic narratives that prioritize polymath dramatists over vocational actors, Zhu's histories bring forward a more realistic, if perhaps less glamorous, picture of *huaju*'s development.

Another Backstage: Public Libraries and Catalogs

Wenmingxi as a profession did not vanish when the genre lost its market share in Shanghai in the early 1920s. Rather, it took root in other cities. Several commercial *wenmingxi* troupes, including the Director Society (Dao She 導社), led by Zhu Shuangyun himself, relocated to Hankou, where they

operated at least until 1929.³⁷ It was at this time that the Hankou Education Bureau began its official registration system for actors, turning this “hinterland” city into a center for theatre’s professionalization.

Meanwhile, another group of intellectual theatre fans devoted themselves to collecting theatre-related books, journals, and other written and visual materials to display to the public. There were at least seven sizable theatre libraries across China in the 1930s, which operated variously under the patronage of the Nationalist government, local banks, drama societies, and individual financing.³⁸ The abundance of such institutions testifies to the vibrancy of modern drama, as well as to the ever-widening network of people who could be seen as part of the field. Sadly, of these seven libraries, it appears that only the collections of Song Chunfang and Shu Weiqing were recorded in published catalogs from which we may deduce differing approaches to promoting modern drama.

In 1931, Song Chunfang,³⁹ one of China’s earliest drama theorists, invested over four thousand yuan to build his library, Coramo (Hemulu 福木廬), in a private house near Hong Shen’s residence in Qingdao. Coramo took its name from three seventeenth-century French dramatists, Pierre Corneille (1606–1684), Jean Racine (1639–1699), and Molière (1622–1673). Song’s contemporaries revered him as a “world drama book collector” for having acquired over seventy-eight hundred copies of plays, drama theories and criticism, drama histories, journals, and Chinese opera scripts during two trips to Europe in 1912–1916 and 1920.⁴⁰ Such a rich collection gave Song the clout to inscribe drama in the popular discourse of the “literature reformation” of the late 1910s. Indeed, Song’s “Catalog of a Hundred Modern Signature Plays” (Jindai mingxi baizhong mu 近代名戲百種) appeared alongside essays by Hu Shi and Fu Sinian in the pivotal 1918 drama issue of *New Youth*.⁴¹ Song’s further essays helped to introduce expressionism, futurism, and other European and American theatre styles to the Chinese dramatic community in the following decades.⁴² The library also served as a salon where contemporary dramatists and cultural figures such as Hu Shi, Hong Shen, Liang Shiqiu, and Li Jianwu could consolidate their drama network in the 1930s, and it even continued to be a place of inspiration and refuge for dramatists during the Second Sino-Japanese War.⁴³ Between 1932 and 1938, Song compiled or published three more catalogs, including two specifically of the Coramo collection, but was forced to stop due to ill health.⁴⁴ While Song’s efforts undoubtedly contributed to knowledge of world theatre, his private collection of original works in Western languages predominately attracted intellectuals who shared with him similar interests, language skills, and study-abroad experiences. Consequently, the esoterically

named “Coramo Library” remained far removed from readers who were more familiar with the domestic development of modern drama.

Shu Weiqing, in Hankou, echoed Song’s efforts at amassing a robust collection of theatre-related materials, but he did so with the agenda that such a collection would be less theoretical and more empirical, and more representative of Chinese than European trends. Shu aspired to reach all “friends of theatre” (*juyou* 劇友),⁴⁵ regardless of educational or professional background. Under the patronage of the Hankou Bank, Shu transformed his private collection of modern drama materials into the Modern Drama Library (Xiandai xiju tushu guan 現代戲劇圖書館), giving city residents free access.⁴⁶ One year later, on October 10, 1933, Shu further engaged the Hankou public, organizing *The First Modern Theatre Material Culture Exhibition* (*Di yijie xiandai xiju wenwu zhanlan hui* 第一屆現代戲劇文物展覽會) in the Han Voice Small Theatre (Hansheng xiaojuchang 漢聲小劇場).⁴⁷ There Shu exhibited his collection of posters, programs, tickets, and advertisements of productions from 1908 to the 1930s, as well as written records of manifestos, public speeches, reports, rosters, and special issues published by professional and amateur theatre troupes and drama schools.⁴⁸ Rather than preserving his treasure for connoisseurs, Shu leveraged his holdings into an institution of mass education, stimulating the circulation of knowledge and practices of *huaju*.

Unfortunately, such generosity led to the loss, either by theft, neglect, or damage, of over two hundred works, which prompted Shu to embark on a second round of collecting. He first attempted to replace his lost copies by reaching out to established publishing houses,⁴⁹ and then placed advertisements in Tianjin’s *Cover the World Newspaper* (*Gaishi bao* 蓋世報), Beijing’s *Chenbao*, and Hankou’s *Wuhan Daily* (*Wuhan ribao* 武漢日報), offering to pay high prices for the pieces he still needed. Finally, he teamed up with his younger sister, Shu Fuli (舒傳儷 n.d.), to scrounge antique shops and book stalls in Hunan, Hubei, and Jiangxi. Shu’s determined efforts illustrate the expanding scope of *huaju*’s backstage network, which by the mid-1930s had moved beyond professionals, fans, and financiers, to include publishers and booksellers, as well as experienced collectors.

Thanks to these efforts, the collection was largely recovered by 1938. Nevertheless, the library’s regular operations were unable to resume, given that Hankou’s landscape, citizenry, and public culture had become profoundly altered by the flood of war refugees from coastal China. Shu Weiqing decided that reopening the collection in such an environment would be impractical, and so took a different route: First, he sold a small portion of his collection (at the price of fifty thousand yuan) to the Ministry of Edu-

cation to become part of the NDS library.⁵⁰ Second, he compiled and self-published *Catalog: Books of Modern Drama*, a work intended to present published works of modern drama and the history of theatre production over the preceding three decades.⁵¹ Shu's *Catalog* centers *huaju* history on the economic, aesthetic, and political dimensions of book publishing.

Shu, in his preface to the *Catalog*, identifies Li Shizeng's (李石曾 1881–1973) translation of *Before the Night Ends* (*Ye wei yang* 夜未央) in 1908 as the first publication of modern drama.⁵² Shu from there unfolds how cosmopolitan dramatists' advocacy for the social elevation of theatre affected the economics and the élan of drama publishing. Since the May Fourth Movement, he relates, a general interest in reading and performing modern dramas has emerged, which slowly transformed published plays from "strange books that were similar but inferior to fictions" to celebrated works of literature that were even part of the educational apparatus.⁵³ Drama books, once an object of societal scorn, now carried legitimacy in the process of social reproduction. Of course, this progressive turn did not develop totally unimpeded. Shu's own efforts to complete a "general ledger" of the achievements and limits of drama publications had, sadly, encountered successive rounds of suspicion, contempt, and censorship: "It even became so bad that no one dared to publish, sell, act, or collect."⁵⁴ Shu writes how opposition, both from the general public, and, at times, the political authorities, repeatedly kept him from achieving his goal. It was only thanks to the broader realization that *huaju* was a weapon for national defense that the importance of Shu's work was at last recognized. The grandiosity of such claims aside, Shu's account is significant in that it provides another backstage perspective on *huaju*'s development, one where book publishers and collectors are just as important as performers and playwrights.

Having laid out a compelling alternative history of modern drama in the preface, Shu in his postscript describes the preparatory work for his cataloging project. The idea was first proposed—and much of the initial work conducted—by Shu Weiqing's younger sister, Shu Fuli, in the fall of 1936, while the two were busy recovering the many lost pieces of the ill-fated public exhibition. Her advocacy for the project derived from her diagnosis of the problem embedded in the so-called script hunger (*juben huang*) of the 1930s.⁵⁵ For Shu Fuli, the "hunger" in Hankou and urban China more broadly did not stem from a lack of creativity, but from the absence of effective backstage (and institutional) coordination between text and stage, individual dramatists and the community of *juren*, and ideology and practice. Almost every theatre organization, both professional troupes and drama societies associated with schools and institutions, faced difficulties when



Fig. 13. Shu Weiqing's *Catalog: Books of Modern Drama*. Zhang Daofan, who had previously initiated state funding for NDS, inscribed the title for the *Catalog*. Wan Laiming (萬籟鳴 1900–1997), the pioneer of Chinese animation, designed and painted the cover. Shu Chang, ed., *Xiandai xiju tushu mulu* (現代戲劇圖書目錄 *Catalog: Books of Modern Drama*) (Hankou: Xiandai xiju tushuguan, 1938). Courtesy of the Shanghai Library.

it searched for appropriate plays, staging techniques, and instructions on performance practices. Inevitably, dramatists would turn to unsystematic book lists put together by journals or publishers. Not only were these lists not comprehensive, they might be misleading, mistaking plays with fiction, blending published playscripts with those that were advertised but never printed, or listing plays that appeared in journals as independent publications. All these inaccuracies could make finding an original source difficult. Thus, there was a need for a rigorously edited catalog of a substantial collection.

Shu Fuli, with Shu Weiqing's approval, categorized her brother's collection into "drama theory," "scripts," "drama journals," and "illustrations and photography." It thus offered theatre troupes not only a list of what dramas to stage, but also specific information on how to stage them through a comprehensive list of works on staging techniques, scriptwriting, directorship, acting, makeup, costuming, scenography, and lighting. It helped transmit the experiences recorded in theatre and film journals and even offered photographs from Mass Education Movement theatre productions that depicted proven performance practices for mass education. The *Catalog* further presented theatre as an educational tool by including children's theatre. Shu's collection thus reflected the broadening of *huaju*-makers' self-identity in the 1930s, but it could also serve as a conduit for that broadening.

Shu Fuli, operating under the shadow of her brother, served as advocate, collector, and copyeditor of the *Catalog*. Her "invisible" presence in constructing *huaju* history is significant. In the 1930s, "women of theatre" were noted for either the roles they played onstage or as key figures in tabloid newspapers and offstage gossip. Either way, they circulated in dominant narratives more as products of cultural consumption than as forces with their own cultural agency. Shu Fuli's direct involvement in making the *Catalog* effectively countered such misrepresentation. For example, the work's taxonomy included nine entries under "Selected Plays by Women Writers" (Nü zuojia xiju xuan 女作家戲劇選). Here one finds plays by Bai Wei (白薇 1894–1987), one of the few established women dramatists of the 1930s, alongside lesser-known works, such as *Reunion* (*Chongfeng* 重逢), written by the actress Zhao Huishen (趙慧深 1914–1967).⁵⁶ By taking such an inclusive approach, Shu Fuli boldly indicated another path for women of theatre to find their agency: from frontstage to backstage.

It may seem odd that it was Shu Weiqing who served as the primary force behind the most comprehensive catalog of modern Chinese drama in the first half of the twentieth century. After all, Shu was not a drama-

tist, a director, an actor, or even a staging technician. Yet he invested both his capital and his creativity in *huaju*. Shu spent all his financial gains as a Hankou banker to collect drama-related materials and publish his catalog, and so represents a kind of “cultural entrepreneur.” The high-profile and importance of cultural entrepreneurs, elided by later scholarship, was not unrecognized by contemporary *juven* in the 1930s and 1940s. *Annals*, a leftist *huaju*, not only pointed to such a force, but actually unfolded its retelling of *huaju* history around the personal life of one key cultural entrepreneur, Ying Yunwei.

Asserting Their Worth: Left-Wing *Juren* in Chongqing

In November and December 1943, two national newspapers, the unaligned *Impartial* (*Dagong bao*) and Communist Party–run *New China Daily* (*Xinhua ribao* 新華日報), ran a series of advertisements to promote *Annals of Theatre*, a five-act, seven-scene *huaju* that dramatized the real-life struggles of Chinese *juven* from the early 1910s to the late 1930s. Although the use of newspaper ads to promote theatre productions was in itself nothing new, *Annals*’ use of the ads to highlight the production’s artistic, entertainment, and social significance is striking for its effective marketing, as well as for revealing the cultural and historical importance attributed to China’s first metadrama, a *huaju* about *huaju*-making.

The first advertisement for *Annals* appeared in *The Impartial* to coincide with the play’s debut at the Silver Society (Yinshe 銀社), a theatre in Chongqing, on November 14, 1943.⁵⁷ Highlighting the all-star cast and Zheng Junli’s (鄭君里 1911–1969) directorship,⁵⁸ the advertisement underscored the play’s unique intertwining of the history of *huaju* with the struggles of those who were themselves immersed in China’s drama movement. The advertisement indicates that the play reflects the lives of *juven*, dramatizing “the glory of the blood and tears in the drama movement of the past thirty years; the epic of the faithful struggling of thousands of drama workers!”⁵⁹ Three days later, a second advertisement in *The Impartial* promoted the publication of the script, detailing the play’s time frame and main theme:

This play depicts the drama history that initiated from civilized new drama (*wenming xinju* 文明新劇) in the May Fourth Movement up to the New Theatre Movement taking place around the August 13 anti-Japanese resistance. The script is charged with many blood-soaked and tear-inducing stories and loaded with revolutionary thoughts

supporting resistance against warlords and imperialists. This play is a historical document of Chinese theatre! Readers of this play are indeed reading the history of Chinese drama!⁶⁰

In this manner, the advertisements for *Annals* in *The Impartial* presented the play as more than just “entertainment” for a war-weary populace, but as an authoritative summary of modern Chinese drama’s development, which, much like the war against Japan, was a heroic and glorious struggle.

Annals’ success in November quickly promoted a second round of performances, making twenty-four in total, starting on December 9. During this round of production, *New China Daily* printed three different ads: The first focused on the play’s continued run in Chongqing that December and included excerpts of positive reviews published in other newspapers, affirming that *Annals*, “as a history drama,” should be seen by “all drama workers, drama fans, and every single Chinese man and woman.”⁶¹ The reviews mentioned in the ad specifically linked the drama’s undeniable success with its artistic qualities, that is, its dramatic structure with its graceful dynamics and touching interludes, the excellent performances, and the director’s painstaking organization and vision. The second ad claimed that the new round of performances was initiated by the Chongqing city government to raise money to build the Huaxiang Airport, which was to be used for both civil and national defense purposes. With a clear eye toward box-office revenue, the second ad presented two pairs of couplets, packaging *Annals* as a melodrama capable of giving its audience both laughter and tears:

The intertwining of love and hatred,
The mixed drink of laughter and tears;
Entrusting feelings on the ebb and flow,
Placed in sorrow and joy, separation and reunion.⁶²

The third ad focused on the drama’s reception offstage, stating that certain dialogues in the play were already on Chongqing’s lips. It claimed that *Annals* was discussed heatedly “in offices, on campus, at home, and generally in all public [spaces].”⁶³ Thus, if the first series of ads in *The Impartial* presented *Annals* as a heroic story, worthy in itself, those in *New China Daily* relied on external sources to testify to the play’s value.

The ads’ claims were not hyperbole. *Annals* indeed struck a chord among audiences and critics alike. Positive word-of-mouth and an impressive box-office take resulted in its final run being extended for two weeks, from

December 12 to December 28.⁶⁴ By the time of these final performances, Zhou Enlai (周恩來 1898–1976), himself a sophisticated theatre fan and *wenmingxi* veteran during his youth in Tianjin in the 1910s, definitively proclaimed, albeit through the mediation of Zhang Ying's (張穎 b. 1923) drama review,⁶⁵ that “among the many *huaju* productions staged this year, [I may say] that *Annals of Theatre* is the one that is best scripted and most worth watching.”⁶⁶ Judging from the advertisements, box-office revenue, and favorable reviews, the playmakers behind *Annals* appear to have discovered the sweet spot that allowed their production to reap the best possible popular, aesthetic, critical, and political returns. Just what was *Annals*, and why was it so successful?

Annals depicts the decline of *wenmingxi* in 1921 (Act 1); the disintegration of an amateur theatre troupe in 1926, right before the Northern Expedition (1926–1928) (Act 2); the formulation and fragmentation of the drama field under the pressures of Japanese invasion, economic retrenchment, and professionalization between 1935 and 1937 (Acts 3 and 4); and finally, the reunion of China's people of theatre to fight against, on both the theatre and world stage, Japan through the large-scale production *Defend the Marco Polo Bridge* (*Baowei Lugou qiao* 保衛盧溝橋) in 1939 (Act 5). Against the political context established in each act, while restaging selective excerpts of signature *wenmingxi*, amateur dramas, and large-scale performances, *Annals* predominantly foregrounds the “backstage” anecdotes, gossip, and behind-the-scenes activities of its leading characters: Lu Xiankui (based on Ying Yunwei), Jiang Han (based on Tian Han), and Tang Qianqian (the archetypal degenerate woman star). *Annals* thus creates a complex three-layered theatricality through its representations of history, reproduction of excerpts from signature plays, and, most important, depiction of the “backstage” preparations for these “frontstage” performances.

Annals' thematic concerns about the “blood and tears” struggles of *juven* made the play instantly distinguishable from the many propaganda-driven dramas that highlighted the Nationalist government's dual agendas of “defending the nation” (*guofang* 國防) and “constructing the state” (*jianguo* 建國). However, one should not take this difference to mean that *Annals* was apolitical. By the early 1940s, the tradition of delivering political content in *huaju* plays via historical allegory or other seemingly nonpolitical themes was well established. Guo Moruo's (郭沫若 1892–1978) five-act historical play *Qu Yuan* (屈原, 1942) was successfully debuted by Ying Yunwei's China Dramatic Society (Zhonghua juyi she 中華劇藝社, aka Zhongyi), the first civilian drama troupe in Chongqing. *Qu Yuan*'s plot was based on events that took place in the Chu Kingdom (1030–223 BCE), but spectators “knew that

King Huai of Chu referred to Chiang Kai-shek” and that “Qu Yuan represented the common fate of the revolutionary cultural workers at the time.”⁶⁷ A seemingly “historical” play could thus offer subtle critiques of contemporary issues. Inspired by the success of *Qu Yuan*, Zhou Enlai proposed the organization of another troupe for the sake of further consolidating the progressive drama movement in Chongqing: The China Drama and Art Society (Zhongguo yishu jieshe 中國藝術劇社, aka Zhongshu) was founded by Xia Yan, Song Zhidi, Yu Ling, and others in December 1942.

Annals, Zhongshu’s best-known production, delivered social commentary on two interrelated “problems” caused by the Nationalists’ governing and war policies. First, the frequent interruption of *ju ren*’s *huaju*-making endeavors by political powers, both warlords and Japan, served as the play’s primary conflict. Its portrayal of *ju ren*’s furious complaints against—and creative negotiations with—political powers was an indirect means to express the frustration that Chongqing dramatists, including the members of Zhongshu, faced in their everyday struggles against the Nationalist government’s censorship. Second, from Act 2 to Act 4, *Annals* constructs its drama history through the split within the drama field between bohemians-cum-revolutionaries, on the one hand, and Shanghai-style cultural entrepreneurs, on the other. However, for the sake of national salvation, these two polarized groups unite in the final act to resist the Japanese. Making the reunion of the drama field the play’s climax was a not-too-subtle way for Zhongshu to show its political sympathy for the CCP. Although the Communists and Nationalists were still technically allied in the Second United Front, cooperation between the two had ceased following the New Fourth Army Incident of January 7–13, 1941. By highlighting the importance of unity, Zhongshu indirectly criticized the Nationalists, who, in Communist discourse, were to blame for the Front’s *de facto* collapse. In this regard, the drama’s narrative about *huaju*’s history and factionalism illuminated both the war effort and the political struggle between China’s main parties.

Even before the play began, clever audience members would have been able to grasp *Annals*’ intended link between the fate of *ju ren* and that of the Chinese nation. A dramatic blending of historical reality and mythical allegory was alluded to in the drama’s “preface” (*kai pian* 開篇). Xia, Song, and Yu, speaking in a sentimental and poetic voice, employ the martyr image of Saint Christopher to depict the selflessness of playwrights:

*To one person,
To a group of people,*

To those who still stand up,
 To those who already fell,
 We sing,
 We weep,
 We annalize (*chunqiu* 春秋) our saints.
 The dawn is coming,
 We glorify our heroes.
 It has been a long run,
 Saint Christopher, exhausted, turns and looks at the child on his back,
 Ah, you, the tiring,
 forthcoming tomorrow!⁶⁸

Drawing parallels between Saint Christopher, who carried the Christ child on his back across a hazardous river and the similarly exhausted *juren* who had by that time trudged through three decades' worth of difficulties making plays, the "preface" depicts *juren* as China's "future-bearers" who sacrificed on behalf of their still-fragile nation.

Ever since the drama reformation of the late Qing, a conscious self-elevation and repositioning of performers—from (sexual) laborers to artists and performative intellectuals—was intertwined with a Western-inspired enlightenment discourse that saw drama and theatre not as commercial entertainment, but as social education. By affirming that *juren* were directly engaged in making histories and preparing for China's future, *Annals* expands upon this discourse. The play's "preface" links the rhetoric of documenting history—"annalizing" in the Chinese sense—with Saint Christopher's service to Christ to make new metaphors for performers and theatrical undertakings. *Juren* and their playmaking, in the drama's canonization, were *sheng* 聖 according to both the Chinese ("sages") and the Western ("saints") understanding. No longer were they mere performers who "entertained" their audience—*juren* were recorders of history and prophets of the coming age.

Why Stage the Annals?

Xia, Song, and Yu's collective attempt to place this *juren*-centered account of *huaju* within the canonical history of modern theatre required, first and foremost, an agreed-upon portrait of *juren* themselves, both in their archetypal leadership roles among the drama community and in their everyday approach to playmaking in 1940s Chongqing. Although Zhu Shuangyun had already applied his "rectification of names" to professional *wenmingxi*

actors in 1914, the left-wing dramatists behind *Annals* notably disregarded it. *Xizi* retained its derogatory connotation in the play, appearing only when referring to “reactionary forces,” such as 1920s policemen belonging to warlord governments and 1930s philistines who monopolize the Shanghai entertainment market. *Juren*, on the other hand, was embraced by the playwrights, who invested the term with a sense of selflessness and national commitment. This elevation of *juren*, no longer marking playmakers who simply “follow others,” reflected both historical and practical factors. As for *xin xiju jia* (new dramatists), which Zhu had used in the 1910s to designate theatre reformers, it had been replaced in popular usage by simply *xiju jia* (戲劇家 dramatists), perhaps reflecting that modern drama was no longer “new.” *Xiju jia*, like its predecessor, emphasized the intellectual and literary qualities of leading figures in the field. Although *xiju jia* was still commonly used in public discussions of scripts and productions, left-wing dramatists increasingly felt that *juren* was better suited for describing the totality of their profession.⁶⁹ Indeed, during the two decades leading up to the early 1940s, under the influence of modern dramatists as well as the market, the understanding of “writing *huaju*” (*xie ju* 寫劇) gradually became subsumed within the conception of “making *huaju*” (*gan xi* 幹戲).⁷⁰ This resulted in a growing recognition in drama circles that *huaju*-making demanded collaborative work from playwrights, directors, performers, technicians, and other intellectual, performative, and manual laborers—all of the “men and women of theatre.” The change from *xiju jia* to *juren* represented an important step in the professionalization of the drama field, showing that *huaju*’s self-identity had moved from being a literary genre to a theatrical production.

Accompanying this shift was Shanghai intellectuals’ “turn” to left-wing culture in the 1930s.⁷¹ *Huaju*, influenced by Japan’s left-wing drama movement, also gained a “red” hue.⁷² China’s left-wing drama movement began in 1929 with the establishment of the Shanghai Art Drama Society (Shanghai yishu jushe 上海藝術劇社), an organization founded by Xia Yan allegedly under the leadership of the CCP.⁷³ The movement expanded in the early 1930s after the Shanghai Art Drama Society was joined by Zuo Ming’s (左明 1902–1941) radical Modern Society (Modeng she 摩登社), which had separated from Tian Han’s Southern Society, and Zhu Rangcheng’s (朱穰丞 1901–1943) Xinyou Drama Society (Xinyou jushe 辛酉劇社). Collectively, these three groups formed the initial leading force behind left-wing drama.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, the League of Left-Wing Dramatists was officially founded in 1931 under the supervision of the CCP with the goal of influencing Chinese society to move in a “progressive” direction. Accordingly, *juren*

affiliated with this organization gained the label of “left-wing” and were frequently (mis)represented as prioritizing political pursuits above all else. Although the image of left-wing *juren* “going amongst the urban proletarian masses” and “raising the class consciousness of workers through their dramatic production”⁷⁵ is certainly romantic, it does not reveal the range of political, commercial, and artistic pressures that they faced.

Thankfully, recent scholarship has begun to address how left-wing cultural workers juggled such concerns. Zhang Zhen argues against the problematic view of left-wing films as an “isolated radical movement within the predominantly commercial Shanghai film industry.”⁷⁶ Instead, the movement “emerged and thrived in a moment in Chinese and international film history when multiple ideological and aesthetic inclinations coexisted and commingled as much as they collided.” In a similar vein, Liang Luo challenges the “widely accepted rhetoric of radical conversion, a move from the ‘aesthetic’ school to the ‘proletarian’ camp among Chinese intellectuals around the year 1930.”⁷⁷ Luo argues that the interpenetration between the avant-garde (artistic pursuits) and the vanguard (political goals) was not only “possible” but common in the Nanjing Decade. Luo’s configuration of the political with the artistic, along with the commercial and the popular, reverberates with the scholarship of Ge Fei, who situates the 1930s left-wing drama movement within Shanghai’s “mosaic” of urban culture. In Ge’s construction, Shanghai’s left-wing drama movement included bohemians, revolutionaries, and moneymakers. Left-wing dramas could be either “conventional” ones that sought to arouse political agitation or “controversial” ones that earned a substantial profit but were criticized by other *juren* for not being sufficiently political.⁷⁸ I press the questions raised by the above-mentioned scholars and examine how left-wing *juren* situated themselves in the “real world” of Chongqing in the 1940s, where commercial, political, and artistic demands were ever present.

Xia’s, Song’s, and Yu’s efforts at self-identification and self-fashioning through drama were undoubtedly affected by the political and social uncertainties of Chongqing during those “grim years” (1942–1944) when war weariness took root in the temporary capital.⁷⁹ While the Nationalist Party maintained the optimistic goal of defeating Japan in the international arena through the support of its foreign allies—the United States, Britain, and the USSR—its alliance with the CCP in the domestic context of national resistance was less assured. Communists and liberals increasingly criticized the Nationalist government for its corruption and indecisiveness. At the same time, the Nationalists became more suspicious of left-leaning literature and enacted more stringent controls over publishing and perfor-

mance. Meanwhile, the worsening economic situation, including inflation, commodity shortages, and graft by compradors, turned Chongqing into a nightmarish city where the future could not be imagined. Left-wing *juven* needed to negotiate strategically with the government's circumscribed tolerance of the Left as well as with the despondent public spirit. It was in the light of such concerns that Song Zhidi first proposed to stage "*juven*" writ-large by reflecting upon Ying Yunwei's life story and his enduring dedication to *huaju* over the past three decades.

The way *Annals* was proposed and written testifies to the established wartime drama network. Ying, the leader of Zhongyi, was responsible for staging more than thirty *huaju* and more than eighty performances, mostly progressive, in Chongqing, Chengdu, Wuhan, and Shanghai.⁸⁰ According to Xia Yan, several of his signature plays, including *Under Shanghai Eaves* (*Shanghai wuyan xia*, 1937) and *The Fascist Germ* (*Faxisi xijun* 法西斯細菌, 1942), were only completed because of Ying's forceful insistence:

The summer of 1942 was unbearably scorching hot. I slept on the floor with my door open. It was around midnight when I was in a deep sleep that I felt a man suddenly fall on top of me, giving me a great shock. It was Ying Yunwei. He said, "We don't have any plays to stage for this year's fog season festival; you have to write something for me." Ying forced me to turn in a play by the end of August and insisted on sitting on my bedroom floor until I agreed.⁸¹

Yang Hansheng and Zhou Enlai had originally recommended Ying in 1941 to be the "official" founder of Zhongyi because of his "neutral" political stance, established reputation in the drama field, and previous experience running the Shanghai Theatre Association (Shanghai xiju xieshe 上海戲劇協社, hereafter STA) in the 1920s. Ying took his leadership role seriously and became responsible for raising funds, recruiting theatre talent, finding plays, and negotiating both with Nationalist censorship and with middlemen in the theatre market.

Ying's achievements impressed *juven* of different political persuasions, while his excellent networking skills and optimistic spirit earned him sympathy and respect. When theatre and cinema talents in Chongqing celebrated Ying's fortieth birthday at the Central Youth Drama Society (Zhongyang qingnian jushe 中央青年劇社, aka Zhongqing) in September 1943, Xia Yan commented: "If the history of the newly developing modern Chinese drama were to be told via the biography of a particular dramatist, Yunwei

would be the ideal candidate.”⁸² Enthusiastically echoing Xia’s suggestion, Song Zhidi proposed transforming Xia’s casual recognition of Ying’s play-making activities into a theatrical venture capable of bringing both economic capital to Zhongshu and cultural capital to the drama field:

We have glorified the fields of journalism and education since the outbreak of the War of Resistance because they contributed unimaginable efforts to war propaganda and education. But how about our drama field? . . . We don’t want to complain that no one credits our work. However, we should look back on our journey these past two decades and see all we have suffered and gone through. Let’s write a play. We can name it *Annals of Theatre*. . . . Zhongshu has no plays to produce [because of the censorship]. . . . Let’s work on this drama. Such a theme will easily spark everyone’s interest in writing.⁸³

Song’s proposal received Xia’s immediate support. Recognizing that Ying’s legendary life dovetailed nicely with the course of China’s drama movement in the 1910s to the 1930s, Xia designated Ying as the archetype for writing the history of modern Chinese drama based on the life stories of left-wing *juven*.

Xia, Song, and Yu were further motivated by the urgency they felt to publish and stage a play that could pass the tightening Nationalist censorship. Since 1937, with the flood of politically progressive theatre talents to Chongqing, and with *huaju*’s increasing popularity as both a propaganda weapon and a mass medium, the Nationalist regime had issued and revised a series of legal acts to regulate drama troupes and their public performances. The party-state aimed to “tame” the political activism of *huaju* and make *huaju* and the drama network in general its own political weapons. However, as Ma Junshan’s archival work has shown, the Nationalist vision and definition of drama remained ambiguous and constantly shifted between seeing it as a “political tool” and an “entertainment commodity.”⁸⁴ While traditional theatre troupes were allowed to perform freely, *huaju* troupes were subject to regulation from both local party branches and the central headquarters. Therefore, many of the early drama troupes that performed in the Chongqing area, such as Zhongqing, the Central Film Studio (Zhongdian 中電), and the China Film Studio (Zhongzhi 中職), ran under state supervision.⁸⁵ This monopoly was briefly challenged by the emergence of commercial troupes in the early 1940s, such as Ying Yunwei’s Zhongyi. However, in 1942, the Nationalist government announced that all

published play scripts and performances staged in Chongqing were subject to review by the Central Books and Journals Censorship Committee (Zhongyang tushu zazhi shencha hui 中央圖書雜誌審查會).⁸⁶

Zhongshu, which leaned left, had felt the effects of government censorship directly.⁸⁷ Although its initial production, *Calling from the Homeland* (*Zuguo zai zhaohuan* 祖國在召喚), directed by Hong Shen in December 1942, was staged without incident, Zhongshu's two proposed follow-up plays (names unknown) were both aborted because of Nationalist bowdlerization, and the company did not stage another work until September 1943.⁸⁸ For the sake of maintaining the troupe, a play was needed that could not only evade censorship but also appeal to a mass audience. In light of such demands, an "objective" play about the history of the modern drama field would be easier to stage than an overtly political work.

Although Xia, Song, and Yu often struggled to complete their plays in time to satisfy the many (semi-)professional drama troupes' hunger for stageable scripts, their collective efforts at writing *Annals* were surprisingly smooth, and the script was completed in just a month. Song recalls: "We all felt that we had a lot to contribute to this theme."⁸⁹ Apart from the passion these dramatists shared for the topic and their familiarity with the materials, their concord regarding this drama's theatrical presentation was another reason for the play's easy genesis. Namely, they agreed that it should foreground the backstage *huaju*-making activities of *Ying* and other *ju ren*.

The backstage focus of *Annals* was not merely a convenient choice and staging tactic to accommodate plot development. This turn backward also provided Xia, Song, and Yu a new vantage point from which to address the three persistent but often frustrating goals that had guided *huaju*'s development for the past three decades: professionalization, popularization, and politicization. Instead of prioritizing one above the other two, the writers of *Annals* demonstrated the intricate relationship that existed among these three demands. The drama sought to expand audiences and critics' view of *huaju*, guiding them to judge it not solely as literature or performance, but to include an appreciation of the efforts made by *ju ren* to resolve the genre's inherent conflicts.

The Two Paradoxes of Huaju

What fundamentally motivated Xia, Song, and Yu's collaborative reflection of the *huaju* movement, or as Song framed it, "the difficult path we have trudged,"⁹⁰ lay in a pair of bewildering paradoxes: (1) *huaju*'s high visibility

in both metropolitan and rural China combined with the increasing difficulties left-wing *juren* faced when it came to popularization and professionalization; and (2) the dilemma of commercialism, or the difficulty of creating a popular yet politically relevant form of *huaju* that would be accepted by both the masses and critics. *Annals* offered solutions to both conundrums.

The 1930s saw *huaju* become a popular art form that thrived in Shanghai's cultural mediasphere.⁹¹ During the second half of the decade, "large-theatre" (*da juchang* 大劇場) blockbusters, such as *Thunderstorm*, *Sai Jinhua* (賽金花, 1936), and *Wu Zetian* (武則天, 1937), ran full-house marathon performances averaging over thirty days each.⁹² In fact, *huaju*'s profits and public recognition forced the Carleton, Shanghai's most famous cinema, to accommodate spoken drama performances in 1937.⁹³ *Huaju*'s public visibility further expanded geographically from metropolitan cities to rural China thanks to the traveling performances provided by (semi-)professional drama troupes organized by both political parties and by students. According to Chang-tai Hung's modest estimate, more than twenty-five hundred units organized traveling performances of *huaju* in rural areas during the war period, involving some seventy-five thousand participants.⁹⁴ By the 1940s, *huaju* had become a staple in the modern metropolitan play and cinema palaces as well as rural makeshift stages.

Nevertheless, how to uphold and practice "popularization" was an open question. In line with the avant-garde call of the 1920s to "go to the people," "popularization" remained the dominant agenda of *huaju* discourse, especially among *juren* who identified as left-wing. However, the actual practice of left-wing drama ironically departed from this ideal when it left student campuses to embrace a broad urban audience in Shanghai. After the January 28 Incident, a five-week war between China and Japan in 1932, left-wing drama turned from (underground) agitation to creating a mass medium to compete with cinema, opera, and local or folk performances. As their dramas began to be staged in modern playhouses and cinema palaces, the majority of left-wing *juren* joined commercial drama troupes and cultural institutions. The minimalist technical design and unsystematic rehearsals that once defined *huaju* performances no longer sufficed to serve the new demand of profitability. *Juren* were thus confronted with new challenges shaping their strategies for and ideals of writing, staging, and marketing plays.⁹⁵

Left-wingers had to accept that a production's budget needed to cover, at minimum, the rent of a venue, the expense of designing and making stage sets and costumes, and actors' living expenses for rehearsals that often lasted a week or more. Such high production costs made for expensive tickets. For example, in the early 1930s, an average *huaju* ticket in Shanghai cost

around one yuan compared to half a yuan for a film ticket.⁹⁶ *Huaju*'s higher ticket prices meant that its patrons were predominantly drawn from financially comfortable households. As a result, the popularity of *huaju* in Shanghai and other metropolitan centers in fact excluded the intended objects of *huaju* popularization—the working poor. Even among those who could afford *huaju* tickets, the agenda of popularization did not go smoothly. Ge Fei writes that the large-theatre *huaju* audience broke down into three groups, each possessing a distinct cultural identity: students and intellectual elites; the so-called petty urbanites (*xiao shimin* 小市民) who remained aloof to the enlightenment discourse and upheld lowbrow cultural consumption; and those who had received middle to higher education, were no longer students, and did not share the petty urbanites' lowbrow tastes.⁹⁷ As one might expect, these different cultural identities generated distinct inquiries about and understandings of *huaju*, which prompted *juren* to adjust their strategies for selecting dramatic literature and their visions of *huaju*'s social function. The diverse cultural expectations of the petty urbanite audience in particular made it difficult for left-wingers to maintain their artistic radicalism and cultural elitism. *Annals*' metadiscourse of canonizing drama history was directly situated in *juren*'s personal experiences of these problems associated with *huaju* popularization, and it was intended to be a gateway for left-wing drama veterans to address them. In Ying Yunwei, Song, Xia, and Yu presented an example of a successful *juren* who had demonstrably solved the first paradox—how to boost *huaju* professionalization while keeping the genre within the reach of the masses both aesthetically and financially.

The second paradox lay in creating a *huaju* that would be embraced by the public while remaining “politically correct” in the eyes of critics. *Annals*' attempt to chart the historical narrative of *huaju* in a leftist fashion through the dramatization of Ying's theatrical activities distantly echoes Xia's and Song's previous plays, the blockbusters *Sai Jinhua* and *Wu Zetian*, which created media storms when they were staged in Shanghai. Both plays received scathing critiques from left-wing dramatists due to Xia's and Song's sensuous characterizations of these controversial historical figures as well for these plays' abundant visual “gimmicks” (*xuetou* 噱頭), a feature common for *wenmingxi* but scolded by *huaju* practitioners.

Sai Jinhua, endorsed by the CCP, was Xia's first major play. It dramatized the alleged liaison of the courtesan Sai Jinhua (1874–1936) with the German field marshal Count Alfred von Waldersee (1832–1904) and her contribution to defending Beijing against the allied foreign occupation after the Boxer Rebellion. Xia not only transformed Sai from “sensuous vixen to saintly (if

underemployed) goddess";⁹⁸ more important, the heroine's troubled—both sexually and morally—story empowered Xia to reflect on the political scene of mid-1930s China and satirize the Nationalist regime's weak response to the increasing threat from Japan. Unfortunately for Xia, government censors quickly deciphered his satire of the Nationalists via his sympathetic characterization of a patriotic courtesan. In early 1937, after a performance in Nanjing, *Sai Jinhua* was banned for "defaming historical figures."⁹⁹

Ironically, Xia and *Sai Jinhua's* leftist position did not spare the author or his play criticism within cultural circles. By early fall 1936, when *Sai Jinhua* had only been published as a script but not yet staged, it had already become a contested terrain for literary debates and power struggles within the League of Left-Wing Writers, sparking ideological rows between the "national defense literature" campaign led by Xia Yan, Zhou Yang, and others, and the "mass literature of nationalist revolutionary war" faction led by Lu Xun.¹⁰⁰ In Lu Xun's sarcastic reading, Xia's greatest accomplishment was turning *Sai Jinhua* from a courtesan to "the Goddess of the Ninth Heaven," thereby creating a new theme of "courtesan plus national defense."¹⁰¹ By making the story of a prostitute, not China's resistance, his work's "most central theme," Xia actually went against his faction's core position that "the theme of 'national defense' should be the most central theme of all non-traitor writers' works."¹⁰² Xia's efforts to inspire popular sentiment for national defense, Lu charged, were disingenuous and echoed tricks employed by popular magazines whose superficially fluffy contents, such as "Wonderful Tips for Cosmetology" and "Secrets in a Nunnery," were masked by revolutionarily charged cover stories.¹⁰³

Lu Xun's criticism of Xia gained further endorsement. From a purist's perspective, it was debatable whether *Sai Jinhua* should have been considered a *huaju* at all. Defying the genre's tendency for economical usage of scenes and characters, Xia's seven-act work demanded both grand sets and numerous characters to tell its sensuous story. Moreover, Xia inserted quite a few sarcastic dialogues that mimicked the pronouncements of Li Hongzhang (李鴻章 1823–1901) and other historical figures, which echoed the vulgar and popular temperament common to *wenmingxi* more than the revolutionary pursuits of left-wing *huaju*. When the play was staged for a Shanghai audience in late 1936, the use of marvelous costumes, theatre lighting, stage sets, and even real guns and swords—which reflected the "realism" of *wenmingxi*—suggested that Xia saw little value in adhering to the rigid distinctions between *huaju* and *wenmingxi* then put forth by drama critics. Xia not only borrowed from *wenmingxi* staging conventions by inserting short slapstick exchanges in between regular scenes, he also copied

the “rival genre” by projecting images of a battle on a film screen in front of the stage curtains while firing yellow smoke from behind the curtain in order to enhance the “spectacle” of the play’s war scenes.¹⁰⁴ *Sai Jinhua*’s embrace of *wenmingxi* conventions even provoked skepticism from within Xia’s national defense literature group. Zhang Geng, the leftist critic who disparaged Hong Shen’s *Rural Trilogy*, proclaimed *Sai Jinhua* to be the first “great harvest” of national defense drama (*guofang xiju* 國防戲劇). Yet he also warned that “satire, once overly exaggerated, will render [a *huaju* play] into a *wenmingxi* and [a part of] the Saturday School.”¹⁰⁵ Zhang cautioned against imitating such popular genres.

Sai Jinhua was nevertheless consistent with the practices Xia had developed during his engagement with left-wing cinema between 1933 and 1936, especially his work with the Mingxing Studio, one of the most commercially successful of Shanghai’s many progressive film companies.¹⁰⁶ During those years, Xia’s amiable personality not only won him friendships with Shanghai filmmakers of various ideological persuasions but also put him in a position to absorb and even hybridize tactics employed in Hollywood melodramas, the progressive films of the Soviet Union, and *wenmingxi*. From this perspective, *Sai*’s sensuous themes, satirical handling of characterizations, and staging gimmicks reflected Xia’s established practice of crossing boundaries between “entertainment” and “national defense,” *wenmingxi* and *huaju*. Indeed, Xia and *Sai* won sympathy from left-wing dramatists and filmmakers aware of the difficulty of staging *huaju* in Shanghai’s materialistic and sensation-driven climate.

Song Zhidi was one of the first left-wing dramatists who saw in *Sai Jinhua* the potential to surmount the pressures of popularization and minimal budgets that had plagued *huaju* since the early 1930s. One year after Xia published his script for *Sai Jinhua*, Song wrote and staged *Wu Zetian*. Song’s positive portrayal of China’s only empress (r. 690–705)—who was typically depicted as a blight on the political and social integrity of the Tang dynasty—immediately became a commercial hit and provoked another round of controversy. More than just a “copy” of *Sai Jinhua*, Song’s rereading of Empress Wu as an “exceptional human being whose beauty connotes not only physical attractiveness but moral courage” was directly related to the far-reaching influence of Oscar Wilde’s (1854–1900) artistic philosophy in China, best embodied in the *Salomé* craze that took place among the pioneering generation of Chinese dramatists in the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁰⁷ But if *Wu Zetian* was in fact keeping abreast with artistic trends, why did the play draw such ire from critics?

The core complaint against *Wu Zetian* was that, like *Sai Jinhua*, its

embrace of commercial theatre rendered the work distasteful. Following Xia's example, Song freely borrowed from the production tactics of *wenmingxi*. To publicize *Wu Zetian*, Song endorsed advertisements that highlighted the play's expensive costumes and stage sets, and drew attention to how it depicted the empress as a femme fatale seeking revenge in a male-dominated world.¹⁰⁸ But in the eyes of left-wing critics like Mao Dun, such "realism"—in both the *wenmingxi* sense and the implied erotic sense—simply catered to, without trying to elevate, "vulgar" tastes, and this ran counter to the enlightening agenda of *huaju*. In his review of the play, Mao Dun expressed his anger and disappointment over the similarities between a slapstick scene in which Wu Zetian powders the face of her male official and the clichéd plots of popular dramas performed in the foreign zone where "playful women molest their kept men" and "young mistresses tease their aging patrons."¹⁰⁹ Had *Wu Zetian* been staged in the 1920s, before the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, its "feminist agenda" might have been praised as ideologically progressive. In 1937, however, Song's sensuous dramatization was condemned as frivolous and failing to serve national defense.

Xia and Song disagreed with the charges that they "betrayed" *huaju* and left-wing culture. In essays explaining their motivation for these works, Xia and Song highlighted the subversive power of dramatizing these troubled, controversial, and potentially antiestablishment figures.¹¹⁰ Moreover, they argued that their selective employment of commercial theatres' production strategies constituted a necessary negotiation with market demands.¹¹¹ It was their awareness of financial pressures—in terms of both the budget and the box office—as well as the political realities of wartime Chongqing, that later persuaded them to consider writing a history of modern Chinese theatre based on Ying Yunwei's playmaking stories.

An "Undesirable Other" or an "Ideal Candidate":

Ying Yunwei's Life of Theatre

Xia's and Song's theatrical endeavors in Shanghai were marked by box-office success coupled with the harsh dismissals of critics. These experiences made them eager to explore the degree to which left-wing dramatists should incorporate commercial concerns and popular taste in their practices. Although Ying Yunwei's career has been either overlooked or excised entirely from canonized narratives of modern drama history, Ying was by no means unknown to those involved in playmaking in the 1930s and 1940s.

As Xia and Song rightly recognized, Ying had been a witness to and

significant participant in Chinese theatre's development in the first half of the twentieth century. Ying Yunwei entered the Shanghai theatre world in 1919 at the age of fifteen. Following the model of Ren Tianzhi (任天知 n.d.) and other *wenmingxi* veterans, Ying's first role was as a crossdressing performer. Unlike *huaaju* pioneers such as Hong Shen, Xiong Foxi, and Yu Shangyuan, who began their careers in student productions abroad, Ying's first "stage" was the Shanghai streets, where he joined a local Youth Propaganda Troupe (Qingnian xuanjiang tuan 青年宣講團) in espousing iconoclastic and anti-imperialist ideologies. During these politically progressive street performances, Ying played the traditional coquettish and shrewish female role (*fengsao podan* 風騷潑旦).

Two years later, Ying's activism and talent in terms of performing and organizing theatre activities led him to cofound and manage with Gu Jianchen (谷劍塵 1897–1976) the Shanghai Theatre Association, which was one of the four major amateur drama societies in Shanghai.¹¹² Notably, it was this troupe that in 1923 recruited Hong Shen upon his return to China from New York. Ying spent the remainder of the decade working alongside Hong and other STA members to develop *huaaju* as a multimedia art and to professionalize the "behind the scenes" forces of Chinese modern theatres. Such professionalization included practicing gender-aligned performances and establishing the leading role of the director.¹¹³ Ying fully demonstrated his talent in this role in the 1930s, when he directed both theatre and cinema productions. Prior to the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, Ying directed thirty-four *huaaju* productions and fifteen films. The artistic quality and commercial profitability of these works consolidated his position as an experienced director and capable producer in the intertwined fields of theatre and filmmaking. Parallel with these successes in the entertainment field, Ying amassed considerable wealth in the shipping industry and may have even had close ties with the mobster Du Yuesheng (杜月笙 1888–1951).¹¹⁴

Zhang Geng, when categorizing the different forces in modern Chinese theatres, described Ying as a "comprador-cum-man of drama."¹¹⁵ In contrast to the conventional intellectual and artistic development of modern dramatists, Ying stood out in three respects: as a crossdressing female impersonator active in *wenmingxi* rather than as a May Fourth "man of letters"; as a commercial-minded "cultural entrepreneur" instead of a bohemian left-wing radical;¹¹⁶ and as a director and producer rather than a playwright. Ying's trajectory made him an intriguing other that could serve to question the dominant narratives of *huaaju* as a modern literary genre and the public persona of *juren* as intellectual playwrights. My reading of

Ying's "inappropriate" fit explains his simultaneous presence and absence in *huaju's* development, as he was omnipresent in a wide variety of dramatic activities but largely absent from canonized drama histories. It further demonstrates that Xia, Song, and Yu sought to create an alternative canonization of *huaju*, one that reflected their lived experiences as left-wing *ju ren* struggling to balance commercial and artistic pressures within a politically tumultuous China.

Poking Fun at Huaju's "Creation Myth"

Ying's early crossdressing experiences on the new theatre stage were part of a performing "vogue" shared by many in the early generation of drama pioneers. Most crucial for the modernization of Chinese theatre culture was the crossdressing role he assumed in *The Shrew* (*Pofu* 潑婦), a play written by Ouyang Yuqian, directed by Hong Shen, and staged by STA in Shanghai's Labor Education Auditorium (Zhigong jiaoyu litang 職工教育禮堂) in September 1923. Seeking to abolish the convention of male actors impersonating female characters, Hong staged Hu Shi's *The Most Important Event* with actresses in female roles on the same bill as *The Shrew*, which was performed with an all-male cast. Just as Hong predicted, juxtaposing these plays provoked understanding applause for the first but ridiculing laughter at the second. Thereafter, the convention of men playing female roles was challenged and gradually gave way to gender-aligned performances in most amateur drama troupes in Shanghai. The dramatic contrast caused by staging these two productions on the same bill was canonized as the pivotal "scene" in which the practice of man playing woman, now charged with a certain "sexual perversity" (*xing biantai* 性變態),¹¹⁷ was ridiculed not only by dramatists with foreign training, such as Hong, but also by *wenmingxi* veterans and the Shanghai audience.

Although most of the credit for this performance has understandably gone to Hong Shen, Ying's contribution must not be overlooked. In unwittingly playing the "undesirable" role, Ying provided the mirror image necessary to illuminate the progressive trajectory of modern Chinese theatre's evolution. Later, when canonizations of modern drama began to celebrate Hong's juxtaposition of *Event* and *The Shrew* on stage, Ying remembered the preparations, negotiations, and staging plans that took place backstage:

These two plays have six to seven female characters in total. However, STA only had three female student actors at that time. . . . We did not have enough actresses to play the female roles. Meanwhile, some [of

us], such as Gu Jianchen, Chen Xianmo (陳憲謨 n.d.), and myself, still advocated for crossdressing and felt we were good at playing women characters onstage. Hong Shen, on the contrary, really loathed this convention. [However], Hong Shen had just recently joined STA and must have felt it rather difficult to directly criticize and change STA conventions. Hong Shen thus came up with a good idea, asking Gu, Chen, and I to play the female roles in *The Shrew* while keeping the three female student actors for the gender-aligned cast for *Event*. Hong Shen deliberately praised our acting skills and arranged *The Shrew* as the final program. We, of course, were thrilled, feeling that we [Ying, Gu, and Chen] could compete with the student actresses. To my great surprise, the audience, after watching the natural and realistic performances of *Event*, made fun of our performance. Man playing woman, thereafter, went to the coffin (*shouzhong zhengqin* 壽終正寢).¹¹⁸

Here Ying accounts for the theatricality unfolding on- and offstage during STA's pivotal 1923 production. Ying, via his confidence in and enjoyment of playing female roles, neatly served as the necessary "antagonist" for Hong's desired theatrical effect—to spur the audience's "appropriate" responses of appreciation and ridicule. In this manner, Ying was not a passive witness but a crucial participant in fashioning one of *huaju*'s defining performative norms, gender-aligned casting, which has conventionally been attributed to Hong Shen.

Yet the onstage performance of *Event* and *The Shrew* only constituted the visible part of normalizing a gender-aligned cast. Also important was the change in perception: the realization that "man playing woman" was ill-suited not just to *The Shrew*, but to *huaju* in general. Ying provides a sketchy account of his female impersonation: "Raising one's voice, being affectedly bashful, every single movement is laughable."¹¹⁹ In this I find a subtle hint of the comic contrast between the illusionary "theatrical reality" that the all-male cast of *The Shrew* hoped to create onstage and the disillusioned reality that Ying and his fellow crossdressing actors actually felt when they failed to deliver such a deception within the *huaju* framework. The audiences for STA's first public performance were thus presented with two shows in which Ying played the roles of protagonist and antagonist: Within *The Shrew* itself, Ying failed to deliver the role of female protagonist convincingly in a work intended to address the serious theme of woman's liberation. In contrast, within the overall theatricality of staging *Event* with a gender-aligned cast and *The Shrew* with an all-male cast, Ying "success-

景 時 地
間 間 點

江南某城
民國十年之秋，八月十五。
難亂污穢的戲園後台。

舊式的建築，看來是年代久遠了。靠近上場門和下场門的地方，有兩根柱子，柱子上，寫着：

上的白灰已剝落，有彩色筆的塗抹。一張海報貼在靠左的柱子上，寫着：

化裝時事講演
青年年宣講團
首次男女合演
言論正生青泰
論生衣斗名著
陸憲揆 馮祝
熱烈沉痛 逃婚
記

地 點
京 華 戲 園

Speech on Current Event with Make-up
The Youth Propaganda Speech Troupe
The First Time Man and Woman Perform Together
Male Orator Role: Lu Xiankui
The Leading Young Maiden: Feng Yunhe
The Famous Young Male Role: Zhu Huaixiang
Sad and Beautiful;
Desolate and Broken-hearted
The Story of Elopement
Heartily and Enthusiastic;
Grief and Remorse
Place: Peking Drama House

另一根柱子，則書着鳥龜，「小三子，不是人」之類。

左首有門通走廊，右首一門通飯房。

在佛齋婉婉的神龕底下，橫七豎八的擺了幾張油垢的方桌，幾條條凳，方桌上點着紅燭，演員甲，乙，丙坐在那裏化妝。

Fig. 14. A stage poster displayed in *Annals of Theatre*. *Xiqu chunqiu* (戲劇春秋 *Annals of Theatre*) (Chongqing: Weizhi chubanshe, 1946), 3. Courtesy of the National Library of China. English translation by the author.

fully” delivered the unnatural and laughable “backwardness” of man playing woman. Ying’s performance within and beyond the play—for both the audience and for the development of *huaju* history—colored a canonical episode of Chinese theatre’s modernization with a slapstick and playful quality. Gender-aligned casting became the performative norm—and man playing woman was “sent to the coffin”—thanks in part to comedic effect.

Unlike most canonizers of *huaju* history who have either overlooked or failed to highlight the complex theatricality of this episode, Xia, Song, and Yu in *Annals* fully capture *juren*’s playful promotion of performing heterosociality and even hetero-intimacy on the *huaju* stage. Understanding the historical significance of playing gender-aligned roles, the drama opens with a slapstick scene depicting the struggles that *juren* youth confronted in 1921. Act 1 tells how Lu Xiankui, the character modeled after Ying Yunwei, boldly brought his fiancée, Feng Yunhe, to perform a “current event

speech with makeup” (*huazhuang shishi yanjiang* 化妝時事演講)—an early form of *xinju* better known in scholarship as a subgenre of *wenmingxi*—entitled *Story of Elopement* (*Taohun ji* 逃婚記). When the curtain rose on Act 1, a chaotic, run-down, and filthy backstage appeared, represented by two poles with fading paint that stood by the entrance and exit gates. A handbill posted on the left pole not only informs the audience of *Story of Elopement*, then being performed at the unseen “frontstage” with a gender-aligned cast, but also efficiently reflects the new theatre culture that Lu Xiankui (Ying Yunwei) and his generation of *juren* were born into.

Significantly, *Annals* does not stage the canonical episode of STA’s 1923 production to celebrate the “finalization” of gender-aligned casting as *huaju*’s norm. Instead, it foregrounds one of many struggling endeavors that *juren* undertook, often without triumphant results, in the different new theatre forms of the early twentieth century. The scheme of *huaju* history in this account, though clearly influenced by the genealogy of *huaju* written by Hong Shen in his 1935 introduction, intentionally draws a difference between the “public speech with makeup” form of *xinju* from the “feudal” and hybridized *wenmingxi* culture while conflating and inserting into it the “progressive” allure of gender-aligned casting.

The play further deviates from the canonical narrative by presenting the move to gender-aligned casting as a backstage struggle between young men and women of theatre (Lu and Feng) and a gentry man, Old Master Feng, who is Lu’s father-in-law. Although this plot detail ties the historical moment of gender-aligned performance with May Fourth discourse, the way that *Annals* stages this scene follows the conventions of Shanghaiense farce (*huaji xi*). While the men and women performing together in *Story of Elopement* are only alluded to on the set, Lu Xiankui’s backstage efforts to mark the significance of performing public hetero-intimacy, despite Old Master Feng’s interference, are staged in a lively fashion:

(*Old Master Feng is onstage; Lu Xiankui does not see him.*)

LU XIANKUI. (*Continuously exaggerating*) Actually, this old gentleman usually is very reform-minded, very active opening new schools and engaging in substantial entrepreneurship. But in coming to terms with male-female relationships, he is outdated. I think that they must all share the same problem regarding this. For example, it’s true, we [Feng Yunhe and Lu Xiankui] haven’t been officially married, but our marriage was settled a long time ago. He, however, forbids us to proceed with courtship. How could this be forbidden?

We appear not to dare disobey him, but we meet each other daily. . . .
(Old Master Feng is shocked and freezes with anger.)

CHEN SHUMO. *(Awkwardly)* Xiankui!

LU XIANKUI. No hurry. I don't have anything until Act 2. *(Continues)*

This time I brought his daughter to our play, and it really gave him a surprise. Now he must be faint with anger. But what is the point of getting angry? His girl has grown up. Of course, she will favor her husband and listen to her husband. That her father is angry and faint amounts to nothing! This counts as a small lesson I've taught him. He called me a bastard; okay, the bastard is me, I am a bastard. Even if he kicks me a couple times, I do not care at all. The victory finally belongs to the generation of son and daughter. See, Yunhe is now on the stage *(stretches his arm and points to the direction where Old Master Feng stands)*. . . .

LU XIANKUI. *(Extremely embarrassed, suddenly doesn't know what to do)*

On . . . onstage, this is really messy and chaotic. The stage used to be a Peking opera stage. . . . Look, it still has an altar for the old god statue. Hahaha . . . *(Making no sense)* Mr. Jiang, a gentleman like you who achieved such a great thing, must be wise and knowledgeable, thus, thus . . . *(Cannot continue)* This is my father-in-law. *(Jiang Han also feels embarrassed.)*

OLD MASTER FENG. *(Shaking with anger)* You, you little brat, what nonsense are you talking about?

OLD MASTER FENG. *(Does not listen)* Where is Yunhe?

LU XIANKUI. *(Intentional slapstick)* The canal [Feng's daughter's name Yunhe has the same pronunciation as "canal"], the canal is located in north Tongzhou. Since ships and trains operated there, the river has been in bad shape. It has many places blocked and out of repair for many years. Listen . . . *(Suddenly raising his neck and pretending to be a dog barking to the backstage)*

OLD MASTER FENG. Are you, are you crazy?

LU XIANKUI. I am making a stage effect. This is called stage effect. Otherwise, you can go to the frontstage and listen. It sounds like a real dog barking. *(To Chen Shumo)* I have done my part, I need to put on makeup. *(Rushes offstage)*¹²⁰

In this scene, Lu experiences a series of awkward moments. His disrespectful yet funny accounts of Old Master Feng and the slapstick handling of his embarrassment when caught are delivered via a combination of northern-

style stand-up comedy (*xiangsheng* 相聲), *wenmingxi*, and the Chinese one-man play (*dujiao xi* 獨角戲) traditions. This scene makes what Rea calls “*huaju* Shanghai,” the comic culture in Shanghai, an integral theatre effect of *huaju*-making.¹²¹

Instead of recreating the key event onstage—the establishment of gender-aligned casting—as a means to distinguish modern drama from its civilized and commercial counterparts, *Annals* presents a comical scene about the backstage reaction to this event. I find such a “backstage view” to be necessary, because it was only from the safety of the backstage, away from the canonical events taking place in front of the curtain, that *Annals*, itself a modern drama, was able to employ elements common to *wenmingxi* without contradicting *huaju*'s self-proclaimed distinction from that genre. By the same token, including a backstage rejoinder to the advent of gender-aligned casting was an ingenious way for *Annals* to affirm *huaju*'s uniqueness, since the curtain served as a symbolic “barrier” between modern drama and its “backward” peers. Comedy and the backstage thus combined in the opening scene to simultaneously challenge, and strengthen, canonized accounts of *huaju*'s birth.

Juren: *Bohemians or Cultural Entrepreneurs?*

Noticeably downplayed in the playwrights' depiction of *juren* is the bohemianism that had been a fixture of left-wing drama culture in the late 1920s and early 1930s. At that time, not only were the theatrical realities that *juren* created inspired by Western cultural and literary norms, their lived realities were likewise modeled on the bohemian characters they depicted on stage. Chen Baichen (陳白塵 1908–1994), a left-wing drama veteran, recalled the youth who gathered under Tian Han's leadership in the Southern Society and turned Shanghai's West Aixiansi Road into a “stage” on which they could perform cosmopolitan bohemian culture domestically:

From March 1928, a lively group of young men and women suddenly appeared on the desolate West Aixiansi Road. They either grew long hair falling to their shoulders, or recited [poems] while walking around as if there was no one next to them, or recited dialogues and performed self-appreciation; or men and women walked side by side, talking about theories and books. Most of them were penniless, but they still enjoyed life, acting like artists. These are our students from the Southern Society. They viewed West Aixiansi Road as if it were the Latin Quarter in Paris.¹²²

Chen Baichen's humorous account of the public personas of dramatists resonates with the following fanciful depiction of 1920s *ju ren* in *Annals*.

In this scene, while a group of young men and women from the Oriental Art Small Theatre (Dongfang yishu xiao juchang 東方藝術小劇場)¹²³ casually sit together and discuss their performances from that afternoon, the bohemian Dong Tao openly expresses his sentimentalism, as well as his intent to leave his companions for the real battlefield in China's South:

DONG. No (*bearing the pain*), I just let out the pent-up emotions. I am not sentimental. . . . Yes, yes, this is the pain of the time. This is the sentimentalism that is deeper than sentimentalism. (*To everyone*) Well, ladies and gentlemen, listen to me. This is the agony of hundreds and thousands of young people. This is the suffering of our nation. (*Singing*) . . .

I am depressed,
The depression, the abyss-like depression.
It cannot wear down my aspiration,
It only encourages my ambition.
(*Ruoyan sings with Dong*)
I am a wandering person,
A drifting soul.
Coming from the far-away soil and land, I burst into the palace
of art,
Our small theatre paradise.
(*Dong sings alone*)
But, after all, I am a wandering child;
I can only hesitate outside the artists' palace.
Have you seen?
In the North the feudal warlords are [restless like] jumping
beans,
People-eating jackals and wolves.
I yearn for the southern land,
The scorching southern land.
Only over there—
Listen,
Those are the revolutionary songs that call me.¹²⁴

Such emotionally fraught depictions of *ju ren* differ dramatically from the pragmatic life experiences of Ying Yunwei. In contrast with his bohemian peers, Ying made use of his amiable personality and the social net-

work he consolidated during his time as a “comprador capitalist” in the 1920s and early 1930s to ease the financial pressures of running STA. It was in the roles of producer, director, and financier that Ying’s symbolic capital rested. Not only did Ying tap into his own fortune for theatre productions, he assumed his banker-comprador identity to reach out to patrons in Shanghai and Hong Kong. As Xia Yan recalled, Ying often wore a diamond ring—the most important stage prop for his businessman persona—while seeking funding for STA.¹²⁵ Ying was alert to the financial pressures facing theatres at a time when *huaju* productions in general were still “amateur” and their professional profit-splitting system had not yet been established.¹²⁶ Although commercial concerns were a reality for nearly all dramatists,¹²⁷ Ying addressed them more frequently and explicitly. In this regard, Ying’s actions place him in tandem with the business-minded class of cultural entrepreneurs who invested their capital and creativity in theatre as one of a wide range of commercial enterprises. Like those figures, Ying differed fundamentally from the archetypical May Fourth “man of letters” who “disdained commerce and was concerned exclusively with aesthetic and moral matters.”¹²⁸

Perhaps the clearest example of Ying’s simultaneous engagement with commercial and aesthetic issues can be found in STA’s production of *Roar, China* in 1932. Ying, serving as director, led STA to stage what is conventionally cited as one of the most important leftist dramas of the time.¹²⁹ In his carefully thought-out “staging plan” (*shangyan jihua* 上演計劃), Ying was candid about his monetary concerns, but offered an innovative solution:

STA, given the major deficit caused by staging *The Merchant of Venice* (*Weinisi shangren* 威尼斯商人), had already been downhearted for over three years, aborting all public performances because of lack of money. STA, therefore, did not contribute anything to the drama field [during this time]. Here we also apologize to the audience who cared about STA. As for this production [*Roar, China*], it was not because we suddenly obtained assistance and became rich. In fact, we took the risk to try [a new financing method]. These were our financial sources: (1) money loans; (2) issuing advance tickets. What made the money arrangement a little bit easy is that we did not need to pay cash for the entire budget. Thus, we took the risk of throwing all the cash we raised into building the commercial ships, warships, and the pier [the stage set for the production].¹³⁰

STA’s financial difficulties came from Ying’s first major production: a five-act *huaju* of Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* in 1930. Unlike STA’s earlier

adaptations of Western plays, such as Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* in 1924, for *Merchant of Venice* Ying decided to abandon the custom of using a Shanghai *mise en scène* in favor of an authentic set and costume design that would represent sixteenth-century Italy. It took Ying half a year to raise the more than three thousand yuan necessary for this grand production. To further highlight the extravaganza, Ying employed artistic lighting (*meishu dengguang* 美術燈光), which one contemporary critic proclaimed to be "dazzlingly beautiful and starting a new fashion for [the *huaju*] stage."¹³¹ By investing a major portion of the budget in visual effects, Ying echoed earlier *wenmingxi* productions and foreshadowed Xia's and Song's lavish historical productions five years later.

Though *Merchant of Venice's* enlarged budget put STA in a rather difficult financial situation, it did not discourage Ying from envisioning even greater spectacles for *Roar, China*. Ying planned to spend most of the budget for the new production on the stage set and the remainder on the lighting. Understanding *Roar, China's* strict scenographic demands—namely, "a plethora of outdoor scenes; major changes in the scenes for different acts; the special stage props (piers, warships, and commercial ships, etc.); and frequent applications of changing scenes and characters without lowering the curtain"¹³²—Ying trained over thirty stagehands to learn and master twenty-seven scene changes that would be repeated for three performances daily. Also, unsatisfied with table and wall lamps and other small sources for lighting, Ying purchased more than ten large spotlights and an additional three dimmers to facilitate the scene changes. Clearly, Ying was not averse to employing the "gimmicks" of *wenmingxi* when it came to staging *Roar, China*.

Ying's ambition was further shown in the large cast and crew. Ying planned to recruit one hundred professional and amateur performers (fifty experienced professional actors from STA, other drama societies, and drama schools; twenty Boy Scouts; and thirty pier workers) to stage the play. Of course, to manage such a sizable cast and accompanying stagehands required intense training, which meant that *Roar, China* demanded a large rehearsal budget as well. While promising a marvelous artistic production, Ying also never hesitated to express the commercial concerns inherent in his staging plan. That even in this most famous left-wing production Ying let "money talk" reflected the real scenario that *juren* faced in the 1930s: Staging a left-wing drama successfully required the business acumen of an entrepreneur.

As Lu Xiankui, Ying is fashioned in *Annals* as a troubled hero who is torn between his dream of making ideologically inspiring and aesthetically daring *huaju*, on the one hand, and his need to compromise with political cen-

sorship and commercialism, on the other. Accordingly, Lu is both admired by other characters, men and women of theatre, as a Shanghai-style com-prador adept at resolving the tensions of playmaking and despised as a philistine for his obsession with luxury and lack of political progressiveness:

LIANG MENGHUI. (*Cannot talk anymore, pauses*) Because the air in our drama field is so suffocating, those student amateur drama troupes, which are no longer able to produce plays, only find more and more difficulties. As for the [foreign] concessions, because of the Japanese interference, even those song troupes need to register before they can sing their choruses. . . .

LIANG MENGHUI. (*Looking at Lu Xiankui*) In that case, we must figure out something to break this suffocating scene.

PENG FANG. (*Follows Liang's words*) So, we are thinking of putting together several drama troupes' energies and efforts and giving a presentable public performance. . . .

LIANG MENGHUI. (*Hesitant*) We have already talked about it. Little Peng and Su Fei both insist that it must be you who stands up to organize and lead this public performance. For one, you have many friends and are capable in the Shanghai dialect; also, Mr. Tian is now imprisoned in Nanjing, Mr. Ouyang is in Guangdong, and Mr. Hong is in Qingdao. Here in Shanghai, we only have you. You are the only one who can unite all the drama workers in Shanghai.¹³³

Two details contained in this passage are worth noting. First, the fictional character of Lu Xiankui is presented as the only person capable of uniting the Shanghai drama field after Tian Han, Ouyang Yuqian, and Hong Shen have all left the city. By positioning Lu/Ying as the peer of, and the alternative to, the absent "founding fathers," *Annals* asserts a role for lesser-known "players." Moreover, the play makes Lu/Ying the protagonist and relegates the contributions of Tian, Ouyang, and Hong to the background, thus creating a hierarchical reordering of the theatre network and *huaju* history. In this manner, *Annals* reveals the real advantages that a cultural entrepreneur such as Lu/Ying could offer. The force most capable of "saving" modern drama in a time of national crisis was not the idealism of the bohemians, but the friendships and commercial networks developed backstage. Ying thus went from being an "undesirable other" to the "ideal candidate" for dramatizing the public persona of left-wing *juven*.

Ying Yunwei was also an ideal candidate for arousing public sympathy.

The following scene depicts Lu Xiankui's growing frustration as he works to stage the patriotic play *Shanghai Corner* (*Shanghai de yijiao* 上海的一角)—*Annals'* conflation of *Roar, China* and Xia Yan's *Under Shanghai Eaves*—in the occupied city:

LU XIANKUI. You are all masters! There is only one who is a coward. I am the only coward. When I was a bank manager, I often scowled at others. Now I am a director, a performer, and a stage director. Everyone else is scowling back at me. . . .

LIANG MENGHUI. (*Calmly*) Old Lu, I heard that you already signed the contract and decided the specific date for our new play.

LU XIANKUI. Um. (*Quickly trying to find something*) Look!

LIANG MENGHUI. I don't need to see anything. I understand all your troubles. But, before we start rehearsing, we already have an oral agreement. For this play, we will strive for a higher artistic quality.

LU XIANKUI. (*Eventually takes a reel of paper out, unfolding the paper*) Look, Old Liang, it is not because I make troubles with you on purpose. Really, it is the deadline, the deadline almost kills me. The timing is so important. If we don't stage this show on this date, we will not seize upon any other dates in the future. . . .

LIANG MENGHUI. In terms of artistic quality, I am asking . . .

LU XIANKUI. (*Jumps up*) I don't know about the artistic quality. I am only a businessman. I am a bastard. I only know how to make money. Okay? Is it okay for everyone? (*Mourning and weeping*). . . .

(*Little Ge walks up on the stage.*)

LITTLE GE. (*Raises his head from reading the account book*) Mr. Lu! (*Holding a pile of receipts*) These are all the debts that will be due soon. Mr. Wu: 550; Mr. Hu's business: 800; Master Cai: 500; and there are also two other bills. . . . It is already the end of the month. What we will do for the paychecks for the last pay period? We can hold off [on paying] the performers, but those laborers who worked on the stage set. . . . I am afraid that we can no longer keep them if we don't pay them soon. Now our cash flow is only 3.3 dollars.¹³⁴

Lu's situation becomes even more desperate as the deadline approaches:

LU XIANKUI. But who will believe in me! We must make today's show. If not, we will be made fun of forever. Also, we've already spent the money we made by selling tickets. If we have to return the audi-

ence's tickets, where can we get money? If we don't return the ticket money, and you all don't stage the play, am I going to be charged as a fraud? You are all talking about conscience, talking about art, how about me? Only I, Lu Xiankui, will have to go to jail.

SU FEI. Old Lu, what you just said was really not necessary.

LU XIANKUI. I am not necessary. I am the surplus one. I am the bastard. You, on the other hand, are real artists, great actors, great directors. I am only a bastard.¹³⁵

Lu/Ying's daily, necessary, but often unrecognized "battles" would have rendered him an "everyman" to which the audience could easily relate. Like Lu, Chongqing residents were themselves struggling to mitigate the unpredictable hardships of wartime life. Furthermore, by depicting the "bohemian" playwrights Su Fei and Liang Menghui as only adding to Lu's burden, Xia, Song, and Yu were in fact affirming *Annals'* central theme: that it was multitasking *juren*, not the bohemian and literary dramatists or *xiju jia*, who were the driving force behind *huaaju*.

Huaju in Defense of the Nation

Among the many contributions that Ying made to theatre, dramaturgy was not among them. Differing not only from celebrated May Fourth intellectuals who predominately wrote closet dramas, Ying's practices as director and producer also distinguished him from other STA and Zhongyi members who excelled in all areas of playmaking, including dramaturgy. Yet, despite his striking lack of writing credits, Ying still enjoyed considerable fame among his peers. When China and the drama field faced the crisis of war, the writers of *Annals* suggested that it was only Ying Yunwei who possessed the networks and skill to unite both *juren* and the nation against the foreign threat.

It is in the final act that Lu Xiankui's mission to organize all Shanghai *juren* at last bears fruit. However, just as Lu and the "bohemian" dramatists Kuang Qi, Peng Fang, and Su Fei start to work together at the Penglai Theatre to stage *Defend the Marco Polo Bridge*, a play meant to stir nationalist spirits to resist Japan, the war begins in earnest. The theatre stage transitions from being a modern playhouse performing the story of the July 7, 1937, Marco Polo Bridge Incident to the city streets, where the real struggle of defending Shanghai was taking place:

(Suddenly comes the sound of cannon. At that moment, the people are all frozen. But immediately, they all understand what happened.)

PENG FANG. Cannons!

SU FEI. The war has started!

PENG FANG. (With an exaggerated voice and gesture typical for actors) Ah, finally, the war starts here!

KUANG QI. Dear friends, this is our national revolutionary cannon! Let's go to the battlefield. Let's go to the battlefield and die for our nation! . . . An hour ago, I was still trying to make stage props in the Penglai Theatre, trying to use the big drum to imitate the real cannon. But only one hour later, the cannon of the War of Resistance can be heard! Friends, let's cry, let's sing!¹³⁶

Annals concludes with China's *juven* united with the masses in both spirit and deeds.¹³⁷ Considering that *Annals* was staged during Chongqing's "fog season," when overcast weather brought a lull to Japanese bombardment, it is easy to see how such a patriotic ending would have served as a rallying cry before the next round of fighting.

As we have seen, Xia, Song, and Yu's original intent—to dramatize Ying's theatre life as a narrative of left-wing *juven*—expanded to include both the friendships and business relationships that Ying had been cultivating since the 1910s. *Annals* thus went from being about "one person" to being about "a group of people, to those who still stand up, to those who already fell."¹³⁸ By the play's end, this "group" had further expanded to include not just left-wing *juven*, but the Chinese nation in toto. Borrowing from James Scott's "backstage discourse" of the weak standing up to the powerful, we see that *Annals* was not only a means for "nontraditional" *juven* such as Xia Yan and Song Zhidi to assert themselves in *huaju* history against the canonical narrative, it was also a metaphor, and an inspiration, for the Chinese masses to resist the Japanese invaders. The audience at once watched a *huaju* production, learned Chinese drama history, and drew parallels to their own wartime "blood and tear" struggles. Viewers would have left the theatre not only familiar with the history of modern drama and the role of *juven*, but also recommitted to the goal of national defense.

Conclusion

The canonical narrative of modern Chinese theatre, begun by Hong Shen's introduction to the *Compendium of New Chinese Literature* in 1935 and continued by literary, political, and scholarly forces afterward, prioritizes the dramaturgic over the performative. In contrast, *Annals* presents an alternative canonization of *huaju*, one where the focus is not on bohemian playwrights and their scripts but on the backstage negotiations that took place among playmakers as they struggled to balance artistic, economic, and commercial concerns. By "canonizing the backstage," *Annals* claimed a space within *huaju* discourse for left-wing figures such as Xia Yan, Song Zhidi, and Yu Ling to assert their lived history of Chinese modern drama against established narratives. This canonization emphasized playmaking over playwriting and bridged the binaries between the political and the artistic, and the popular and the critically acclaimed. *Annals* thus reflected playmakers' own evolving self-identity, from *xiju jia* (dramatists) to *ju ren* (men and women of theatre).

Annals was not the first attempt to form a *huaju* canonization differing from Hong Shen's, and it was certainly not the first *huaju* to employ historical analogy for political ends. However, *Annals* was the first to accomplish both tasks satisfactorily. The Hankou government attempted to regulate the drama field in 1930 before an "official" history of modern drama emerged and was thus unable to define *huaju*'s social role. Zhu Shuangyun's *History of New Drama* and *Historical Materials on Early Professional Huaju* highlighted the market concerns that were central to modern Chinese theatre's development, but Zhu's promotion of *wenmingxi* discounted these works in the eyes of amateur dramatists and early *huaju* practitioners. Song Chunfang's and Shu Weiqing's collections of drama-related works, notable for including "meta-books" on the theories and specifics of playmaking and important in shaping the development of modern theatre, still focused on plays and drama literatures rather than backstage maneuverings. Finally, Xia Yan's and Song Zhidi's earlier attempts to create a historical *huaju* that was both politically pertinent and profitable—*Sai Jinhua* and *Wu Zetian*—were unable to impress left-wing drama critics, who faulted the plays for flirting with commercial trends. What allowed *Annals* to succeed where these others failed was its subject matter, the playmaking activities of Ying Yunwei.

Ying was the ideal candidate for Xia, Song, and Yu to present their backstage account of *huaju* history. Ying's "everyman" status—demonstrated by his reputation for being more interested in putting on a good show than in making political proclamations—made "Ying Yunwei" a topic that could

pass government censorship and “Lu Xiankui” a character who could win the masses’ sympathy. Moreover, Ying, by the time of *Annals*’ debut, had demonstrably achieved the three goals of the modern theatre field: professionalization, popularization, and politicization. Helping to end the convention of men playing women, staging an elaborate production of the leftist drama *Roar, China*, and being appointed by Zhou Enlai to serve as the “neutral” head of Zhongyi were just some of Ying’s accomplishments. His rich experiences running STA and Zhongyi, his extensive network of performers, stagehands, and financial backers, and his skill at navigating the politically uncertain waters of wartime Chongqing were further proof of Ying’s playmaking dexterity. A play about Ying Yunwei was thus a play about the maturation and validation of *huaju* itself.

When judged by its glowing reviews, box-office take, and political impact, specifically in terms of raising the spirits of a war-weary Chongqing audience while offering subtle criticisms of the Nationalists, *Annals* appears to have achieved every measure of success. Certainly, *Annals* struck a chord among audiences and critics alike. One is left to wonder, then, whether its “alternative canonization” was in fact more akin to the lived realities of *jueren* than the “play-centered” narrative put forward by Hong Shen in 1935 and maintained by most scholarship. Consequently, when we look at *Annals*, we are not only “rediscovering” a neglected work that played an important role in Chongqing’s war effort, we are also “relearning” the history of Chinese modern theatre more broadly. *Annals* asks us to ponder again how such “history” is constructed, who are the figures it includes, and more important, who are the ones excluded.

Conclusion

It is difficult to overlook the historical and political significance of *huaju*'s institutionalization. Its development arch—from an extracurricular practice pursued by post–World War I cosmopolitan youth to an established popular art form, entrusted by political parties, liberal intellectuals, and cultural entrepreneurs to educate the masses and consolidate nationalism during World War II—parallels the trajectory of Chinese intelligentsia who advocated urban and rural modernization during the Republican period. The constantly shifting locations of center and periphery in *huaju*'s institutionalization—metropolises, villages, provincial towns—are emblematic of the intersecting routes of transnational, national, and local inputs needed in canonizing a modern medium. The repetitively redefined goals of *huaju*—professionalization, popularization, and politicization—are symbiotic with both colonial and alternative imaginations of Chinese modernity. *Huaju*, in this light, has been an essential legend to map out and revisit China's political and cultural landscape in the first half of the twentieth century.

Yet *huaju*'s essential status and the weight of its institutionalization are not adequately covered in scholarship. A sincere inquiry into *huaju* will quickly come to an awkward realization: *huaju* is frequently referred to but rarely defined. Even within these limited definitions, *huaju* is a Chinese theatre, but it does not observe the aesthetic norms and traditions of Chinese indigenous theatres; or *huaju* is a modern media, but it does not fascinate a wide audience with technological novelties and wonders; or *huaju* is a part of the broader mass-education movements but still frustratingly “foreign” for urban and rural viewers. To put it simply: We are more comfortable saying what *huaju* is *not* than what it is.

This awkwardness has escalated and become increasingly burdensome in the past two decades. While recent analytical readings of signature *huaju* productions rescue individual works from oblivion, the lack of a systematic understanding of the early history of *huaju* renders these potent discoveries

episodic, if not fragmented. The individual productions' artistic reforms and ideological realignments are, consequently, either over- or underestimated or misinterpreted entirely. Thus, the demand for systematic studies of *huaju* is profound and urgent. So is my dedication to writing such stories.

This work offers the first comprehensive English-language history of *huaju* during its formative decades, delivered from the perspective of the backstage. The "backstage," in this book, expands from being a specific physical site, well equipped or makeshift, used to prepare for individual *huaju* productions, to a series of concentric circles that facilitated cosmopolitan dramatists to imagine and stage *huaju* plays, address their artistic and political concerns, and explore the manifold possibilities of re-forming *huaju* while educating and transforming urban and rural masses into participatory citizens on the one hand, and either skilled actors or an enlightened audience on the other.

By "comprehensive," I do not mean an exhaustive survey of all published plays and productions. Such an attempt is neither feasible nor productive. Instead, the focus of this book is on an expanding network that was initially formed by cosmopolitan intellectuals practicing and studying theatre in America and was later joined by participatory rural villagers, urbanites and petty intellectuals, political parties, and cultural entrepreneurs in China. Often in scholarship this theatre network has been treated as amateur, makeshift, or pedagogical in nature, thus remaining in the periphery. Critically responding to the extant ways of canonizing *huaju*, I assert that it is the amateur, makeshift, and pedagogical activities unfolded backstage, and not the published plays and well-received productions, that define *huaju*'s political status and artistic norms.

Shifting from signature plays by genius dramatists to the backstage does not keep me from reading plays, but it does change how I identify signature plays and how I read them. The plays I select reflect and pin down the pivotal political and artistic developments of *huaju* between the two world wars. Instead of simply rereading the canonical repertoire, I revise the canonical repertoire by reading the ideological in tandem with the aesthetic and return "unexpected" plays and productions to their proper yardstick positions. The plays I cover demonstrate how theoretical visions and experimental practices, while reforming Chinese theatre culture and institutionalizing *huaju* itself, resolved a set of thorny tensions regarding Chinese modernities; namely, the polarization of political arts and the art of politics, intellectual mobilization and grassroots participation, and cosmopolitan tenets and local critical adaptations.

These plays, if evaluated by extant historical narratives of early *huaju* and

the Anglo-Saxon rubric of modern drama, might appear unpolished and polemic. Due to their recognizable themes, they are often placed within the canonized categories of Chinese “Nora plays” in the late 1910s, the esoteric intellectual plays of the National Theatre Movement in the 1920s, peasant plays in the 1930s, and resistance plays during World War II. Unfortunately, the dominant reading of *huaju* still employs literary qualities as the yardstick to judge a genre that is dramaturgic and performative in nature. The distinct craft and aesthetic explorations that were embedded in stage directions, scenography, and plot remain unrecognized or completely eclipsed by their ideological significance.

Instead of repeating such misreading, I have consistently investigated what I call the backstage components of each play, such as stage blocking and direction, the designing and installment of realist and modernist scenographies, and the construction of theatrical space. Such performative instructions, technical details, and spatial imaginations are the essential elements that enable *huaju* productions and should be prompted as the central loci in reading. When approaching an early *huaju* play, we should not just read the written dialogues and the ideological messages but tune in to how the dialogues and messages are delivered onstage; not merely react to the literary illusions but investigate how the playwrights aspired to have their illusions materialized; and not slight the places written in these plays as intangible backdrops but consider them as spaces to expedite mass mobilization. The reading of *huaju* is, accordingly, revisited and redirected from a literary close reading of a heavily politicized art form to a thorough investigation of the art of modern politics. Reading a *huaju* play gains its own agency: It is to actively animate the script into plans and methods of production, and not to be passively captivated by illusions and rhetoric.

From its beginning in the late 1910s, *huaju* had been compelled to address a pair of paradoxical imperatives: popularization and professionalization. The former required *huaju*'s increasing exposure among the rural and urban masses, whereas the latter meant recruiting and cultivating theatre talents in writing, acting, and backstage techniques. Most studies, understandably, investigate published plays, staged productions, and theatre movements to reflect on the efforts of established dramatists to achieve these goals. My book takes a different approach. When investigating *huaju*'s “popularization” and “professionalization,” I turn to the training methods practiced in theatre academies and mass-education programs, reading how cosmopolitan dramatists educated and incorporated the “grassroots” into the backstage field of *huaju*-making. This shift from productions to education, and from frontstage to backstage, not only illuminates the playmak-

ing space where intellectual and grassroots forces joined and negotiated but also allows us to see why this pair of unlikely allies merged. The “amateur” label that *huaju*-makers had rather proudly assumed in the early 1920s had by that decade’s end started to show its unsatisfying qualities, namely, *huaju*’s circumscribed popularity among urban and progressive intellectual youth and the lack of a self-sustaining production system. Consequently, starting from the late 1920s and early 1930s, dramatists’ advocacy of popularizing *huaju* expanded from writing and staging plays for a broad audience to teaching amateurs backstage know-how. Cosmopolitan dramatists prioritized transforming rural villagers, urban petty intellectuals, and theatre amateurs into participatory playmakers over producing popular *huaju*. As a result, it was the backstage knowledge and practices of making *huaju*, not compelling plots and realistic spectacles, that enabled the “foreign” genre to take root among the masses. The villagers who used to be distanced from *huaju* grappled with the genre’s aesthetic norms and progressive ideologies via rehearsing acts and building open-air theatres. The urban petty intellectuals who had minimum theatrical experiences but wanted to make a living endorsed *huaju* after they started to earn income from the techniques of playwriting and acting. Likewise, the popularization of *huaju* practices and theories further prepared for and cultivated a new generation of *huaju*-makers. In this manner, popularization and professionalization became self-driving forces behind *huaju*’s institutionalization.

The *participatory* spirit cultivated via backstaging endeavors did not just unite established dramatists with grassroots amateurs. It also deepened the transnational nature and dynamic of *huaju*. This book embraces and traces *huaju*’s rather unwieldy roots by examining (1) works written in English and published in English-language literary magazines and diaspora journals; plays, practices, and debates hashed out in popular and scholarly journals in China; as well as special issues published by the Mass Education Movement (MEM) in Ding Xian; (2) plays staged in university chapels, school auditoriums, commercial playhouses, rural open-air theatres, and renovated Confucian temples; (3) the innovative curricula of the National Drama School, which combined the Stanislavski method with traditional opera techniques; and (4) the hidden *huaju* history expressed in drama book catalogs as well as a blockbuster multiact play about *huaju*’s development. The nuances of *huaju*’s history, while difficult to track down, effectively complicate the canonized route of *huaju*’s adaptation—from Tokyo to Shanghai and then to less-developed areas—and conclusively prove that *huaju* was not a passive and crude imitation of Western realist theatre.

Specifically, when Hong Shen, Yu Shangyuan, and Xiong Foxi reformed

and staged Chinese theatre in various American universities, their productions entrusted Confucian ethics to resuscitate post-World War I morality and advocated indigenous theatre and painting techniques to critique a realism that had become increasingly rigid. After returning to China, these foreign-style dramatists, following a frustrating adjustment period, embarked upon new rounds of playmaking. Their visions of playwriting, acting, and stage design were now practiced for urban petty intellectuals who treated modern theatre as an emerging profession for financial security; for the selected rural community that underwent the rural reconstruction movement; and for war refugees who found in a hinterland town a space to pursue the twin goals of resistance and rejuvenation. Although these American-educated dramatists never entirely let go of their cosmopolitan visions for *huaju* and thus retained their foreignness while localizing their craft in various contexts, their endeavors were not ephemeral and fruitless, despite the claims of some scholarship. Rather, their negotiation between cosmopolitan concerns and local interests, and transnational backgrounds and national requests, were laid out more in the backstage than the frontstage. Or, to put it another way, the techniques and methods of productions were more important for the development of *huaju* than the productions themselves. Adopting a backstage framework allows this book to consider the hidden, transnational qualities of making *huaju* that are not recognized when we solely investigate the intertextuality and/or intermediality of signature plays.

Revealing the backstage narratives of *huaju* in its formative decades, I revise the standard historical periodization, or rubric of *huaju*'s canonization, and offer a definition of what *huaju* is, instead of what it is not. Specifically, the backstaging of *huaju* between the two world wars provided intellectual playwrights a vital but tension-ridden venue to (re)produce forms of "self" as performatively informed "enlighteners" to the masses, while at the same time transforming the masses into participatory citizens for building a modern China by restoring and (re)defining social norms within the extended *huaju* "stage." I have demonstrated how *huaju*-making, seen and practiced as a "democratic institution" by cosmopolitan dramatists such as Hong Shen, attempted, among other things, to form a unity incorporating the metropolitan masses, a rural base for MEM, and shelters for refugees during the Second Sino-Japanese War. The complex transnational quality of *huaju* was further fleshed out and consolidated in institutional avenues such as drama schools, libraries, and book catalogs. Examining these professionalizing and canonizing endeavors brings forth a more inclusive understanding of *huaju*; one that recognizes not only the contributions of

genius dramatists, but also the input of cultural entrepreneurs and grass-roots amateurs.

Chapter 1 examines *The Wedded Husband* and *Rainbow*, two English-language plays that Hong Shen wrote and staged for an American audience while he was a student at OSU. My rediscovery of these works critiques the legacy as well as the burden that the May Fourth paradigm imprinted upon *huaju*. Ideologically, although these “realistic” plays shared common concerns—modern (wo)men’s relationship with their patriarchal families, and the status of Chinese people and their nation in a newly structured world order—with the emerging May Fourth intelligentsia in China, they retained an intriguing advocacy for the “discredited” Confucian ethic. Confucian morality was positioned in these works as a promising social order to restructure the world out of the postwar ruins. In this light, these “forgotten” playmaking practices reflect a clear intellectual lineage with late Qing intellectuals’ reformative aspirations for modern China and the world.

Hong’s practice of writing, performing, and defining modern Chinese theatre via these two amateur productions thus greatly distinguishes his experience abroad from other well-known narratives of overseas students, such as Lu Xun and Wen Yiduo, both of whom faced tension-charged “humiliations” of their own racial, national, and gender identities. Unlike these tragic accounts, which have become interwoven into a shared discourse of suffering—and from which arrives the best-known variant of modern Chinese nationalism—both Hong’s story and the broader cosmopolitan current it represented (which included Yu Shangyuan and Xiong Foxi in the I-House) have, until now, been left unexamined.

Among the cohort of American-educated Chinese dramatists, Yu Shangyuan is generally remembered not for what he achieved but for how he failed. Due to the relative ineffectiveness of his National Theatre Movement, as well as his disavowal of social problem plays, Yu was labeled an eccentric and excluded from the founding fathers of *huaju*. Critically responding to this narrative, Chapter 2 reads Yu’s travel writings and technical documents that he wrote while sojourning in the United States in tandem with *Mutiny* and *Statue*, two *huaju* plays that he published soon before and soon after the National Theatre Movement. Yu’s imagination, theorization, and practices of making realist scenographies, contained in these writings, guide me in uncovering Yu’s substantial investigation of realism, namely, the cultivation and actualization of spectatorial visuality. I argue that Yu, endorsing neither a conventionally defined Western realist theatre nor a traditional Chinese theatre, negotiated for an ocular

realism, inherited from the techniques (but not the ideology) of Ibsenism and the neo-Confucian “investigation of things” (*gewu*). Yu’s attention to the visual qualities embedded in modern Chinese theatre demonstrates how the divide—between realist and modernist theatres in the West and between representation (*xieshi*) and presentation (*xieyi*) in the Chinese artistic tradition—was not clear-cut but porous. By returning to scholarship the missing chapter of Yu Shangyuan and his early realist explorations, this book reveals the divergent paths of modern Chinese theatre’s development in the 1920s before *huaju*’s canonization.

For these foreign-educated dramatists, neither their personal transitions nor their aspirations of (re)forming modern theatre back in China were smooth. Usually, their difficulties acclimating to Chinese realities are blamed on their cosmopolitan lifestyles. Chapter 3 examines how Tian Han, Hong Shen, and Xiong Foxi imagined, wrote, and staged the rural space in their “peasant plays”—*The Night the Tiger Was Caught*, *Rural Trilogy*, and *Cross the River*. Tian’s *Tiger* casts a nostalgic look at rural China, presenting the countryside as a lyrical space to which urban intellectuals longed to return. Hong moves Tian’s nostalgic imagination toward the direction of scientific investigation in his *Rural Trilogy*, focusing on the problems of the rural reconstruction movement—the loss of native land and the futility of attempting to build a modern public/national infrastructure—to suggest his skepticism about the goal of building a rural modern. Onstage, the destructive actions and the prevailing anger/sentiment of the peasant characters reinforced each other, leading to a theatrical climax where the social disorder that had been generated from building a rural public swayed between the categories of “village mob” and “new citizens.” Offstage, the discernible self-doubts embodied by Hong’s peasant plays demonstrated his belief that playmaking was a “democratic” space in which to exert a critical voice.

Although Xiong Foxi recycled the (re)construction theme addressed in Hong’s peasant plays, he removed the tension between intellectual educators and the rural masses. Xiong, who wrote *Cross the River* while living in Ding Xian, turned the plot and dramatic action of demolishing an old bridge or cherry orchard in Hong’s plays into building a new bridge, thereby echoing—instead of questioning—the optimistic goals of the rural reconstruction movement. Further, the Ding Xian peasants not only played roles of bridge-builders within *Cross the River* but were organized by Xiong and MEM’s Theatre Division to build the open-air theatre where the play was staged. By situating a textual analysis of the play alongside accounts of peasant actors’ daily rehearsals and their collective labor in theatre-

building, I have demonstrated that the process of staging *Cross the River* attempted to stimulate and incorporate peasants' participation in making *huaju* and a rural modern, while also transforming them into "new citizens." Theatre, as a "democratic" space, was actualized in both sentimental and material senses.

Xiong's playmaking experiences in Ding Xian promptly gained national attention. The National Drama School (NDS), a government-sponsored network that exerted the tasks of training playwrights (pedagogical), refining the theatrical art of *huaju* (aesthetic), and propagating the ideologies of national defense and state building (political), strongly endorsed and further institutionalized the Ding Xian experience by weaving together villagers' communal training efforts with other intellectual theorizations of acting and elocution. Chapter 4 turns to Jiang'an's Confucian Temple, an unlikely place that served as the innovative makeshift stage of NDS. Yu Shangyuan orchestrated this embracive space where *huaju* education, production, and theorization—along with the energizing forces of cosmopolitanism, nationalism, and localism—developed in a symbiotic dynamic.

After the mid-1930s, the Japanese threat of invasion was further pronounced. Established cosmopolitan dramatists, indigenous theatre stars, and political arbiters, frequently at odds with one other, joined forces to envision the techniques of wartime *huaju*. After contextualizing these discussions and debates, I read Zhang Daofan's grant proposal for NDS and place the school within the long-term goal of building a national theatre, thereby linking NDS with Qing diplomats' "awe" of the Paris Opera in the late nineteenth century, and the process of nationalizing Peking opera in the Nanjing Decade. Leaving the prescriptive level, I examine how cosmopolitan dramatists, after becoming war refugees and living with the local grassroots, translated various acting theories borrowed from *wenmingxi*, Peking opera, and Stanislavski into an applicable backstage training curriculum. Finally, Chapter 4 examines *Joy of Joining the Army*, a *huaju* meant to promote "conscription propaganda." The play embraces, in fact relies on, synthesizing "singing, dancing, and music" to move the masses and deliver its political message. Synthesization not only enriches the specific methods of producing this *huaju* in various makeshift conditions but also provides the stage for the dramatists, student actors (amateurs), and audience to become participatory citizens. The joint efforts of professionalization, popularization, and politicization of *huaju* are no longer "empty talk" but tangible.

Following these studies of *huaju*-making in textual, performative, and institutional aspects, I conclude with an examination of alternative canon-

izations of *huaju* from the 1910s to the 1940s. Compared to the mythmaking narratives that are embodied in established dramatists' "introductions" of their own *huaju* anthologies, or in state-sponsored volumes published in the 1950s, the works I examine in Chapter 5 are lesser known and do not always endorse the dominant voices of *huaju* history. Shu Weiqing's *Catalog: Books of Modern Drama* aspired to meet the more urgent request from amateur (and professional) theatre troupes to provide sources for stageable scripts rather than to canonize literary "closet dramas." Zhu Shuangyun, a veteran *wenmingxi* player, offered input in regulating a sustainable *huaju* theatre culture in the early 1940s, when *wenmingxi* was deemed *passé* and the call for professionalizing *huaju* was superseded by the need for politicizing *huaju*. The seemingly odd angles expressed in these works reveal the entrepreneurial and professional concerns that were always central to *huaju* history, despite their rare appearance in celebrated narratives.

Chapter 5 also examines *Annals of Theatre*, a *huaju* about the history of *huaju*-making. Xia Yan, the main writer behind *Annals*, studied in Japan and was a leading figure of China's left-wing film- and playmaking network. Interestingly, Xia chose the trajectory of Ying Yunwei to dramatize *huaju*-makers' collective fate. Ying's career diverged from the "man of letters" identity embedded in established dramatists and instead resembled the "cultural entrepreneur" who engaged not only textual and ideological aspects of *huaju* but also the performative, theatrical, and commercial venues of *huaju*-making. While fully exerting his talent in directing and producing plays as well as managing drama troupes, Ying was much less qualified as a playwright and did not contribute any signature plays to the *huaju* repertoire. Ying's broad social networking with leftists and nationalists, bankers and dramatists, actors and stage technicians further blurred his identity as a left-wing dramatist. By focusing on Ying, Xia shifted attention to the "backstage" of *huaju* theatre, where the conflict and negotiation of playmaking are dramatized. In this sense, Xia positioned *Annals* within the "backstage discourse"—or "the hidden script" in James C. Scott's definition—that prioritizes the spoken over the written and the preparation for a performance over the performance itself. By making a *huaju* about *huaju*-making, *Annals* provides a self-canonization that encounters and challenges the established canonical voice of *huaju*. *Annals* values the contributions of *juren* (men and women of theatre) over individual *xiju jia* (dramatists).

In sum, this book unearths an alternative imagination of *huaju* and *huaju*-making—as "cosmopolitan" instead of "Western," and "democratic" instead of "elitist." I reconstruct the map and timeline of *huaju*'s develop-

ment from an “amateur” theatre practiced by post–World War I cosmopolitan youth to the canonized modern Chinese theatre that answered artistic, popular, and political pursuits during World War II. Specifically, I point to the significance of *huaju*’s backstage network that expanded from Columbus, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and New York (Chapters 1 and 2) to Shanghai and Ding Xian (Chapter 3) to Nanjing and Jiang’an (Chapter 4) and, finally, to Qingdao, Hankou, and Chongqing (Chapter 5). Treating *huaju* as a vital and collaborative entity rather than as a literary genre, I examine the trajectory of *huaju*-making, from one of its origins among Chinese students studying in America to *huaju*’s popularization among the masses, to the institutionalization of a *huaju* drama school, and to its self-canonization in a *huaju* play. Finally, I link the process of playmaking on the extended *huaju* stage with the project of nation-building that took place among China’s overseas student community, its domestic metropolises and rural reconstruction bases, and wartime capital, while also demonstrating the vital two-way traffic between *huaju* theatre and political reality (or the worldly stage). *Huaju* thereby is given a fuller examination of its artistic meanings, social function, and trajectory of development. During the first half of China’s tumultuous twentieth century, cosmopolitan dramatists, the (rural) masses, professional and amateur performers, government bureaucrats, and cultural entrepreneurs negotiated with each other in (re)defining artistic and social norms, as well as (re)producing self- and national identities, on the democratic and makeshift *huaju* stage.

Notes

Introduction

1. Jean-Pierre Moynet's (1819–1896) *L'Envers du Théâtre* (1873) was the first popular book to offer a “backstage” view of the gas-lit proscenium stages that appeared in the nineteenth century. Jean-Pierre Moynet, *Backstage in the Theatre: Scenes and Machines*, translated, introduced, and annotated by Christopher Baugh in association with David Wilmore (North Yorkshire: Theatresearch Books, 2015).

2. Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-Creation of Peking Opera, 1979–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 27.

3. Such as Liu Songkun, *Anecdotes from the Pear Garden (Liyuan yiwén 梨園軼聞)* (Beijing: Beijing yanshan chubanshe, 1998).

4. The I-House was conceived by Harry E. Edmonds (1883–1979), who saw the need for a community-oriented living and study center for international students. *Yang Guifei* was staged as part of a performance by I-House residents to present their cultures to the American public. John D. Rockefeller Jr. (1874–1960) was one of the guests in attendance. Following the success of the New York I-House, Rockefeller funded additional I-houses in Berkeley (1930) and Chicago (1932). Michael R. Auslin, *Pacific Cosmopolitans: A Cultural History of U.S.-Japan Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 134–35.

5. Huang Renlin, *Huang Renlin huiyi lu* (黃仁霖回憶錄 Huang Renlin's Memoir) (Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe, 1984), 28. Huang would later play a leading role in China's New Life Movement as general secretary of the Officers' Moral Endeavor Association.

6. *Chuanqi* is a form of traditional Chinese drama developed in the late fourteenth century. *The Palace of Eternal Life*, written by Hong Sheng (洪昇 1645–1706), depicted the love story between Emperor Xuanzong (玄宗 r. 712–756) and his young consort Yang Yuhuan (楊玉環, aka Yang Guifei 楊貴妃, 719–756) during the Tang dynasty (618–907).

7. Hong Shen, trans., “The Cowherd and the Weaving Maid” (Niulang yu zhiniu 牛郎與織女), *Yingwen zazhi* (英文雜誌 The English Student) 9, no. 6 (June 1923): 448–54, and no. 7 (July 1923): 529–34.

8. Huang, *Huang Renlin huiyi lu*, 29.

9. Liang Qichao, “Xin Luoma” (新羅馬 New Rome), *Xin xiaoshuo* (新小說 New Fiction) 1, no. 1 (1902).

10. Xiaomei Chen, *Acting the Right Part: Political Theatre and Popular Drama in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 4.
11. Siyuan Liu, *Performing Hybridity in Colonial-Modern China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
12. Yinjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 7.
13. Huang Aihua, "Ershi shiji chuqi baokan chuanmei yu xinju de chuanbo: yi Shen Bao xuesheng yanju, wenmingxi yanchu xiaoxi he guanggao weili" (20世纪初报刊传媒与新剧的传播——以《申报》学生演剧, 文明新戏演出消息和广告为例 The Newspaper Media and the Spread of New Drama in the Early Twentieth Century: A Case Study on the Performance Advertisements of Student Theatres and Civilized Drama), *Nanjing daxue xuebao* (南京大学学报 Nanjing University Journal) no. 2 (2016).
14. Liu, *Performing Hybridity*, 60.
15. Weihong Bao, *Fiery Cinema: The Emergence of an Affective Medium in China, 1915–1945* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 42.
16. For more on Qi Rushan and his revision of Peking opera as a presentational but not realistic art, see Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, 134–74.
17. For more on Chen Dabei's theorization of amateur drama, see Annelise Finegan Wasmoen, "Translational Stages: Chinese Theatrical Modernism," PhD dissertation, Washington University in St. Louis, 2021.
18. John B. Weinstein, "Ding Xilin and Chen Baichen: Building a Chinese Theatre Through Comedy," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 20, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 92–130.
19. Wen-Hsin Yeh, *The Alienated Academy: Culture and Politics in Republican China, 1919–1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 10.
20. Liu, *Performing Hybridity*, 8.
21. Hong Shen, "Xiju daoyan" (戲劇導言 Introduction to Drama), in *Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi* (中國新文學大系 Compendium of New Chinese Literature), vol. 9 (Shanghai: Liangyou tushu yinshua gongsi, 1935), 16.
22. Liu, *Performing Hybridity*, 9.
23. Hong Shen, "Cong Zhongguo de xinju shuodao huaju" (從中國的新劇說到話劇 From New Theatre to Spoken Drama), foreword to Ma Yanxiang, *Xiju gailun* (戲劇概論 Introduction to Theatre) (Shanghai: Daguang shuju, 1932), 18; Hong, "Xiju daoyan," 88.
24. Hu Ningrong, "Shuoshuo 'huaju' zhege mingcheng—jianji cong 'aimei de' dao 'huaju'" (说说“话剧”这个名称—兼及从“爱美剧”到“话剧” A Note on the Neologism of “huaju”—and from “Amateur” to “Spoken Drama”), *Xiju* (戏剧 Drama), March 2007, 97–98.
25. Wasmoen, "Translational Stages," 112.
26. Chen, *Acting the Right Part*, 17.
27. Chen, *Acting the Right Part*, 22.
28. Liu, *Performing Hybridity*, 7.
29. Liang Luo, *The Avant-Garde and the Popular in Modern China: Tian Han and the Intersection of Performance and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014); Megan Ammirati, "Uncle Tom's Cabin in China: Ouyang Yuqian's Regret of a Black Slave and the Tactics of Impersonating Race, Gender, and Class," *Asian Theatre Journal* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 165–88.

30. Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, 134–74; Jin Jiang, *Women Playing Men: Yue Opera and Social Change in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

31. Mobile theatres were “dramatized presentations on current events” performed at street corners, village markets, and other makeshift stages. Xiaobing Tang, “Street Theatre and Subject Formation in Wartime China: Toward a New Form of Public Art,” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* no. 18 (March 2016): 21. For more on mobile theatres, see Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); and Ge Fei, *Xiju, geming yu dushi xuanwo: 1930 niandai zuoyi juyun, juren zai shanghai* (戏剧, 革命与都市漩涡: 1930年代左翼剧运, 剧人在上海 Drama, Revolution and the City: The Left-Wing Drama Movement and Men of Theatre in 1930s Shanghai) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2008).

32. Tang, “Street Theatre and Subject Formation,” 24.

33. Alexa Huang, *Chinese Shakespeares: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Kwok-kan Tam, *Chinese Ibsenism: Reinventions of Women, Class, and Nation* (Singapore: Springer, 2019).

34. Siyuan Liu, “Hong Shen and Adaptation of Western Plays in Modern Chinese Theatre,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 27, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 106–71; Weihong Bao, “The Art of Control: Hong Shen, Behavioral Psychology, and the Technics of Social Effects,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 27, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 249–97; Tarryn Li-Min Chun, “Revolutionary Illumination: Stage Lighting, Politics, and Play in 1930s Shanghai Theater,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2018): 87–140.

35. Bao, “Art of Control,” 255.

36. Liu, *Performing Hybridity*.

37. Goldstein, *Drama Kings*.

38. Jiang, *Women Playing Men*.

39. Luo, *Avant-Garde and the Popular*.

40. Bao, *Fiery Cinema*.

41. Chen, *Acting the Right Part*.

Chapter 1

1. Portions of this chapter were previously published as Man He, “When S/He Is Not Nora: Hong Shen, Cosmopolitan Intellectuals, and Chinese Theatres in 1910s China and America,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 27, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 51–105.

2. Hong Shen was not the first Chinese national to publish an English-language play in the United States. In 1915–1916, Zhang Pengchun published *The Intruder*, *The Man in Gray*, and *The Awakening* (all one-act plays) in *The Journal of the Chinese Students Christian Association in North America* (*Liumei qingnian* 留美青年). However, these English-language scripts were never staged.

3. Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 29.

4. Walter J. Meserve and Ruth I. Meserve, “Hung Shen: Chinese Dramatist Trained in America,” *Theatre Journal* 31, no. 1 (March 1979): 25–34.

5. Dave Williams, ed., *The Chinese Other, 1850–1925: An Anthology of Plays* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1997), xiv.
6. Weili Ye, *Seeking Modernity in China's Name: Chinese Students in the United States, 1900–1927* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 212.
7. Xiaomei Chen, "Mapping a 'New' Dramatic Canon: Rewriting the Legacy of Hong Shen," in Peng Hsiao-yen and Isabelle Rabut, eds., *Modern China and the West* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 225.
8. Hong Shen only mentions TWH's Chinese title, *Wei zhi you shi*, once in his introduction, stating that it was part of his successful application to Professor Baker's drama workshop at Harvard. Hong Shen, "Xiju daoyan" (戲劇導言 Introduction to Drama), in *Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi* (中國新文學大系 Compendium of New Chinese Literature), vol. 9 (Shanghai: Liangyou tushu yinshua gongsi, 1935), 58.
9. Hong, "Xiju daoyan," 23.
10. Xiaomei Chen, *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 123.
11. Shen Hung, *The Wedded Husband*, *Poet Lore* 32 (March 1921): 125.
12. Jing Tsu, *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature: The Making of Modern Chinese Identity, 1895–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 1.
13. Hong Shen, "Xiju de rensheng" (戲劇的人生 A Life of Drama), in *Wukui qiao* (五奎橋 Wukui Bridge) (Shanghai: Xiandai shuju, 1934), 1–32.
14. Gong Yuan, "Zhongguo xiandai huaju shi shang de 'Qinghua chuantong'" (中国现代话剧史上的清华传统 The "Tsinghua Tradition" in the History of Modern Chinese Drama), *Xiju yishu* (戏剧艺术 Theatre Art) no. 3 (2012): 9–10.
15. Denise Gimpel, *Lost Voices of Modernity: A Chinese Popular Fiction Magazine in Context* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 201.
16. Bao Tianxiao, "Yilü ma" (一縷麻 One Strand of Hemp), *Xiaoshuo shibao* (小說時報 Fiction Times) 1, no. 2 (1909): 1–5.
17. Bao Tianxiao, *Chuanying lou huiyi lu* (釧影樓回憶錄 A Memoir from the Mansion of Bracelet's Shadow) (Hong Kong: Dahua chubanshe, 1971), 361.
18. Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900–1950* (Stanford: University of Stanford Press, 2007), 25.
19. Martin W. Huang, "Sentiments of Desire: Thoughts on the Cult of Qing in Ming-Qing Literature," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 20 (December 1998): 161.
20. Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 34.
21. Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 34.
22. Bao, "Yilü ma."
23. Bao, "Yilü ma."
24. Mei Lanfang, *Wutai shenghuo sishi nian* (1) (舞台生活四十年 Forty Years of Life on Stage I) (Shanghai: Pingming chubanshe, 1952), 274.
25. Mei, *Wutai shenghuo sishi nian*, 273.
26. Mei, *Wutai shenghuo sishi nian*, 275.
27. Mei, *Wutai shenghuo sishi nian*, 277. Mei made this self-criticism soon after China's Communist Revolution.
28. Liao Taiyan, "Meilanfang yu bao tianxiao" (梅蘭芳與包天笑 Mei Lanfang and Bao Tianxiao), *Shuwu* (書屋 Book House) no. 11 (2012).
29. Fu Sinian, "Xiju gailiang gemian guan" (戲劇改良革命觀 A Comprehensive

View on Theatre Reform), in *Fu Sinian quanji* (傅斯年全集 Complete Works of Fu Sinian), vol. 4 (Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu chubanshe, 2003), 1089.

30. *Shenbao* (申報 Shanghai News), November 5, 1916.

31. Siyuan Liu, *Performing Hybridity in Colonial-Modern China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 8. Hong Shen's 1935 introduction initiated the practice of excluding *wenmingxi* from the parameters of modern Chinese drama. However, in 1957 modern Chinese drama was officially marked as starting with the 1907 Spring Willow production of *Black Slave's Cry to Heaven*, which was a civilized drama.

32. Zheng Zhengqiu, *Xinju kaozheng baichu* (新劇考證百出 One Hundred New Drama Plays) (Shanghai: Zhonghua tushu jicheng gongsi, 1919), 47.

33. Shuei-may Chang, *Casting Off the Shackles of Family: Ibsen's Nora Figure in Modern Chinese Literature, 1918-1942* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 25-49.

34. Such as Ouyang Yuqian's *After Returning Home* (*Huijia yihou* 回家以後, 1922-1924), which "complicated the May Fourth concern of women's liberation and the entire genre of the 'Nora Plays.'" Xiaomei Chen, "Modern Chinese Spoken Drama," in Victor H. Mair, ed., *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 853.

35. Xu Muyun, *Zhongguo xijushi* (中國戲劇史 China's Drama History) (Shanghai: Shijie shuju, 1938), 130; A Ying, "Yi Pusheng de zuopin zai Zhongguo" (易卜生的作品在中國 Ibsen's Works in China), *Wenyi bao* (文藝報 News of Literature and Art) no. 17 (1956).

36. *Actors' Magazine* was edited by Spring Willow member Feng Shuluan. Liu Hecheng, "Jinchu yiqi de Paiyou zazhi" (仅出一期的俳优杂志 The Single Issued Actors' Magazine), Chuban shiliao Publication Archives, 2005 (1), 64.

37. Lu Jingruo and Feng Shuyuan, "Yipusheng zhi ju," (易蒲生之剧 Ibsen's Drama), *Paiyou zazhi* (俳优雜誌 Actors' Magazine) no. 1 (September 20, 1914): 4-6.

38. Ouyang Yuqian, *Zi wo yanxi yilai* (1907-1928) (自我演戲以來 Since I Perform) (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1959), 52-53.

39. Le Shui [Hong Shen], "Oumei mingju" (歐美名劇 European and American Signature Plays), *Xiaoshuo yuebao* (小說月報 Short Story Monthly) 6, no. 6 (1915). Hong's pen name was inspired by "Zhizhe le shui, renzhe le shan" (智者樂水 仁者樂山 The wise find pleasure in water; the virtuous find pleasure in mountains), from the *Analects*.

40. Hung, *Wedded Husband*, 110.

41. Hung, *Wedded Husband*, 130.

42. Hung, *Wedded Husband*, 117.

43. Hung, *Wedded Husband*, 117.

44. Hung, *Wedded Husband*, 112.

45. Hung, *Wedded Husband*, 125-26.

46. Hung, *Wedded Husband*, 134-35.

47. Chi C. Lin, "Club News," *Chinese Students' Monthly* 14 (December 1918): 503-4.

48. Williams, *Chinese Other*, xiv.

49. Williams, *Chinese Other*, 392.

50. Prior to the Exclusion Act of 1882, "Pacific Orientalism" had generated an abiding fascination among American elites with Chinese luxury goods, culture refinement, and even political ideals. John Kuowei Tchen, *New York before Chinatown*:

Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776–1882 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999).

51. Hong, “Xiju de rensheng,” 15.

52. Hong, “Xiju de rensheng,” 16.

53. Unknown author, “Influenza Encyclopedia: The American Influenza Epidemic of 1918–1919,” produced by the University of Michigan Center for the History of Medicine and Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, <https://www.influenzaarchive.org/cities/city-columbus.html#>, accessed April 2024; unknown author, “Kahn Tells How to Prevent Influenza,” *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, October 5, 1918.

54. The 1850 arrival of Yung Wing (容闳 1828–1912) is usually considered the beginning of elite Chinese studying in the United States.

55. Emma Jinhua Teng, *Eurasian: Mixed Identities in the United States, China, and Hong Kong, 1842–1943* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 2.

56. Karl, *Staging the World*, 16.

57. Teng, *Eurasian*, 4.

58. Ye, *Seeking Modernity*, 4; Jon L. Sarri, *Legacies of Childhood: Growing Up Chinese in a Time of Crisis, 1890–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1990).

59. By 1918, around twelve hundred Chinese students were studying in America. This was a much smaller number than the Chinese student population in Japan, which amounted to eight thousand in Tokyo alone in 1906. Ye, *Seeking Modernity*, 8.

60. Hong Shen’s transcript at Ohio State University. Courtesy of Hong Qian.

61. Chen Dabei, *Aimei de xiju* (愛美的戲劇 Amateur Theatre), reprint (Shanghai: Shanghai shiji, 2011), 1–2. In 1921, Chen Dabei began a series of essays in *Morning Post Supplement* (*Chenbao fukan* 晨報復刊) calling for “amateur” theatres in China.

62. Carlos Rojas, *Homesickness: Culture, Contagion, and National Transformation in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 3. Rojas credits Germany’s Kaiser Wilhelm II (1859–1941) as having been the first to use the phrase “yellow peril,” in 1895.

63. Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the Yellow Peril: Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 2–3.

64. Madeline Y. Hsu, *The Good Immigrants: How the Yellow Peril Became the Model Minority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 24–25.

65. Marchetti, *Romance and the Yellow Peril*, 3.

66. Hong Shen was a member of the Cosmopolitan Club, the Chinese Students Club, and the YMCA. OSU in the late 1910s had approximately nine thousand students. *Makio* (Ohio State University yearbook), 1919.

67. Ye, *Seeking Modernity*, 240.

68. Hong Shen was elected president of OSU’s Cosmopolitan Club on May 19, 1919, one month after he staged *TWH*. Unknown author, “Cosmopolitan Club Elects,” *Ohio State Lantern*, May 19, 1919.

69. *Ohio State Lantern*, February 12, 1918.

70. *Ohio State Lantern*, December 16, 1918.

71. Unknown author, “To Give Chinese Play in Chapel April 11–12,” *Ohio State Lantern*, April 1, 1919.

72. *Ohio State Lantern*, April 10, 1919.

73. Ohio State *Lantern*, April 8, 1919.
74. Ohio State *Lantern*, April 8 and April 11, 1919.
75. James S. Moy, *Marginal Sights: Staging Chinese in America* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993).
76. Esther Kim Lee, *A History of Asian American Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 8.
77. Ohio State *Lantern*, April 4, 1919.
78. Sophie Volpp, *Worldly Stage: Theatricality in Seventeenth-Century China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 6–8.
79. Ohio State *Lantern*, April 16, 1919.
80. Suwen Luo, “Gender on Stage: Actress in an Actor’s World, 1895–1930,” in Bryna Goodman and Wendy Larson, eds., *Gender in Motion: Division of Labor and Cultural Change in Late Imperial and Modern China* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 79.
81. Luo, “Gender on Stage,” 84.
82. Luo, “Gender on Stage,” 75.
83. Ye, *Seeking Modernity*, 164.
84. Wu Jingchao, “Chinese Immigration in the Pacific Area,” MA thesis, University of Chicago, 1926; cited in Teng, *Eurasian*, 49.
85. Teng, *Eurasian*, 8.
86. Teng, *Eurasian*, 46.
87. Wang Huanchen, *Liuxue jiaoyu: Zhongguo liuxue jiaoyu shiliao* (留學教育: 中國留學教育資料 Overseas Education: Historical Sources Relating to Chinese Overseas Education) (Taipei: Guoli bianyiguan, 1980).
88. Ohio State *Lantern*, April 1, 1919.
89. Ohio State *Lantern*, April 11, 1919.
90. Ohio State *Lantern*, April 16, 1919.
91. Vogel, as the bride, only speaks once during Act 2, yelling “help” before passing out from the plague.
92. Hung, *Wedded Husband*, 118–19.
93. Hong Shen, “Dongfang ming xi (Rainbow)” (東方明兮 *Rainbow*), *Chinese Students’ Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (December 1920): 215.
94. Hong, “Dongfang ming xi (Rainbow),” 209–15. In 2012, Hong Qian visited Ohio State University to do archival research on her father’s early activities in the United States. It was while assisting her that I located both the published script of *TWH* in English and the published synopsis of *Rainbow* in Chinese. These two pieces were later included in Hong Qian’s book, *The Pioneer of Spoken Drama and Chinese Cinema: The Chronicle of Hong Shen (Zhongguo huaju dianying xianqu: Hogn Shen lishi biannian ji 中国话剧电影先驱: 洪深历世编年纪)* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2013), 58–77.
95. In fact, the Chinese title echoes the English title of *Rainbow* because “the appearance of a rainbow suggests that the storm has already passed and we will soon find blue sky and bright sun.” Hong, “Dongfang ming xi (Rainbow),” 215.
96. Hong, “Dongfang ming xi (Rainbow),” 210.
97. Mencius, “Li Lou xia” (離婁 下 Li Lou II), *Mengzi* (孟子 Mencius), <https://ctext.org/text.pl?node=1728&if=en>, accessed April 2024.
98. Hong, “Dongfang ming xi (Rainbow),” 210.

99. Hong, “Dongfang ming xi (Rainbow),” 213.
100. Unknown author, “Shandong wenti zhong zhi xueshengjie xingdong” (山東問題中之學生界行動 Student Activism in Response to the Shandong Question), *Chenbao* (晨報 Morning Post), May 5, 1919. Here I follow Chen Pingyuan’s translation and interpretation. Chen Pingyuan, *Touches of History: An Entry into “May Fourth” China* (New York: Brill, 2011), 17–52.
101. Ohio State *Lantern*, April 4, 1919.
102. Various sensational accounts about Hong Shuzu’s death still circulate today. All agree that Hong Shuzu was the first convict sentenced to death after China became a republic. Ironically, while Hong Shen was preparing to use traditional costumes shipped from China to stage a realistic Chinese play in the United States, Hong Shuzu was executed on the first electric gallows imported from the United States. Shang Xiaoming, *Song an chongshen* (宋案重审 Review of Song Jiaoren’s Case) (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2018).
103. Ye, *Seeking Modernity*, 180.
104. Hong, “Xiju de rensheng,” 10.
105. A special business meeting of the Cosmopolitan Club was held on October 1, 1919, to select a successor to Hong Shen, who “has entered Harvard University to study dramatic art.” Unknown author, “Cosmopolitan Club to Elect,” Ohio State *Lantern*, September 30, 1919.
106. Although Professor Baker and “Workshop 47” are most often credited for Hong Shen’s drama education, the Curry School of Expression exerted substantial influence on Hong’s comprehensive training in acting, which included vocalization, physical culture, artistic reading, public speaking, and philosophy. Weihong Bao, “The Art of Control: Hong Shen, Behavioral Psychology, and the Technics of Social Effects,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 27, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 265.
107. Meserve and Meserve, “Hung Shen: Chinese Dramatist,” 28.
108. *Shenbao* (申報 Shanghai Times), March 6, 1921.
109. Hong Shen, “Shen Hong yu Hong Shen” (沈洪雨洪深 Shen Hong and Hong Shen), in Hong Qian, ed., *Hong Shen wenchao* (洪深文鈔 Essays of Hong Shen) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 34.
110. Hong Shen, “Mulan congjun zai Meigu” (木兰从军在美国 *Mulan Joins the Army in America*), in Hong Qian, ed., *Hong Shen wenchao* (洪深文鈔 Essays of Hong Shen) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2004), 29.
111. There is evidence that Hong wrote at least one script while at Tsinghua, *The Fruit Vendors* (*Maili ren* 賣梨人), a 1915 production that included specific dialogues. The majority of Hong’s Tsinghua student theatre productions, though, were scenario-based.
112. Milena Doleželová-Velingerová, “The Origins of Modern Chinese Literature,” in Merle Goldman, ed., *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977).
113. Liu, *Performing Hybridity*, 100.
114. Liu, *Performing Hybridity*, 103.
115. Ma Er Xiansheng [Feng Shuluan], “Xixue jiangyi (4)” (戲學講義 Lectures in Theatre (4)), *Youxi zazhi* (遊戲雜誌 The Pastime) no. 12 (1914): 2–3, quoted in Liu, *Performing Hybridity*, 99.
116. Liu, *Performing Hybridity*, 101–2.

117. Hong Shen and Shen Gao, “Bianju xinshuo [2]” (編劇新說 New Discussion on Scriptwriting), *Liu Mei xuesheng jikan* (留美學生季刊 Students Abroad in America Quarterly) 1, no. 2 (Summer 1919).
118. Volpp, *Worldly Stage*.
119. Hong Shen and Shen Gao, “Bianju xinshuo [1]” (編劇新說 New Discussion on Scriptwriting), *Liu Mei xuesheng jikan* (留美學生季刊 Students Abroad in America Quarterly) 1, no. 1 (Spring 1919): 38.
120. Hong and Shen, “Bianju xinshuo [1],” 39.
121. Hong Shen, “The Contemporary Chinese Theatre,” *Theatre Arts* 4 (1920): 237.
122. Hong, “The Contemporary Chinese Theatre,” 238.
123. Hong, “The Contemporary Chinese Theatre,” 240. The companies usually consisted of only same-sex performers, unless, very rarely, mixed-gender companies were founded with the municipal authorities’ permission.
124. Hong, “The Contemporary Chinese Theatre,” 241.
125. Hong, “The Contemporary Chinese Theatre,” 243.
126. Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-Creation of Peking Opera, 1870–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 56.
127. Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, 56.
128. Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, 69.
129. Hong, “The Contemporary Chinese Theatre,” 240.
130. Hong and Shen, “Bianju xinshuo [1],” 38–39.
131. Hong and Shen, “Bianju xinshuo [1],” 40.
132. Hong and Shen, “Bianju xinshuo [1],” 42.
133. Wen-Hsin Yeh, *The Alienated Academy: Culture and Politics in Republican China, 1919–1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), 5.

Chapter 2

1. The ship’s traveling service was provided by the Admiral Oriental Line. An advertisement for the line can be found in *China Review* 5 (September 1923): 87.
2. *Shenbao* (申報 Shanghai News), August 17, 1923.
3. Unknown author, “Guan si fei liumei xuesheng fangyang ji” (官私費留美學生放洋紀 A Record of the Students with Government Funds and Self-Support to Study Abroad), *Shenbao* (申報 Shanghai News), August 18, 1923.
4. Laikwan Pang, considering the effect of photography on Chinese theatres, notes, “The two-dimensional flattened images had replaced the three-dimensional moving performances, and attending operas may have felt similar to viewing photographs.” Laikwan Pang, *The Distorting Mirror: Visual Modernity in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 151.
5. The opening announcement of the Great World proclaimed, “The Great World is well designed and decorated. [Visitors] will find unseen flying swings with rising chairs and ships.” Unknown author, “Da shijie kaimu ji” (大世界開幕記 On the Opening of the Great World), *Shenbao* (申報 Shanghai News), July 14, 1917.
6. The Department of Drama at Carnegie, founded in 1914, is the oldest degree-granting drama program in the United States. Elizabeth Schrader-Kimberly, *A History of the Drama Department of Carnegie-Mellon University, Formerly Carnegie Institute of Technology, 1914–1981* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie-Mellon University, 1981).

7. Edward Gunn, ed., *Twentieth-Century Chinese Drama: An Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), iii.
8. Xiaomei Chen, ed., *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 4.
9. David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849–1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 7.
10. Kai-wing Chow, Tze-ki Hon, Hung-yok Ip, and Don C. Price, eds., *Beyond the May Fourth Paradigm: In Search of Chinese Modernity* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008); Wang Xiaoming, Michel Hockx, and Theodore Hutters, “A Journal and a ‘Society’: On the May Fourth Literary Tradition,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 11, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 1–39.
11. Chen, *Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Drama*, 3.
12. Li Jin, “Theatre of Pathos: Sentimental Melodramas in the New Drama Legacy,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 24, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 99.
13. Kirk Denton, *The Problematic of Self in Modern Chinese Literature: Hu Feng and Lu Ling* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 7.
14. Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-Creation of Peking Opera, 1870–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Jin Jiang, *Women Playing Men: Yue Opera and Social Change in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011).
15. Siyuan Liu, *Performing Hybridity in Colonial-Modern China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 3.
16. Li, “Theatre of Pathos,” 94.
17. Li, “Theatre of Pathos,” 105–9.
18. Pang, *Distorting Mirror*, 134.
19. Weihong Bao, *Fiery Cinema: The Emergence of an Affective Medium in China, 1915–1945* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 50.
20. Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, 89–90.
21. One notable exception is Alexa Huang, who uncovers the utilitarianism embedded in May Fourth realism when discussing how Shakespeare’s works were staged in 1920s China. Alexa Huang, *Chinese Shakespeares: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).
22. Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 7.
23. Anderson, *Limits of Realism*, 12–14.
24. Anderson, *Limits of Realism*, 14.
25. Anderson, *Limits of Realism*, 28.
26. Hu Shi, “Yibusheng zhuyi” (易卜生主義 Ibsenism), *Xin qingnian* (新青年 New Youth) 4, no. 6 (1918); quoted in Anderson, *Limits of Realism*, 32.
27. Anderson, *Limits of Realism*, 40.
28. David Der-wei Wang, *Fictional Realism in Twentieth-Century China: Mao Dun, Lao She, Shen Congwen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).
29. Christopher Rea, *The Age of Irreverence: A New History of Laughter in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 65.
30. Rea, *Age of Irreverence*, 40.
31. Xiaomei Chen, “Tian Han and the Southern Society Phenomenon: Networking the Personal, Communal, and Cultural,” in Kirk Denton and Michel Hockx, eds., *Literary Societies of Republican China* (New York: Lexington Books, 2008), 242.

32. Amy Holzapfel, *Art, Vision, and Nineteenth-Century Realist Drama: Acts of Seeing* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 82.
33. Holzapfel, *Acts of Seeing*, 84.
34. Holzapfel, *Acts of Seeing*, 89.
35. Egil Tornqvist, *Ibsen: A Doll's House* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 66; quoted in Holzapfel, *Acts of Seeing*, 90.
36. Holzapfel, *Acts of Seeing*, 90–95.
37. Holzapfel, *Acts of Seeing*, 89.
38. Alan Ackerman, *Seeing Things: From Shakespeare to Pixar* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 7; quoted in Holzapfel, *Acts of Seeing*, 2.
39. Siyuan Liu's construction of the early generation of the Qing diplomats' tours of museums and theatres in Paris in the late nineteenth century offers sufficient evidence in this regard. Liu, *Performing Hybridity*, 13–33. Hong Shen also credited museum visits in shaping his cosmopolitan life when studying in America between 1916 and 1922. Hong Shen, "Xiju de rensheng" (戲劇的人生 A Life of Drama), in *Wukui qiao* (五奎橋 Wukui Bridge) (Shanghai: Xiandai shuju, 1934).
40. The Apollo Art Society was founded in Beijing in 1921. With a primary goal to promote oil painting and other Western arts, this society organized several exhibitions in the winters of 1922–1923. Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 42.
41. Yu Shangyuan, "Qinxian 2: Shier xiaoshi de Zhijiage" (芹獻 2: 十二小時的芝加哥 A Humble Gift 2: Twelve Hours in Chicago), *Chenbao fukan* (晨報副刊 Morning Post Supplement) 4, December 1, 1923.
42. Yu, "Qinxian 2."
43. Yu, "Qinxian 2."
44. Zong-qi Cai, ed., *How to Read Chinese Poetry: A Guided Anthology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 252.
45. Yu, "Qianxian 2."
46. The first American presentation of *Madame Butterfly* occurred in October 1906 in Washington, DC, by the Savage Opera Company. Henry Williams Simon, ed., *The Victor Book of the Opera* (Camden: Victor Talking Machine Company, 1913), 265–67.
47. Yu, "Qinxian 2."
48. Holzapfel, *Acts of Seeing*, 79.
49. Helen Sheumaker and Shirley Teresa Wajda, eds., *Material Culture in America: Understanding Everyday Life* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 346.
50. Jane E. Elliot, *Some Did It for Civilisation, Some Did It for Their Country: A Revised View of the Boxer War* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2002), 248.
51. James Ricalton, *China Through the Stereoscope: A Journey Through the Dragon Empire at the Time of the Boxer Uprising* (New York: Underwood, 1901), 12.
52. Yu, "Qinxian 2."
53. Holzapfel, *Acts of Seeing*, 86.
54. Anderson, *Limits of Realism*, 33.
55. For an example of an objective definition of realism, see Jiang Hao, who wrote, "Realism is an entirely objective and real attitude to describe all kinds of life in reality. The goal of realism is to add no [subjective] ideal nor make any revision." Jiang Hao, "Tan xieshi zhuyi" (談寫實主義 On Realism), *Xuepian* (雪片 Snowflakes) 1, no. 2 (1924): 15.

56. Zhou Xiang also founded the Oil Painting School (Shanghai Youhua yuan 油畫院) to provide scenic background for portrait photographers. Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*, xi.

57. Zhou Xiang, “Wutai beijing huafa [1]” (舞台背景畫法 The Methodology of Painting a Stage Scene), *Meiyu* (美育 Art Education) no. 1 (1920): 47.

58. Zhou, “Wutai beijing huafa [1],” 47.

59. Zhou Xiang, “Wutai beijing huafa [2]” (舞台背景畫法 The Methodology of Painting Stage a Scene), *Meiyu* (美育 Art Education) no. 2 (1920): 50.

60. Zhou, “Wutai beijing huafa [2],” 49.

61. Song was a well-known Francophile. After graduating from St. John’s University in Shanghai, he studied in Geneva, where he gained an unusually wide knowledge of contemporary Western drama. Following his return to China in 1916, he taught at universities in Shanghai and Beijing. His Coramo library will be examined in Chapter 5.

62. Song introduced the little-theatre movement in his 1919 essay, “The Significance, History, and Development of Little Theatres” (Xiao xiuyuan de yiyi youlai ji xianzhuang 小劇院的意義由來及現狀). In this movement, the realist pursuits represented by Ibsen’s plays supplanted the classicism and Romanticism that had previously ruled European theatres. Song Chunfang, *Song Chunfang lunju* (宋春舫論劇 Song Chunfang’s Essays on Drama), vol. 1 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1923).

63. Yu Shangyuan, “Qinxian 4: Jinru Kanaiji yihou” (芹獻4: 進入卡耐基以後 A Humble Gift 4: Since Entering Carnegie), *Chenbao fukan* (晨報副刊 Morning Post Supplement) 4, December 5, 1923.

64. Yu, “Qinxian 4.”

65. Michael Mark Chemers, *Ghost Light: An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), 3.

66. Yu Shangyuan, “Bingbian” (兵變 Mutiny), *Chenbao fukan* (晨報副刊 Morning Post Supplement) (Seventh Anniversary Additional Issue, 1925). The play was eventually published in the *Morning Post*, after two abortive publishing attempts in the *Tsinghua Literature Quarterly* and the *Creation Quarterly* (*Chuangzao jikan* 創造季刊).

67. Rea, *Age of Irreverence*, 40.

68. Mei Chun, *The Novel and Theatrical Imagination in Early Modern China* (New York: Brill, 2011), 191–217.

69. It is perhaps not coincidental that Miss Qian’s “acting” as a female director within *Mutiny* presaged a change in women’s engagement with the theatre, shifting from merely acting or being seen to acting to see. Indeed, Miss Qian’s directorship in *Mutiny* came roughly a year before the canonized emergence of the female director in Chinese film history with Xie Caizhen’s (謝采貞 n.d.) melodramatic film *An Orphan’s Cry* (*Guchu beisheng* 孤雛悲聲, 1925). Lingzhen Wang, “Chinese Women’s Cinema,” in Yingjin Zhang, ed., *A Companion to Chinese Cinema* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 319–23.

70. Yu, “Bingbian,” 350.

71. Holzapfel, *Acts of Seeing*, 82.

72. Holzapfel, *Acts of Seeing*, 80.

73. Yu Shangyuan, “Qinxian 14: Ai’erlan wneyi fuxing yundong zhong de nujie” (芹獻14: 愛爾蘭文藝復興運動中的女傑 A Humble Gift 14: A Heroine of the Irish Art and Literary Renaissance), *Chenbao fukan* (晨報副刊 Morning Post Supplement), April 7, 1924, 3. Translation is from Siyuan Liu, “The Cross-Currents of Modern

Theatre and the Chinese National Theatre Movement of 1925–1926,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 11.

74. Yu, “Qinxian 14.”

75. Xiaomei Chen, *Acting the Right Part: Political Theatre and Popular Drama in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2002), 23.

76. Yu Shangyuan, “Qinxian 10: Guanyu bujing de yidian yijian” (芹獻 10: 關於佈景的一點意見 Humble Gift 10: Some of My Opinions Regarding the Theatre Scenography), *Chenbao fukan* (晨報副刊 Morning Post Supplement), January 29, 1924, 3.

77. Yu, “Qinxian 10,” 3.

78. Here Yu distantly echoed the Ming-Qing dramatist Li Yu (李漁 1611–1680) who believed, “If one can really possess a feeling of ‘idleness’ and a pair of enlightened eyes, then anything that passes by his eyes is a picture; any sound that enters his ears is material for poetry.” Mei, *The Novel and Theatrical Imagination in Early Modern China*, 194. For more on Li Yu’s visuality, see Patricia Sieber, “Seeing the World Through Xianqig ou’ji: Visuality, Performance, and Narrative of Modernity,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 12, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 1–43.

79. Yu, “Bingbian,” 345.

80. Mei, *The Novel and Theatrical Imagination in Early Modern China*, 195.

81. *Mutiny*, despite its pronounced emphasis on theatre practices, was performed only once by an amateur drama troupe, the Five Five Drama Society (Wuwu jushe 五五劇社), in Beijing after Yu returned to China in 1925. While Yu directed the play, records regarding other perspectives of this staging (the scenography, the performance, and the audience response) remain unknown.

82. In the *Times Pictorial Weekly*’s brief report, Yu’s production was referred to as *Song of Everlasting Sorrow* (*Changhen ge* 長恨歌). Scholarship typically refers to this play as *Yang Guifei*. See, for example, Xia Xiaohong, “The Construction of the Modern Chinese Concept of Xiju (‘Drama),” in Carlos Rojas and Andrea Bachner, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Chinese Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 64.

83. Unknown author, “Dong Xi chongshang zhi woguo guju *Changhen ge*” (東西崇尚之我國古劇長恨歌 East and West Venerate Our Old Chinese Play *Song of Everlasting Sorrow*), *Shibao tuhua zhouban* (時報圖書週刊 *Times Pictorial Weekly*), January 11, 1925.

84. Unknown author, “Dong Xi chongshang zhi woguo guju *Changhen ge*.”

85. Liu, “Cross-Currents of Modern Theatre,” 2.

86. Huang Renlin, who played the role of the Tang Emperor in *Yang Guifei*, mentioned the work in his autobiography, *The Forty Years When I Was Chiang Kai-shek’s General Secretary: Huang Renlin’s Memoir* (*Wo zuo Jiang Jieshi teqin zongguan 40 nian: Huang Renlin huiyi lu* 我做蔣介石特勤總管40年: 黃仁霖回憶錄) (Beijing: Tuanjie chubanshe, 2006), 34. Yu Shangyuan also briefly described this performance in his edited volume, *National Theatre Movement* (*Guoju yundong* 國劇運動) (Shanghai: Xinyue shudian, 1928).

87. Liu, “Cross-Currents of Modern Theatre,” 5.

88. Liu, “Cross-Currents of Modern Theatre,” 10.

89. Liu, “Cross-Currents of Modern Theatre,” 1.

90. Chen Duxiu, “Meishu geming: Da Lü Cheng” (美術革命: 答呂澂 Art Revolution: A Reply to Lü Cheng), *Xin qingnian* (新青年 New Youth) 6, no. 1 (1919).

91. Wang Hui became recognized in the late 1660s largely due to his exceptional skill in reproducing ancient masterpieces, especially Song and Yuan dynasty paintings. Maxwell K. Hearn, ed., *Landscapes Clear and Radiant: The Art of Wang Hui (1632–1717)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 64.

92. Chen, “Meishu geming”; quoted in David Der-wei Wang, *The Lyrical in Epic Time: Modern Chinese Intellectuals and Artists Through the 1949 Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 255.

93. Chen, “Meishu geming.”

94. Chen, “Meishu geming.”

95. In contrast to modern spoken drama, or *huaju*, the early phase of *wenmingxi* predominantly adopted the role-playing performance style.

96. Yu Shangyuan, “Qinxian 16: biaoyan de yishu” (芹獻16: 表演的藝術 A Humble Gift 16: The Art of Performance), *Chenbao fukan* (晨報副刊 Morning Post Supplement), May 6, 1924, 2–3.

97. Liu, “Cross-Currents of Modern Theatre,” 11.

98. George E. Bogusch, “Norman Bel Geddes and the Art of Modern Theatre Lighting,” *Educational Theatre Journal* 24, no. 4 (December 1972): 424.

99. Yu, “Qinxian 16,” 2–3; quoted in Liu, “Cross-Currents of Modern Theatre,” 11.

100. Liu, “Cross-Currents of Modern Theatre,” 11.

101. Hu Zhiyi, “Daoqu huozhong: Wusi shiqi de xiju fanyi” (盜取火種: 五四時期的戲劇翻譯 Stealing Fire: The Drama Translation in the May Fourth Period), in *Zhongguo huaju yanjiu* (中國話劇研究 Chinese Spoken Drama Study), vol. 12 (Beijing: Zhongguo chuanmei daxue chubanshe, 2010), 85–87.

102. Liu, “Cross-Currents of Modern Theatre,” 12.

103. Scholarship on the National Theatre Movement has mostly focused on the group’s articles published in the fifteen issues of the *Morning Post Theatre Supplement* in summer 1926. Liu, “Cross-Currents of Modern Theatre,” 12–25; Tian He, “Chonglun ‘Guoju yundong’ de kua wenhua kunjing” (重論‘國劇運動’的跨文化困境 Re-Discussion of the Cross-Cultural Dilemma of the National Theatre Movement), *Tongji daxue xuebao shehui kexue ban* (同濟大學學報社會科學版 Tongji University Journal Social Science Section) 26, no. 6 (December 2015): 78–83.

104. Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, 175–76.

105. Yu Shangyuan, “Zhongguo xiju de tujing” (中國戲劇的途徑 The Way of Chinese Theatre), in Zhang Yu, ed., *Yu Shangyuan yanjiu zhuanji* (余上沅研究專集 Yu Shangyuan Research Collection) (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaotong daxue chubanshe, 1993), 61.

106. Yu, “Zhongguo xiju de tujing,” 61.

107. One exception is Ouyang Yuqian’s *Pan Jinlian* (潘金蓮, 1928). Ouyang responded to the “experimental spirit” Yu called for by writing two versions of this play, one in the form of *huaju* and the other as a Peking opera. Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, 176.

108. Charles A. Laughlin, *The Literature of Leisure and Chinese Modernity* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 141. Yu had previously written *Mutiny* for Liang Shiqiu’s *Tsinghua Literature Quarterly* (*Qinghua wenxue jikan*).

109. Advertisement for *Guoju yundong* (國劇運動 National Theatre Movement), *Xinyue yuekan* (新月月刊 Crescent Moon Monthly) 2, no. 1 (1928): 17.

110. For detailed studies of the Southern Society, see Liang Luo, *The Avant-Garde and the Popular in Modern China: Tian Han and the Intersection of Performance and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 69–95; and Xiaomei Chen, “Reflections on the Legacy of Tian Han: ‘Proletarian Modernism’ and Its Traditional Roots,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 155–215.
111. Here I follow conventions from the 1930s in using “Fudan Dramatic Club” as the English translation of Fudan jushe (e.g., see *Young Companion Pictorial* (*Li-angyou huabao* 良友畫報) no. 77 [1933]).
112. Qin Shao, *Culturing Modernity: The Nantong Model, 1890–1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 177–90.
113. Some of these correspondences were published in *Beijing Morning Post* (*Beijing chenbao* 北京晨報) and were later included in Hong Shen’s “Introduction to Drama” in 1935.
114. Ouyang Yuqian, “Jinri zhi xieshi zhuyi” (今日之寫實主義 Today’s Realism), *Xiju* (戲劇 Drama) 1, no. 2 (1929): 229–30.
115. Yu Shangyuan, “Xu” (序 Preface), in *Shangyuan juben jiaji* (上沅劇本甲集 Shangyuan’s Plays, Volume 1) (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1934), 2.
116. Yu Shangyuan, “Suxiang [1]” (塑像 Statue), *Xinyue yuekan* (新月月刊 Crescent Moon Monthly) 1 (1928): 6.
117. Luo, *Avant-Garde and the Popular*, 91.
118. Luo, *Avant-Garde and the Popular*, 92.
119. Advertisement for *Guoju yundong* (國劇運動 National Theatre Movement), *Xinyue yuekan* (新月月刊 Crescent Moon Monthly) 2, no. 1 (1928): 17.
120. Yu, “Xu,” i.
121. Lu Xun, “Shangshi” (傷逝 Regret for the Past), in *Panghuang* (徬徨 Wandering) (Beijing: Beixin shuju, 1926).
122. Lu Xun, “What Happens After Nora Walks Out?,” translated by Bonnie S. McDougall, *China Channel*, <https://chinachannel.lareviewofbooks.org/2017/09/29/lu-xun-nora/>, accessed April 2024.
123. Qu Qiubai (瞿秋白 1899–1935), Zhou Yang (周陽 1908–1989), and other members of the Chinese League of Left-Wing Writers (Zhongguo zuoyi zuojia lianmeng 中國左翼作家聯盟), founded in 1930, advocated a realism that was quite different from what Zheng Zhenduo and others had understood in the early 1920s. Critiquing the European influence that had dominated Chinese culture in the May Fourth era, Qu aspired to “extract the positive qualities from them [realism and romanticism] in order to delineate a new literary mode more appropriate to China’s needs.” Through this critique, “socialist realism” (*shehuizhuyi de xianshi zhuyi* 社會主義的現實主義) redefined the purpose of literature to “reflect and describe reality but also to direct and propel reality.” Anderson, *Limits of Realism*, 56–57.
124. Tina Lu, *Persons, Roles, and Minds: Identity in “Peony Pavilion” and “Peach Blossom Fan”* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 19.
125. Lu, *Persons, Roles, and Minds*, 19.
126. Tang Xianzu; quoted in Lu, *Persons, Roles, and Minds*, 19.
127. Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 75. The illustration of Bridal Du was made by the Ming engraver Huang Mingqi (黃鳴岐 n.d.).
128. Luo, *Avant-Garde and the Popular*, 91.

129. Yu Shangyuan, “Suxiang [2]” (塑像 Statue), *Xiju yu wenyi* (戲劇與文藝 Theatre and Art) 1, no. 1 (1928): 111–12.
130. Yu, “Suxiang [2],” 98.
131. Mei, *The Novel and Theatrical Imagination in Early Modern China*, 198.
132. Yu, “Suxiang [2],” 98.
133. Lu, *Persons, Roles, and Minds*, 35–36.
134. Lu, *Persons, Roles, and Minds*, 36.
135. Yu, “Suxiang [2],” 89.
136. Yu, “Suxiang [2],” 117.
137. Yu, “Suxiang [2],” 132.
138. Yu, “Suxiang [2],” 135.
139. Yu, “Suxiang [2],” 135.

Chapter 3

1. Weili Ye, *Seeking Modernity in China's Name: Chinese Students in the United States, 1900–1927* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).
2. Hong Shen, “Wode dagu shiqi guoqu le ma?” (我的打鼓時期過去了嗎? Has My Time Beating the Drum Already Passed?), *Liangyou huabao* (良友畫報 Young Companion Pictorial) (1935): 108.
3. Unknown author, “Hong Shen bianju zhi biao zhuan jia” (洪深編劇之標準價 The Standard Price Hong Shen Charges for His Playwriting), *Mingxing zhoukan* (明星週刊 Mingxing Weekly) (1929): 406.
4. Changcheng Wai, “Xijujia Hong Shen de lishi” (戲劇家洪深的歷史 The History of the Dramatist Hong Shen), *Mingxing zhoukan* (明星週刊 Mingxing Weekly) (1929): 306.
5. For more on Tian Han's uncomfortable readjustment to China, see Liang Luo, *The Avant-Garde and the Popular in Modern China: Tian Han and the Intersection of Performance and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 83–89.
6. Changcheng Wai, “Xijujia Hong Shen de lishi,” 306.
7. Chang-tai Hung, *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature, 1918–1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 10–11.
8. “Nativism” was introduced to Chinese literary circles by Lu Xun and Mao Dun. Rosemary Haddon, “Chinese Nativist Literature of the 1920s: The Sojourner-Narrator,” *Modern Chinese Literature* 8, nos. 1–2 (Spring–Fall 1994): 97–125.
9. Regarding the discrepancy between the Chinese phrase *xiangcun jianshe* (rural construction) and the Anglophone term “rural reconstruction,” Merkel-Hess notes that by 1937, translating *xiangcun jianshe* as “rural reconstruction” was so common that “Xu Shilian . . . would note in a speech that while it ‘should properly be translated rural construction,’ popular usage dictated that it be rural reconstruction.” Kate Merkel-Hess, *The Rural Modern: Reconstructing the Self and State in Republican China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 16. Xu Shilian (許仕廉, aka Leonard S. Hsu, b. 1896) was a sociology professor at Yanjing University. He wrote several books on rural reconstruction, including two volumes of *Experiments of Rural Reconstruction (Xiangcun jianshe shiyan 鄉村建設實驗)* (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1935).
10. China's rural reconstruction movement was part of a transnational effort to revitalize (and modernize) the countryside. Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) is re-

flective of this global trend. The poet and social reformer toured China in 1924, lamenting the fate of India's villages under colonial rule. Merkel-Hess, *Rural Modern*, 16.

11. Charles Wishart Hayford, *To the People: James Yen and Village China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), x. Li Jingshen's *Ding County: A Social Survey (Ding xian shehui gaikuang diaocha 定縣社會概況調查)* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1933) laid a good foundation for later researchers to understand and historicize James Yen's efforts.

12. East Buluogang was one of the two "experimental fields" selected among the many villages of Ding Xian to be a "model village" for MEM.

13. Edgar Snow (1905–1972) visited Ding Xian in 1933 and proclaimed that "rural China is being made." Snow invented the term "Ting Hsien-ism" to describe what he saw. Hayford, *To the People*, x.

14. Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 54–56.

15. William Huizhu Sun, "The Peasants' Theatre Experiment in Ding Xian County (1932–1937)," PhD dissertation, New York University, 1990, 20.

16. Siyuan Liu, "A Mixed-Blooded Child, Neither Western nor Eastern': Sinicization of Western-Style Theatre in Rural China in the 1930s," *Asian Theatre Journal* 25, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 273.

17. Merkel-Hess, *Rural Modern*, 3, 17, and 82.

18. Yu Zhang, "Visual and Theatrical Constructs of a Modern Life in the Countryside: James Yen, Xiong Foxi, and the Rural Reconstruction Movement in Ding County (1920s–1930s)," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 49.

19. Briefly, this scholarship questions the appropriateness of the Enlightenment dualism of reason and emotion, arguing instead that a modern public is bound together at an intimate level. Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Eugenia Lean, *Public Passions: The Trial of Shi Jianqiao and the Rise of Popular Sympathy in Republican China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900–1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

20. Zhang, "Visual and Theatrical Constructs," 49.

21. Luo, *Avant-Garde and the Popular*, 76.

22. Tian Han, "The Night the Tiger Was Caught," translated by Jonathan S. Nobel, in Xiomei Chen, ed., *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 42.

23. Tian Han, "Women de ziji pipan" (我們自己的批判 Our Self-Criticism), in *Tian Han Quanji* (田漢全集 Complete Works of Tian Han), vol. 15 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1983), 90.

24. Luo, *Avant-Garde and the Popular*, 78.

25. Tian, "The Night the Tiger Was Caught," 47.

26. Tian, "The Night the Tiger Was Caught," 47.

27. Luo, *Avant-Garde and the Popular*, 83.

28. Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896–1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 246.

29. Hong, in his preface to his *Selected Works*, affirms that *Wukui Bridge* reflects

the ideological education he gained while a member of Zuolian. Note that this was published two years after the founding of the PRC. Hong Shen, *Hong Shen zixuan ji* (洪深自選集 Hong Shen's Own Selections of His Works) (Beijing: Kaiming shudian, 1951), 493.

30. For example, Xiaomei Chen argues that instead of passively following the dictates of the Chinese Communist Party, Tian Han actively “formed his multicultural and multi-ideological identities as a proletarian modernist.” Xiaomei Chen, “Reflections on the Legacy of Tian Han: ‘Proletarian Modernism’ and Its Traditional Roots,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 159.

31. Xiaomei Chen, *Staging Chinese Revolution: Theatre, Film, and the Afterlives of Propaganda* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 48–49.

32. Lu Jianting, *Hong Shen zhuan* (洪深傳 Biography of Hong Shen) (Beijing: Xiju chubanshe, 2000), 28.

33. In the early 1930s, public support of “the Left” carried with it certain risks. Zuolian was banned by the Nationalist government in September 1930, and on February 7, 1931, five members of Zuolian were executed: Li Weisen (李偉森 b. 1903), Hu Yepin (胡也頻 b. 1903), Rou Shi (柔石 b. 1902), Yin Fu (殷夫 b. 1909), and Feng Keng (馮鏗 b. 1907).

34. Hong Shen, “Nongcun sanbu qu zixu” (農村三部曲自序 Preface to *Rural Trilogy*), in *Nongcun sanbu qu* (農村三部曲 *Rural Trilogy*) (Shanghai: Tushu chubanshe, 1936), 1.

35. Chen Meiyong and Song Baozhen, *Hong Shen zhuan* (洪深傳 Biography of Hong Shen) (Beijing: Wenyi chubanshe, 1996), 137.

36. Hong, “Nongcun sanbu qu zixu,” 1.

37. Mr. Lin’s demise by the hands of those he sought to help parallels the uncertain fate of Gentryman Liu at the end of Hong Shen’s *Rainbow*, covered in Chapter 1.

38. *Green Dragon Pond* was performed by National Drama School students after two months’ rehearsals, and with a budget of over US\$2,000. The production was overseen by Hong Shen and Ma Yanxiang (馬彥祥 1907–1988). Ma Yanxiang, “Guanyu Qinglong tan de jidian shuoming” (關於青龍潭的幾點說明 A Couple of Explanations Regarding *Green Dragon Pond*), in *Guoli juxiao di ba jie gongyan ce* (國立劇校第八次公演冊 Brochure of the Eighth Public Performance of the National Drama School) (Nanjing: National Drama School, 1936).

39. Hong, *Hong Shen zixuan ji*, 472–73.

40. Merkel-Hess, *Rural Modern*, 55.

41. Merkel-Hess, *Rural Modern*, 28.

42. Zhang Geng, “Hong Shen he Nongcun sanbu qu” (洪深和農村三部曲 Hong Shen and the *Rural Trilogy*), in *Zhang Geng zixuan ji* (張庚自選集 Zhang Geng’s Own Selection of His Works) (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2004), 9.

43. Zhang, “Hong Shen he Nongcun sanbu qu,” 10.

44. Hong Shen serialized these essays in *Film Monthly* (*Dianying yuebao* 電影月報) between May and August 1928. Later, in February 1935, Hong compiled these essays into a theoretical work, *Techniques of Acting for Film and Theatre* (*Dining xiju biaoyan shu* 電影戲劇表演術). Chapter 4 examines this work in more detail.

45. For moral-based understandings of “sympathy,” see Weihong Bao, *Fiery Cinema: The Emergence of an Affective Medium in China, 1915–1945* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 102–4; and Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 221–55.

46. Hong Shen, “Biaoyan shu” (表演術 Techniques of Acting), *Dianying yuebao* (電影月報 Film Monthly) no. 3 (August 1, 1928); quoted in Bao, *Fiery Cinema*, 102.

47. Bao, *Fiery Cinema*, 102.

48. Bao, *Fiery Cinema*, 103.

49. Hong Shen, “*Pinmin canju xu*” (貧民慘劇序 Preface for Poverty or Ignorance, Which Is It?), *Liumei xuesheng jibao* (留美學生季報 Chinese Students’ Quarterly) 7, no. 2 (1920).

50. As Jin Jiang notes, “petty intellectuals” composed the key cultural force to modernize Yue opera in the 1940s. These petty intellectuals’ familiarity with theatre- and filmmaking enterprises facilitated their reforming efforts. Jin Jiang, *Women Playing Men: Yue Opera and Social Change in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 85–87.

51. Hong published several theoretical works between 1934 and 1936 that discussed the components of theatre- and filmmaking in Shanghai. Liang Luo, “Reading Hong Shen Intermedially,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 27, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 220–24.

52. Georges Polti, *The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations*, trans. Lucille Ray (Ridge-wood: Editor Company, 1917), 9–15.

53. Hong Shen, *Dianying xiju de bianju fangfa* (電影戲劇的編劇方法 Techniques of Play Writing for Film and Theatre) (Shanghai: Zhengzhong shuju, 1933), 171–74.

54. Hong, *Dianying xiju de bianju fangfa*, 171–72.

55. Hong, *Dianying xiju de bianju fangfa*, 184–85.

56. Unknown author, “Fudan jushe paiyan mingju *Wukui qiao*” (復旦劇社排演名劇五奎橋 The Fudan Drama Club Staged the Signature Play *Wukui Bridge*), *Fudan daxue xiaokan* (復旦大學校刊 Fudan University Journal) no. 137 (March 6, 1933).

57. In the published script of *Wukui Bridge*, Hong included twelve named characters as well as four groups of laborers: several Daoist monks, several young and old peasants, several long-term workers in the Zhou family, and five sedan bearers. This unspecified number of characters amounted to over seventy actors in the 1933 production.

58. Unknown author, “Fudan jushe gongyan, xia xingqi zai benxiao, wei kangri mujuan” (復旦劇社公演, 下星期在本校, 為抗日募捐 Public Performance by the Fudan Drama Club, Next Week at Fudan, Fundraising Event for Resistance against Japan), *Fudan daxue xiaokan* (復旦大學校刊 Fudan University Journal) no. 142 (April 17, 1933).

59. For more on *Cyrano de Bergerac* in China, see Tian Luo, “*Xihanuo zai Zhonguo ershi shiji ershi zhi sanshi niandai de yijie yu jieshou*” (西哈諾在中國20世紀20–30年代的譯介與接受 The Translation and Introduction of *Cyrano de Bergerac* in the 1920s–1930s), *Kua wenhua duihua* (跨文化對話 Cross-Cultural Dialogue) 38 (2011): 139–43.

60. Zhu Duanjun, “Ping Hong Shen xiansheng de *Wukui qiao*” (評洪深先生的五奎橋 Reviews of Mr. Hong’s *Wukui Bridge*), *Chenbao, Meiri dianying* (晨報每日電影 Morning Post, Movie Daily), May 13–14, 1933.

61. Dao Xi, “Lun *Wukui qiao*” (論五奎橋 On *Wukui Bridge*), *Chenbao, Meiri dianying* (晨報每日電影 Morning Post, Movie Daily), May 20, 1933.

62. Hong Shen, “*Xiju de rensheng*” (戲劇的人生 A Life of Drama), in *Wukui qiao* (五奎橋 *Wukui Bridge*) (Shanghai: Xiandai shuju, 1934), 37.

63. Ma Junshan, “Aimei ju yu Zhongguo huaju xiexixing wutai meishu tixi de

goujian” (爱美剧与中国话剧写实性舞台美术体系的构建 The Construction of the Realistic Stage System for Amateur Drama and Chinese Spoken Drama), *Wenyi yanjiu* (文艺研究 Literature and Art Studies) no. 20194 (2019): 110–24.

64. The Fudan Stadium was completed in March 1928. The inner space was eleven hundred square feet and could accommodate over sixteen hundred audience members. It was divided into a rectangular rostrum on one side and a three-sided circular audience seating area, rising five levels, which extended from the middle to the left and right sides. The rostrum was often changed into a makeshift proscenium stage, though without a satisfying depth, when large-scale performances took place. Unknown author, “Fudan daxue zuizao de tiyuguan” (復旦大學最早的體育館 The Earliest Stadium at Fudan University), *Fudan daxue bainian xiaoqing wangzhan* (復旦大學百年校慶網站 Web Page of the One Hundredth Anniversary of Fudan University), <http://edu.sina.com.cn/y/news/2005-09-20/205244279.html>, accessed April 2024.

65. Polti, *Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations*, 83–87.

66. Hong Shen, *Wukui qiao* (五奎橋 Wukui Bridge) (Shanghai: Xiandai shuju, 1934), 62.

67. Yu was the last of China’s legendary Five Emperors. He is credited with developing flood control and starting the Xia dynasty (ca. 2070–1600 BCE).

68. Hong, *Wukui qiao*, 102–3.

69. Hong, *Wukui qiao*, 120. This outcry is delivered by Guisheng, a minor character.

70. Hong, *Wukui qiao*, 125.

71. Song Chunfang, *Song Chunfang lunju diyi ji* (宋春舫論劇第一集 Song Chunfang on Drama, Volume 1) (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1922), 282. Recall that it was Song Chunfang who inspired Yu Shangyuan to study theatre at Carnegie.

72. Edward M. Gunn, introduction, in Edward M. Gunn, ed., *Twentieth-Century Chinese Drama: An Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), ix.

73. Song, *Song Chunfang lunju diyi ji*, 273.

74. Xiaomei Chen, “Mapping a ‘New’ Dramatic Canon,” in Peng Hsiao-yen and Isabelle Rabut, eds., *Modern China and the West: Translation and Cultural Mediation* (New York: Brill, 2014), 228.

75. Hong, “Xiju de rensheng,” 10.

76. Hong, “Xiju de rensheng,” 11.

77. *Wukui Bridge* was staged twice by the Fudan Dramatic Club in 1933, whereas *Green Dragon Pond* was staged only once by the National Drama School in 1936. The *huaju* production of *Fragrant Rice*, despite several attempts by Hong Shen to stage the play at the National Drama School, was never actualized in Republican China.

78. Tian Qin, “Zhongguo nongcun wutai yu Ding Xian lutian juchang zhi bijiao” (中國農村舞台與定縣露天劇場之比較 A Comparative Study of the Stages in Rural China and the Open-Air Theatre in Ding Xian), *Minjian* (民間 Among the People) 2, no. 22 (1936): 14.

79. Li Jingshen, ed., *Ding Xian xuzhi* (定縣須知 Notes of Ding Xian) (Beijing: Zhonghua pingmin jiaoyu cujin hui chubanshe, 1931), 18.

80. Zhonghua pingmin jiaoyu cujin hui, ed. *Nongcun xiju yu nongcun jiaoyu* (農村戲劇與農村教育 Rural Theatre and Rural Education) (Baoding: Zhonghua pingmin jiaoyu cujin hui chubanshe, 1933), 1, 5, 10, 11, 14.

81. Yang Cunbin, “Xu” (序 Preface), in Xiong Foxi, ed., *Guodu jiqi yanchu* (過渡以及演出 *Cross the River and Its Production*) (Shanghai: Zhongzheng shuju, 1937), 4.

82. MEM believed that “under the republican regime . . . every Chinese man, woman and child should learn to read. ‘Scholar’ and ‘farmer’ should no longer stand in separate categories.” Chinese National Association of the Mass Education Movement, *China’s New Scholar-Farmer*, vol. 2 (Ting Hsien: Chinese National Association of the Mass Education Movement, 1929), 10.

83. Sun Fuyuan, “Ding Xian nongmin lutian yanchu” (定縣農民露天演出 *Open-Air Theatre Productions by Peasants in Ding Xian*), *Minjian* (民間 Folk) 1, no. 3 (1936).

84. Yang, “Xu,” 4–5.

85. Yang, “Xu,” 5.

86. Branches of the Alumni Association were founded in 138 villages in Ding Xian, and membership reached 6,983 people by 1935. By uniting students who had attended MEM schools, the Alumni Association served as an organizational unit for the new rural world. Jiang Wenyu and Liang Shumin, *Xiangcun jianshe shiyan* (鄉村建設實驗 *The Rural Reconstruction Experiment*), vol. 3 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1937), 244.

87. Xiong Foxi, *Xiju dazhong hua zhi shiyan* (戲劇大眾化之實驗 *Experiment in Theatre Popularization*) (Nanjing: Zhongzheng shuju, 1937), 58–59.

88. Yang, “Xu,” 6.

89. For more on the “disciplining” force embedded in the urban indoor playhouse, see Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-Creation of Peking Opera, 1870–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 76–85.

90. Xiong, *Xiju dazhong hua zhi shiyan*, 73.

91. Sheldon Cheney, *The Open-Air Theatre* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1918), v. Although there is no direct evidence showing Xiong’s familiarity with this work, it is unlikely that Xiong was not aware of Cheney. Between 1924 and 1926, Xiong studied theatre at Columbia University in New York, where he bonded with Yu Shangyuan and Hong Shen. Hong, as noted in Chapter 1, published articles to introduce Chinese operatic theatres in Cheney’s *Theatre Arts* magazine and probably shared his knowledge of Cheney’s ideas with Xiong.

92. Cheney, *Open-Air Theatre*, 8.

93. Cheney, *Open-Air Theatre*, 7.

94. Xiong, *Xiju dazhong hua zhi shiyan*, 74–75.

95. Xiong, *Xiju dazhong hua zhi shiyan*, 78.

96. Xiong, *Xiju dazhong hua zhi shiyan*, 79.

97. Xiong, *Xiju dazhong hua zhi shiyan*, 84.

98. Xiong, *Xiju dazhong hua zhi shiyan*, 80.

99. Yang, “Xu,” 7.

100. Apart from reports contributed by MEM’s Theatre Division staff, the special collection reprinted reviews by Tian Qin; Chen Yuyuan (陳豫源 n.d.); Zhang Junxiang; Zhang Jichun (張季純 1907–2000), Xiong Foxi’s former student in the Theatre Department at the National Beiping College of the Arts; and Jiang Gongwei (姜公偉 n.d.), an editor of *Yenching Weekly* (*Yanda zhoukan* 燕大週刊). These reviews originally appeared in popular journals such as *Yong Bao* (庸報) in Tianjin, *National News Weekly* (*Guowen zhoubao* 國聞週報) in Shanghai, and *Morning Post Supplement: Drama* (*Chenbao fukan: jukan* 晨報復刊: 劇刊) in Beiping between 1935 and 1936.

101. Zhang Junxiang, “Canguan Ding xian dong Buluogang cun nongmin yanju ji” (參觀定縣東不落崗村農民演劇記 A Journal on Viewing the Peasants’ Performance in East Buluogang Village in Ding County), in Xiong Foxi, ed., *Guodu yanchu teji: Nongmin xiju shiyan baokao zhiyi* (過渡演出特輯: 農民戲劇實驗報考之一 Special Collection on *Cross the River* and Its Production: Report on Peasant Experimental Theatre, Part 1) (Beiping: Zhonghua pinmin jiaoyu zujinhui, 1936), 72.

102. Xiong Foxi, “Guodu de xiezuo jiqi yanchu” (過渡的寫作及其演出 The Writing and Performance of *Cross the River*), in Xiong Foxi, ed., *Guodu yanchu teji: Nongmin xiju shiyan baokao zhiyi* (過渡演出特輯: 農民戲劇實驗報考之一 Special Collection on *Cross the River* and Its Production: Report on Peasant Experimental Theatre, Part 1) (Beiping: Zhonghua pinmin jiaoyu zujinhui, 1936), 28.

103. Yuan Quanxin, “Guodu yanchu sumiao” (過渡演出素描 Sketch of the Production of *Cross to River*), in Xiong Foxi, ed., *Guodu yanchu teji: Nongmin xiju shiyan baokao zhiyi* (過渡演出特輯: 農民戲劇實驗報考之一 Special Collection on *Cross the River* and Its Production: Report on Peasant Experimental Theatre, Part 1) (Beiping: Zhonghua pinmin jiaoyu zujinhui, 1936), 40.

104. Soon after coming back to China in 1940, Zhang joined the National Drama School at Jiang’an and directed Cao Yu’s *Metamorphosis* (*Tuibian* 蛻變) and other theatre productions. Man He, “Play-Makers and Nation-Builders: Cosmopolitan Intellectuals, Peasant Citizens, and Modern Drama, 1910s–1940s,” PhD dissertation, Ohio State University, 2015, 208–14.

105. Zhang, “Canguan Ding Xian Dong Buluogang cun nongmin yanju ji,” 72.

106. Merkel-Hess, *Rural Modern*, 94.

107. Li, *Ding Xian xuzhi*, 1–2.

108. Tong Fengren, “Guodu paiyan jingguo” (過渡排演經過 Rehearsals of *Cross the River*), in Xiong Foxi, ed., *Guodu yanchu teji: Nongmin xiju shiyan baokao zhiyi* (過渡演出特輯: 農民戲劇實驗報考之一 Special Collection on *Cross the River* and Its Production: Report on Peasant Experimental Theatre, Part 1) (Beiping: Zhonghua pinmin jiaoyu zujinhui, 1936), 76.

109. Tong, “Guodu paiyan jingguo,” 77.

110. Yang, “Xu,” 15.

111. Tong, “Guodu paiyan jingguo,” 77.

112. Between 1935 and 1936, *Cross the River* was staged three times in the open-air theatre in East Buluogang, the Ding Xian Examination Hall, and the Ding Xian auditorium.

113. Xiong, *Guodu jiqi yanchu*, 21.

114. Xiong Foxi, “Zenyang biaoan” (怎樣表演 How to Act), in *Foxi lunju* (佛西論劇 Foxi on Drama) (Shanghai: Xinyue shudian, 1931), 65.

115. Xiong, “Zenyang biaoan,” 65. Yu Shangyuan, as we saw in Chapter 2, also used “playfulness” (*wanyier*) to describe *Mutiny*.

116. Zhang Mingqi, “Wo duiyu Guodu shangyan de pingjia” (我對於過渡上演的評價 My Comments on the Production of *Cross the River*), in Xiong Foxi, ed., *Guodu yanchu teji: Nongmin xiju shiyan baokao zhiyi* (過渡演出特輯: 農民戲劇實驗報考之一 Special Collection on *Cross the River* and Its Production: Report on Peasant Experimental Theatre, Part 1) (Beiping: Zhonghua pinmin jiaoyu zujinhui, 1936), 45.

117. Stefan Aquilian, “Meyerhold and the Revolution: A Reading Through Henri Lefebvre’s Theories on ‘Everyday Life,’” *Theatre History Studies* 37 (2018): 10.

118. James Yen's ideal of the rural modern organization was the "village republic," or "a polity of rural individuals who could organize their own communities as part of the national, organic whole." Merkel-Hess, *Rural Modern*, 82.

119. The ending of *Cross the River* went through several different versions before it was finalized with the introduction of law. "The practitioners in the Rural Reconstruction Movement," Yu Zhang notes, "felt a strong need to distinguish between the peasants' potential mob-like behavior and the act of appealing to the law for social justice." Zhang, "Visual and Theatrical Constructs," 82.

120. Here I borrow Yu Zhang's translation. Zhang, "Visual and Theatrical Constructs," 82.

121. Aquilian, "Meyerhold and the Revolution," 15.

Chapter 4

1. Portions of this chapter were previously published as Man He, "Juren (Men and Women of Theatre) in the Confucian Temple: Technics, Prompts, and Plays to Serve the Nation, 1934–1945," *Asian Theatre Journal* 38, no. 1 (2021): 245–74.

2. The Ningbo Native-Place Association was one of the most prominent native-place associations in Shanghai from the late 1910s until the 1930s. Bryna Goodman, "Being Public: The Politics of Representation in 1918 Shanghai," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 60, no. 1 (June 2000): 78.

3. Tian Han, "Linshi yanyuan" (臨時演員 Extras), *Xiangsheng* (湘聲 The Voice of Hunan) 1, no. 1 (1935): 65–76.

4. One month later, *Extras* was renamed *Under the Arc Light* (*Shuiyin deng xia* 水銀燈下) and given a more prominent staging at the Golden City Grand Theatre (Jincheng da xiyuan 金城大戲院). This time, the play starred Jin Yan (金焰 1910–1983), Wang Remen (王人美 1914–1987), and other members of the Shanghai Stage Association (Shanghai wutai xiehui 上海舞台協會). Liu Ziling, "1930 niandai Shanghai da jujuchang gongyan yu Tan'nisilafusiji tixi wenti" (1930年代上海左翼大剧场公演与斯坦尼斯拉夫斯基体系问题 Issues of the Shanghai Left-Wing Theatre Performances and Stanislavski's System in the 1930s), *Dong Yue luncong* (东岳论丛 The Forum of East Mountain) no. 20169 (2016): 119–26.

5. The previous year, Yuan Muzhi had starred in Hong Shen's *Wukui Bridge*.

6. Zhen Zhang, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896–1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 302.

7. Andrew F. Jones, *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 10.

8. Weihong Bao originally used "technics" to translate *shu*, so as to highlight the Chinese term's twofold connotation, namely "technique" (craft, art, and skill) and "technology." Weihong Bao, "The Art of Control: Hong Shen, Behavioral Psychology, and the Technics of Social Effects," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 27, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 250. While I have chosen to translate *shu* as "techniques," I intend for the term to carry the same connotations that Bao identifies.

9. The National Drama School was briefly renamed the National Academy of Dramatic Arts (Guoli xiju zhuanke xuexiao 國立戲劇專科學校) between 1939 and 1945.

10. Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937–*

1945 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Xiaobing Tang, “Street Theatre and Subject Formation in Wartime China: Toward a New Form of Public Art,” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* no. 18 (March 2016).

11. Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr., Siyuan Liu, and Erin B. Mee, eds., *Modern Asian Theatre and Performance, 1900–2000* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2014), 6.

12. Yu Shangyuan, “Baihua yu xiju” (白話與戲劇 Vernacular Chinese and Drama), *Duli pinglun* (獨立評論 Independent Review) no. 14 (1932).

13. Yu, “Baihua yu xiju,” 15.

14. Yu, “Baihua yu xiju,” 12.

15. Yu, “Baihua yu xiju,” 13.

16. Hongwei Thorn Chen, “Cinema, Highways, and the Making of Provincial Space: Mobile Screening in Jiangsu, China, 1933–1937,” *Wide Screen* 7, no. 1 (March 2018): 13.

17. Chen, “Cinema, Highways, and the Making of Provincial Space,” 13.

18. When the *baihua* vernacular was first implemented, its written style was saturated with neologistic borrowings from Japanese, missionary translations, and haphazardly transliterated terms from European languages. The speech pattern was also heavily influenced by these borrowings. Edward Gunn, *Rewriting Chinese: Style and Innovation in Twentieth-Century Chinese Prose* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

19. Xu Lingxiao, “Xiangei nanjing xiju xuexiao” (獻給南京戲劇學校 To the Nanjing Drama School), *Juxue yuekan* (劇學月刊 Drama Study Monthly) 5, no. 3 (1936): 7–8.

20. By the 1930s, Cheng Yanqiu had become Mei Lanfang’s only potential rival in the international media sphere. Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-Creation of Peking Opera, 1870–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 264–89.

21. Jones, *Yellow Music*, 25.

22. Other Peking opera reformers included Wang Guowei (王國維 1877–1927) and Qi Rushan. Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, 134–71.

23. Cheng Yanqiu, “Huaju daoyan guankui” (話劇導演管窺 A Quick Study of Huaju Directorship), *Juxue yuekan* (劇學月刊 Drama Study Monthly) 2, no. 10 (1933): 17.

24. Cheng, “Huaju daoyan guankui,” 18.

25. Cheng, “Huaju daoyan guankui,” 26.

26. Cheng, “Huaju daoyan guankui,” 18.

27. Cheng, “Huaju daoyan guankui,” 19.

28. Cheng, “Huaju daoyan guankui,” 18.

29. Cheng, “Huaju daoyan guankui,” 4.

30. For more on gramophone culture in Republican China, see Jones, *Yellow Music*, 54–59.

31. By the mid-1930s, more than sixty radio stations operated in Shanghai alone. Jones, *Yellow Music*, 22.

32. Cheng, “Huaju daoyan guankui,” 19.

33. Cheng, “Huaju daoyan guankui,” 18.

34. While Cheng’s training as an operatic singer certainly shaped his preference for sonic over visual expressions, his argument is in line with scholarly recognition

of the affinity of sound and inner voice. As Bruce Smith argues, heard sounds, unlike visualized objects that stay “out there,” penetrate the body of the listener and remain simultaneously “out there” and “in here.” Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 7.

35. In 1942, Yu’s lectures on “Abstract of Directing” (Daoyan tiyao 導演提要) and “Abstract of Stage Design” (Wutai sheji tiyao 舞台設計提要) were published in NDS’s alumni newsletter. *Guoli xiju zhuanke xuexiao tongxun yuekan* (國立戲劇專科學校通訊月刊 Alumni Monthly Newsletter of the National Drama School), vol. 6; reprinted in *Zhongguo zaoqi xiju huakan* (中國早期戲劇畫刊 Early Chinese Drama Gazettes) (Beijing: Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin, 2006), 37.

36. Yu Shangyuan, “Biaoyan tiyao” (表演提要 Abstract of Performance), *Guoli xiju zhuanke xuexiao tongxun yuekan* (國立戲劇專科學校通訊月刊 Alumni Monthly Newsletter of the National Drama School) 4, no. 2 (1941).

37. Yu, “Biaoyan tiyao,” 1.

38. Shuyun, “Wutai shang de fayin yu gechang” (舞台上的發音與歌唱 Voice Production and Singing on Stage), *Xi* (戲 Drama) 2 (1933). Notably, Cheng Yanqiu offered his detailed description of the human sound-making process in the same year that Shuyun called for a “scientific” analysis of voice production.

39. Yu, “Biaoyan tiyao,” 2.

40. Yu, “Biaoyan tiyao,” 2.

41. Yu, “Biaoyan tiyao,” 2.

42. Meow Hui Goh, *Sound and Sight: Poetry and Courtier Culture in the Yongming Era, 283–493* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 2.

43. Yu, “Biaoyan tiyao,” 3.

44. Weihong Bao, *Fiery Cinema: The Emergence of an Affective Medium in China, 1915–1945* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 229. One of the journal’s essays, “The Future of Sound Pictures” (Yousheng dianying de qiantu 有聲電影的前途), was by Hong Shen.

45. Zhou Jianyun in his essay differentiated between “film with voice” and “film with sound” (*youyin yingpian* 有音影片). While the former refers to sound film, the latter refers to the films displayed in Shanghai in the 1910s with diegetic sound effects. Zhou Jianyun, “Wo duiyu yousheng dianying de yijian” (我對於有聲電影的意見 My Views of Sound Film), *Dianying yuebao* (電影月報 Film Monthly) no. 8 (1928): 2.

46. Zhou, “Wo duiyu yousheng dianying de yijian,” 1.

47. Zhou, “Wo duiyu yousheng dianying de yijian,” 2.

48. Zhou, “Wo duiyu yousheng dianying de yijian,” 2.

49. Zhou, “Wo duiyu yousheng dianying de yijian,” 2.

50. Zhou, “Wo duiyu yousheng dianying de yijian,” 3.

51. Bao, *Fiery Cinema*, 229–32.

52. Yu, “Biaoyan tiyao,” 4.

53. For more on the historical context and theoretical intertextuality of this work, see Liang Luo, “Reading Hong Shen Intermedially,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 27, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 220–24; and Bao, “Art of Control,” 249–67.

54. Tian Han, “Xu” (序 Preface), in *Dianying xiju biaoyan shu* (Techniques of Acting for Film and Theatre 電影戲劇表演術) (Shanghai: Shenhuo shuju, 1935), 1–2.

55. Tian, “Xu,” 5–6; quoted in Bao, “Art of Control,” 269.

56. Liang Luo, *The Avant-Garde and the Popular in Modern China: Tian Han and the Intersection of Performance and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 221.

57. NDS was not Yu's first effort in higher education. He had previously participated in drafting the "Guideline of Beijing Art Theatre" (Beijing yishu juyuan jihua dagang), mentioned in Chapter 2.

58. Guoli xiju xuexiao, ed., *Guoli xiju xuexiao xunyan shouce* (國立戲劇學校巡演手冊 Pamphlet of the National Drama School's Tour) (Nanjing: Guoli xiju xuexiao, 1935), 27.

59. Yu Shangyuan, "Women yinian ban yilai de gongzuo" (我們一年半以來的工作 Our Work in the Past One and a Half Years), in Guoli xiju xuexiao ed., *Guoli xiju xuexiao yilan* (國立戲劇學校一覽 A Quick Review of the National Drama School) (Nanjing: Guoli xiju xuexiao, 1937), 11.

60. Zhang Daofan, "Guoli xiju xuexiao zhi chuangli" (國立戲劇學校之創立 The Founding of the National Drama School), in Guoli Xiju Xuexiao, ed., *Guoli xiju xuexiao yilan* (國立戲劇學校一覽 A Quick Review of the National Drama School) (Nanjing: Guoli Xiju Xuexiao, 1937), 1.

61. Ge Yihong, *Zhongguo huaju tongshi* (中国话剧通史 A History of Modern Chinese Drama), 2nd ed. (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1997), 33.

62. Zhang, "Guoli xiju xuexiao zhi chuangli," 3.

63. The development of *guoyu* is closely tied to the propagation of *baihua*. Between 1920 and 1922, the Ministry of Education ordered that the national written language (*guowen* 國文) be used in all primary and middle schools, which necessitated that textbooks be changed from classical Chinese (*wenyan*) to *baihua*. Li Jinxi, *Guoyu yundong shi* (國語運動史 A Historical Outline of the National Language Movement) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1990), 108–12.

64. Jie Li, *Utopian Ruins: A Memorial Museum of the Mao Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 12.

65. Yu, "Women yinian ban yilai de gongzuo," 19.

66. Yu Shangyuan, "Benxiao zuijin yinian zhi gongzuo" (本校最近一年只工作 Our School's Work in the Recent Year), in *Guoli xiju xuexiao xiaoyou hui huikan* (Alumni Booklet of the National Drama School) no. 2 (1939); reprinted in *Zhongguo zaoqi xiju huakan* (國立戲劇學校校友會會刊 Early Chinese Drama Gazettes), vol. 37 (Beijing: Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei fuzhi zhongxin, 2006), 3.

67. Weihong Bao, "Diary of a Homecoming: (Dis-)Inhabiting the Theatrical in Postwar Shanghai Cinema," in Yingjin Zhang, ed., *A Companion to Chinese Cinema* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 385.

68. Jin Yunzhi and Wan Jiabao, "Women de biaoyan jiben xunlian de fangzhen he fang fa" (我們底表演基本訓練的方針和方法 Our Guiding Principles and Methods for Performance), in *Biaoyan yishu lunwen ji* (表演藝術論文集 Collection of Essays on Performing Arts) (Nanjing: Zhengzhong shuju, 1947), 95–105.

69. For example, Wei-yu Lin claims that the practices of Stanislavski were implemented in China only after the mid-1950s, when Soviet experts were invited by the government of the People's Republic to teach in theatre academies. Wei-yu Lin, "Lin Zhahua's Innovation of Huaju Acting in *The Master Builder*," in Ruru Li, ed., *Staging China: New Theatres in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 51. Jonathan Pitches and Ruru Li's construction of "Stanislavsky with Chinese char-

acteristics” also focuses on the post-1950s practices of Stanislavski. Jonathan Pitches and Ruru Li, “Stanislavsky with Chinese Characteristics: How the System Was Introduced into China,” in Jonathan Pitches and Stefan Aquilina, eds., *Stanislavsky in the World: The System and Its Transformations across Continents* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017), 166–95.

70. Jin Yunzhi, “Shitannisilafusiji de yanyuan xunlian fangfa” (史坦尼斯拉夫斯基的演員訓練方法 Stanislavski’s System of Training Actors), in *Biaoyan yishu lunwen ji* (表演藝術論文集 Collection of Essays on Performing Arts) (Nanjing: Zhongzheng shuju, 1946), 94.

71. After the migration from Nanjing to the greater Chongqing area during the war, NDS invited several established scholars to teach or give lectures in their respective domains. Ying Shangneng (應尚能 1902–1973), one of the first musicians who introduced systematic Western vocal musicology to China, gave lectures on voice production. Liang Shiqiu, an expert on Shakespeare, offered a course on four comedies and four tragedies by Shakespeare. Yu Keji (余克稷 1910–1993), the general engineer of the Chongqing Electric Power Company (Chongqing dianli gongsi 重慶電力公司) and founder of the Roar Drama Society (Nuhou jushe 怒吼劇社), taught a course on the technology of stage lighting. Li Naichen, ed., *Guoli zizhuan shiliao jicheng* (國立劇專史料集成 The Collected Historical Materials of the National Drama School), vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2014), 881.

72. Although Jin Yunzhi does not give credit to Michel Saint-Denis (1897–1971), a French theatre director and drama theorist under whom she studied in the London Theatre Studio in 1938, it is likely that, when designing the NDS curriculum, Jin drew upon Saint-Denis’s call to transform an actor’s body into a fully expressive instrument. Jane Baldwin, “Michel Saint-Denis: Training the Complete Actor,” in Alison Hodge, ed., *Actor Training* (New York: Brill, 2010), 81.

73. For more on the NDS production of *Hamlet*, see Alexa Huang, *Chinese Shakespeares: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 125–66.

74. Chen Zhice arrived at Carnegie in fall 1924, the semester after Yu Shangyuan had left.

75. Chen Zhice, “Huaju de yanpu: yige chubu shiyan” (話劇的演譜：一個初步的實驗 The Acting Score of Spoken Drama: One Preliminary Experiment), *Xiju gangwei* (戲劇崗位 Drama Post) 1, no. 1 (1939): 6.

76. Chen Zhice, “Shengyin biaoqing sanshiji zhong” (聲音表情三十九種 Thirty-Nine Vocal Expressions), *Xiju gangwei* (戲劇崗位 Drama Post) 1, nos. 2–3 (1939): 97.

77. Yuen Ren Chao created a *xipu* for the play *The Last Five Minutes* (*Zuihou wu fenzhong* 最後五分鐘), which was Chao’s own translation and rewriting of A. A. Milne’s (1882–1956) *The Camberley Triangle* (1925).

78. Chen, “Huaju de yanpu: yige chubu shiyan,” 7.

79. Shanghai jiuwang yanjiu dui dierdai, “Du Huanghe” (渡黃河 Crossing the Yellow River), *Kangzhan xiju* (抗戰戲劇 Resistance War Drama) 2, no. 1 (1938).

80. Yu Shangyuan, “Houji” (後記 Postscript), in Yu Shangyuan and Wang Sizeng, *Congjun le* (從軍樂 Joy of Joining the Army) (Chongqing: Zhengzhong shuju, 1940), 92.

81. Zhang Junli was a key member of the Crescent Moon Group (Xinyue pai) which, as we saw in Chapter 2, supported Yu Shangyuan during the ill-fated Na-

tional Theatre Movement. Between 1937 and 1938, Zhang published letters to Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石 1887–1975), Wang Jingwei (汪精衛 1883–1944), and Mao Zedong to express the urgency of resisting Japan.

82. Yu, “Houji,” 93.

83. Chen, “Cinema, Highways, and the Making of Provincial Space,” 13.

84. Hong Shen, *Kangzhan shi'nian lai Zhongguo de xiju yundong yu jiaoyu* (抗戰十年來中國的戲劇運動與教育 *The Chinese Drama Movement and Education in the Decade since the War of Resistance*) (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1948), 33.

85. Such extracts are often referred to as *zhezi xi* 折子戲, a program of select scenes rather than complete plays, and were the primary mode of staging Kun opera. Colin Mackerras, “Tourism and Musical Performing Arts in the First Decade of Twenty-First Century: A Personal View,” *CHINOPERL Papers* no. 30 (2011): 161.

86. For a detailed account of such challenges, see Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, 62–64.

87. Tang, “Street Theatre and Subject Formation,” 39.

88. Between 1937 and 1938, mobile theatre was widely discussed in left-leaning journals, and *Illumination* (*Guangming* 光明) and *Resistance War Drama* published special issues and manifestos to discuss key concerns and strategies of the movement.

89. Tang, “Street Theatre and Subject Formation,” 38–39.

90. Yu, “Houji,” 93.

91. Yu, “Houji,” 93–94.

92. Bao, “Art of Control,” 287.

93. As Li recalls, he published “Joining the Army—a Joy?” (*Congjun—le?* 從軍—樂?) in a contemporary theatre journal at NDS, *Theatre Biweekly* (*Xiju liangzhou kan* 戲劇兩週刊), when the play was staged between 1939 and 1940. However, my archival research could not locate this journal. The quote is from Li Naichen’s memoir, “Guoli juxiao er jin shancheng: zai yong zhong xue” (國立學校二進山城—在用中學 *The Second Time That the National Drama School Went to Mountain City [Chongqing]: Learning in Practices*), in *Guoli xizhuan shiliao jicheng* (國立劇專史料集成 *The Collected Historical Materials of the National Drama School*), vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2014), 888.

94. The Yibin TV station, in cooperation with the Jiang’an County Party Committee and the Jiang’an County Government, completed a three-part program, “The National Academy of Drama Arts at Jiang’an” (*Guoli juzhuan zai Jiang’an* 國立劇專在江安), to mark the seventieth anniversary of NDS’s relocation. The program synthesized archival materials, interviews with NDS alumni, and short skits based on memoirs and other textual accounts. In the second installment, “Years in the Small Town” (*Xiaocheng suiyue* 小城歲月), the narrator mentions that the Confucian Temple hosted statues of both Confucius and his disciples. The program premiered on October 30, 2008.

95. Yang Cunbin, “Ding Xian nongminju *Longwang qu de yanchu*” (定縣農民劇《龍王渠》的演出 *The Performance of the Ding County Peasant Theatre—Dragon King Canal*), *Yuebao: Wenyi lan* (月報 文藝欄 *Monthly Newspaper: The Column of Literature and Art*) 1, no. 3 (1937): 672–73.

96. Zhang Dinghe’s talent for music composition reached its maturity during the war period. Reflecting his greater recognition, Zhang’s brother-in-law, Shen Con-

gwen (沈從文 1902–1988), published “Dinghe Is a Music Fan” (Dinghe shi ge yinyue mi 定和是個音樂迷) in *The Impartial* (*Dagong bao* 大公報) in 1946.

97. Zhang Dinghe, “Congjun le” (從軍樂 Joy of Joining the Army), in Yu Shangyuan and Wang Sizeng, *Congjun le* (從軍樂 Joy of Joining the Army) (Chongqing: Zhengzhong shuju, 1940), 69–70.

98. Joshua Howard, “The Making of a National Icon: Commemorating Nie Er, 1935–1949,” *Twentieth-Century China* 37, no. 1 (January 2012): 8.

99. Xiaobing Tang, “Radio, Sound Cinema, and Community Singing: The Making of a New Sonic Culture in Modern China,” *Twentieth-Century China* 45, no. 1 (January 2020): 6.

100. For a detailed analysis of the application of “Pathbreakers” in *The Big Road*, see Tang, “Radio, Sound Cinema, and Community Singing,” 8–10.

101. For more on Wu Xiaobang’s theoretical and performative activities in the 1930s, see Nan Ma, “Transmediating Kinesthesia: Wu Xiaobang and Modern Dance in China, 1929–1939,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 129–73.

102. While at NDS, Wu Xiaobang held the title of “dance director” (*wuyong zhidao* 舞踊指導). The term *wuyong* used here is borrowed from *buyō*, the Japanese term for “dance.”

103. Yu, “Houji,” 95.

104. Li, “Guli juxiao erjin shancheng,” 888.

105. Ma, “Transmediating Kinesthesia,” 159–61. “March of the Volunteers” later became the national anthem of the People’s Republic of China.

106. Ma, “Transmediating Kinesthesia,” 159.

107. Yu and Wang, *Congjun le*, 58.

108. Yu, “Houji,” 93–94.

Chapter 5

1. Kong Qingdong, “Cong *Leiyu* de yanchu shi kan *Leiyu*” (从雷雨的演出史看雷雨 A Reading of *Thunderstorm* from Its History of Production), *Wenxue pinglun* (文學評論 Literature Review) no. 1 (1991): 100.

2. Tarryn Li-Min Chun, “Revolutionary Illumination: Stage Lighting, Politics, and *Play* in 1930s Shanghai Theatre,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2018): 94.

3. Hankou jiaoyu ju disanke minzhong jiaocai gu, ed., *Xiju yanyuan dengji zhi jingguo* (戲劇演員登記經過 The Process of Drama Actors’ Registration) (Hankou, 1930), 123–25. These materials are also mentioned in Ma Junshan, “Lun Guomindang huaju zhengce de liangqixing jiqi weihai” (论国民党话剧政策的两栖性及其危害 On the Paradox and Compromises in the Nationalist Party’s Policies on Spoken Drama), *Jindai shi yanjiu* (近代史研究 Study on Modern History) no. 4 (2002): 116–17.

4. Bei Feng, “Zhandou de wushinian: jieshao Zhongguo huaju yundong wushinian shiliaoji diyi ji” (战斗的五十年: 介绍中国话剧运动五十年史料集 第一辑 Fifty Years of Combat: An Introduction to *Historical Materials on the Chinese Drama Movement of the First Fifty Years*, Volume 1), *Renmin ribao* (人民日报 People’s Daily), January 30, 1958, 7.

5. Hong Shen’s 1935 understanding of the labor/talent distribution in playmak-

ing echoes his earlier views developed in America on theatre as a democratic space where playwrights and performers enjoy a *zhiji* relationship, but playwrights still assume the leading role.

6. Bei, “Zhandou de wushinian,” 7. The League of Left-Wing Dramatists was a subgroup of the Chinese League of Left-Wing Writers (Zhongguo zuoyi zuojia lianmeng).

7. Tian Benxiang and Jiao Shangzhi, *Zhongguo huaju shi yanjiu gaishu* (中国话剧史研究概述 A General Overview of Studies on the History of Huaju) (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1993), 245.

8. Milena Doleželová-Velingerová, “The Origins of Modern Chinese Literature,” in Merle Goldman, ed., *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 35.

9. Song Chunfang’s influence on the drama field was briefly discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

10. Shu Weiqing, “Wo zenyang shoucang xiju shukan” (我怎樣收藏戲劇書刊 How I Collect Drama Books), *Wuhan wenhua* (武漢文化 Wuhan Culture) 5, no. 1 (1947).

11. Christopher Rea, “Enter the Cultural Entrepreneur,” in Christopher Rea and Nicolai Volland, eds., *The Business of Culture: Cultural Entrepreneurs in China and Southeast Asia, 1900–65* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2014), 9–11.

12. The *huaju* theatre was no longer a gendered space in the 1940s. While actresses (e.g., Wang Ying 王瑩 1913–1974) and women playwrights (e.g., Bai Wei) still constituted a sensational object of gossip and controversies, the contribution of women to *huaju* was neither invisible nor deniable.

13. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), xii.

14. Klaus R. Scherpe, “‘Backstage Discourse’: Staging the Other in Ethnographic and Colonial Literature,” in Gerhard Fischer and Bernhard Greiner, eds., *The Play within the Play: The Performance of Meta-Theatre and Self-Reflection* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2007), 27.

15. Zhang Geng, “Huaju yundong dashi biannian” (话剧运动大事编年 Chronicle of the Huaju Movement), in *Zhang Geng wenlu* (张庚文录 Collected Works of Zhang Geng), vol. 7 (Hunan: Hunan wenyi chubanshe, 2002), 372.

16. Tian Benxiang, “Zhongguo xiandai xiju shixue yanjiu zhi huigu he zhanwang” (中国现代戏剧史学研究之回顾和展望 Review and Prospect of Studies on the History of Modern Chinese Drama), *Renda Fuyin Baokan Ziliao* (人大复印报刊资料 People’s University Reprint Series) no. 1 (2002).

17. Shen Zhiyi, “Zhu Shuangyun zhuan” (朱雙雲傳 Biography of Zhu Shuangyun), in Zhu Shuangyun and Zhao Ji, eds., *Zhu Shuangyun wenji* (朱雙雲文集 Selected Works of Zhu Shuangyun), vol. 2 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2015), 919.

18. Siyuan Liu employs Zhu Shuangyun’s *History of New Drama* to identify the 1899 amateur spoken theatre productions in Shanghai’s St. John’s University and the College of St. Ignatius as the first such productions in China, showing how Anglo and French theatres shaped early Chinese spoken drama. Xuelei Huang, building on Zhu’s appraisal of *wenmingxi*’s commercial success, demonstrates the cultural/financial trend that *wenmingxi* and early cinema, such as the Mingxing Studio, shared. Zhao Ji, writing in Chinese, also recognizes the importance of the

first chronicle of modern Chinese theatre. Siyuan Liu, *Performing Hybridity in Colonial-Modern China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 82–83; Xuelei Huang, *Shanghai Filmmaking: Crossing Borders, Connecting to the Globe, 1922–1938* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 80; Zhao Ji, “Xinju shi yishu de shiliao kaozheng” (新劇史一書的史料考證 An Analysis of the History of New Drama), *Tushuguan zazhi* (圖書館雜誌 Library Journal) 37, no. 9 (2018): 118–28.

19. Zhu Shuangyun, *Xinju shi* (新劇史 The History of New Drama), in Zhu Shuangyun and Zhao Ji, eds., *Zhu Shuangyun wenji* (朱雙雲文集 Selected Works of Zhu Shuangyun), vol. 2 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2015), 121.

20. Zhu Shuangyun’s positive depiction of *xizi* was echoed in 1936 by the Peking opera reformer Xu Lingxiao, who criticized *huaju* actors’ “unprofessionalism.” See Chapter 4.

21. Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-Creation of Peking Opera, 1870–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 77.

22. Zhu Shuangyun’s account of the “playfulness” in acting foreshadows similar statements made by Yu Shangyuan and Xiong Foxi, noted in Chapters 2 and 3.

23. Zhu Shuangyun, *Chuqi zhiye huaju shiliao* (初期職業話劇史料 The Historical Materials of Early Professional *Huaju*) (Chongqing: Duli chubanshe, 1942), 1.

24. Zhu, *Chuqi zhiye huaju shiliao*, 54–55. Zhu points out that by 1927 mobile troupes had brought *wenmingxi* performances to Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Jiangxi, Hubei, Hunan, Sichuan, Hebei, Shandong, Fujian, and Guangdong.

25. Zhu, *Chuqi zhiye huaju shiliao*, 31–32.

26. Zhu, *Chuqi zhiye huaju shiliao*, 2.

27. Zhu, *Chuqi zhiye huaju shiliao*, 1.

28. Zhu, *Chuqi zhiye huaju shiliao*, 1.

29. Such as Hong Shen’s *Techniques of Writing for Film and Theatre* (*Dianying xiju de bianju fangfa*, 1935) and *Techniques of Acting for Film and Theatre* (*Dianying xiju biaoyan shu*, 1935), covered in Chapters 3 and 4.

30. Zhu, *Chuqi zhiye huaju shiliao*, 2.

31. Zhu, *Chuqi zhiye huaju shiliao*, 3.

32. Zhu, *Chuqi zhiye huaju shiliao*, 55–58.

33. Zhu, *Chuqi zhiye huaju shiliao*, 32.

34. Zhu’s catalog contains significantly more entries than what is recorded in Zheng Zhengqiu’s (鄭正秋 1889–1935) *One Hundred New Drama Plays* (*Xinju kaozheng baichu* 新劇考證百出) (Shanghai: Zhonghua Publishing House, 1919). Zheng was a leading figure of *wenmingxi* and early film.

35. Zhu, *Chuqi zhiye huaju shiliao*, 10.

36. For example, the New New Stage (Xinxin wutai 新新舞台) enticed Ren Tianzhi and his Progressive Troupe to relocate from Hankou to Shanghai with a contract of four thousand silver yuan (one thousand to Ren himself and three thousand to the troupe) in 1911. Zhu, *Chuqi zhiye huaju shiliao*, 4–5.

37. Zhu, *Chuqi zhiye huaju shiliao*, 49.

38. Shu, “Wo zenyang shoucang xiju shukan.” The libraries were (1) the Giant Source Drama Library (Juyuan xiju tushu guan 鉅源戲劇圖書館), founded by Weichi Juqing (尉遲鉅卿 n.d.), a prominent comprador, in Hankou’s French Concession in 1930; (2) Qi Rushan’s book collection archived in Beiping’s National Drama Study Society (Guoju xuehui 國劇學會) in 1931; (3) Song Chunfang’s personal theatre li-

brary, called “Coramo,” established in Qingdao in 1931; (4) the Hankou Modern Drama Library founded by Shu Weiqing in 1932; (5) The library of the National Drama School founded in 1935 in Nanjing; (6) the Ants and Bees Theatre Library (Yifeng xiju tushuguan 蟻蜂戲劇圖書館), used by the Ants and Bees Drama Society (Yifeng jushe 蟻蜂劇社) in Shanghai and opened to the public in 1937; and (7) the library associated with the Call to Arms Drama Society (Nahan jushe 吶喊劇社), founded by Deng Xingjing (鄧星鏡 n.d.) in Changsha.

39. Song Chunfang graduated from St. John’s University in 1912 and went on to study political science, sociology, and drama in France and other European countries. Song’s expertise with multiple foreign languages and his passion for theatre aided his exposure to European dramatic cultures. In 1918, Song was appointed by Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培 1868–1949) to the French department at Beijing University, where he offered the first Western theatre course in a Chinese university. Those wishing to learn more about Song’s dramatic leanings should consult W. Somerset Maugham’s (1874–1965) *On a Chinese Screen* (London: W. Heinemann, 1922).

40. For specific categories and volumes, see Xu Yajuan, *Guojia tushugan cang Hemu lu cangshu zhenben juyao* (国家图书馆藏褐木庐藏书珍本举要 Summary of Coramo Library Catalog Reserved in the National Library of China) (Beijing: Guojia tushuguan, 2010).

41. Scholarship recognizes the importance of *New Youth’s Special Issue on Drama Reform* (*Xiju gailiang zhuanhao* 戲劇改良專號) for the development of modern Chinese theatre. However, unlike Hu’s and Fu’s politically charged calls for drama reform and their introductory translation of Henrik Ibsen, which have come to mark the start of *huaju’s* participation in the New Culture Movement, Song’s efforts at collecting drama books have been overlooked in the narratives of modern drama history.

42. Song published the first volume of *Song Chunfang on Drama* (*Song Chunfang lunju* 宋春舫論劇) in 1923. The other two volumes, *Song Chunfang on Drama*, volume 2, and *Julius Caesar on Stage* (*Kaisa dadi dengtai* 凱撒大帝登台), were published in 1936 after the construction of Coramo.

43. In September 1940, *Theatre Art* (*Juchang yishu* 劇場藝術) had a special issue marking Song Chunfang’s contribution to the development of modern Chinese theatre as a theorist, translator, and collector of drama-related books and archival materials.

44. Song completed *Catalog of Opera Scripts Collected in the Coramo Library* (*Hemu lu cang xiqu shu xiemu* 褐木廬藏戲曲書寫目) and *Catalog of the Coramo Library* (*Hemu cangshu jumumu* 褐木藏書劇目), and he began to compile *History of European Drama* (*Ouzhou xiju shi* 歐洲戲劇史).

45. Shu Chang, ed., *Xiandai xiju tushu mulu* (現代戲劇圖書目錄 Catalog: Books of Modern Drama) (Hankou: Xiandai xiju tushuguan, 1938), 2.

46. Su Xuelin, “Shu Weiqing jiqi xiju shukan” (舒蔚青及其戲劇書刊 *Shu Weiqing and His Drama Books and Journals*), *Qingnian jie* (青年界 *The Field of Youth*) 6, no. 1 (1948).

47. A special volume dedicated to this exhibition was reportedly published and circulated in Wuhan. Sadly, it has not been preserved in extant archival collections. An entry for this special issue is listed in Shu, *Xiandai xiju tushu mulu*, 118.

48. Shu Weiqing’s collection embraced all kinds of drama-related books and ma-

terials. According to Su Xuelin (蘇雪林 1897–1999), Shu's collected drama scripts were both "erudite and elegant" and "vulgar and coarse," and they consisted of printings from the full spectrum of publishing houses. Su, "Shu Weiqing jiqi xiju shukan."

49. Such as the Modern Press (Xiandai shuju 現代書局), the Commercial Press (Shangwu yinshu guan 商務印書館), the World Press (Shijie shuju 世界書局), the Young Companion Book and Printing Company (Liangyou shuhua gongsi 良友書畫公司), and the Life Bookstore (Shenghuo shudian 生活書店). Shu, *Xiandai xiju tushu mulu*, 191.

50. Su, "Shu Weiqing jiqi xiju shukan."

51. Shu, *Xiandai xiju tushu mulu*, 2.

52. Li Shizeng translated Leopold Kampf's (1882–1912) *Am Vorabend: Drama in drei Akten* (1905) while he studied in France. There he was particularly struck by the organizational capabilities of the Paris Opera. After returning to China, Li drafted a plan for constructing the National Opera Music Association and Institute (Zhonghua xiqu yinyue xuehui ji yinyue yuan 中華戲曲音樂戲曲音樂學會暨音樂院, hereafter NOMI), where he stipulated that NOMI should use the Paris Opera as its reference point to establish an academic and performative institution in Nanjing. Li Shizeng, "Chongyin Ye wei yang juben xuwen" (重印夜未央劇本序文 The Preface of Reprint *Ye wei yang*), *Juxue yukan* (劇學月刊 Theatre Studies Monthly) no. 1 (1932): 1. For Li's NOMI proposal, see Sun Bai, "Cong Bali geju yuan dao Zhonghua xiqu yinyue yuan: lishuo xiandai xiju de guojia xiangxiang" (从巴黎歌剧院到中华戏曲音乐院: 历说现代戏剧的国家想象 From Paris Opera to National Opera Music Institute: A Case Study on Modern Drama's National Imagination), *Xiju* (戏剧 Drama) no. 3 (2011): 8–19.

53. Shu, *Xiandai xiju tushu mulu*, 1.

54. Shu, *Xiandai xiju tushu mulu*, 1.

55. The problem of "script hunger," mentioned in Chapter 1, persisted into the early socialist era. Brian DeMare, *Mao's Cultural Army: Drama Troupes in China's Rural Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 199.

56. Shu, *Xiandai xiju tushu mulu*, 85. Zhao Huishen was most famous for playing the role of "sister" (a prostitute) in the film *Street Angel* (*Malu tianshi* 馬路天使, 1937).

57. Following its successful debut, *Annals'* producers quickly scheduled twenty more performances to take place that month. Shi Man, *Chongqing kangzhan jutuan jishi* (重庆抗战剧坛纪实 Chronicles on Chongqing Wartime Theatre) (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chuban she, 1995), 140.

58. Zheng Junli, a well-established actor and director, moved to Chongqing during the Second Sino-Japanese War. There he played a prominent role in "the astonishing surge of creativity that swept through the Chinese film world." Paul G. Pickowicz, *China on Film: A Century of Exploration, Confrontation, and Controversy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 124.

59. *Dagong bao* (大公報 The Impartial), November 14, 1943.

60. *Dagong bao*, November 17, 1943.

61. *Xinhua ribao* (新華日報 New China Daily), December 5, 1943.

62. *Xinhua ribao*, December 10, 1943.

63. *Xinhua ribao*, December 12, 1943.

64. *Xinhua ribao's* December 25 advertisement pointed out that the performances

scheduled for December 26–28 would be the final three shows. The ad also promised that “after these three days’ performances” there would be “absolutely no other shows.” *Xinhua ribao*, December 25, 1943.

65. Zhang Ying 張穎 graduated from the Lu Xun Art School (Lu Xun yishu xueyuan 魯迅藝術學院) in Yan’an. Between 1940 and 1943, she worked as a journalist for *New China Daily* and as Zhou Enlai’s secretary. Using the pen name Zhang Ying 章嬰, she published several long and influential drama reviews and works of drama criticism in the *New China Daily Supplement* (*Xinhua ribao fukan* 新华日报副刊). Zhang Ying later revealed that most of her drama essays published during that period came directly from Zhou Enlai, who was then serving as the official CCP representative in Chongqing.

66. Zhang Ying, “Tan Xiju chungqiu” (談戲劇春秋 On Annals of Theatre), *Xinhua fukan* (新華副刊 Supplements for New China Daily), December 27, 1943.

67. Rudolf G. Wagner, *The Contemporary Chinese Historical Drama: Four Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 14.

68. Xia Yan, Song Zhidi, and Yu Ling, *Xiju chungqiu* (戲劇春秋 Annals of Theatre) (Chongqing: Weizhi chubanshe, 1946), 1.

69. Ge Fei, *Xiju, geming yu dushi xuanwo: 1930 niandai zuoyi juyun, juren zai Shanghai* (戲劇, 革命与都市漩涡: 1930年代左翼剧运, 剧人在上海 Drama, Revolution, and the City: The Left-Wing Drama Movement and Men of Theatre in 1930s Shanghai) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2008).

70. Hu Dao, *Ganxi qishinian: shang shiji sansishi niandai Shanghai de huaju wutai* (干戏十七年: 上世纪三十年代上海的话剧舞台 The Miscellaneous Memories of My Seventy Years’ Experiences Making Plays: The Shanghai Spoken Drama Stage in the 1930s and 1940s) (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2006).

71. Ge Fei, “Xiangzuo zhuan: Boximiya shi yishujia zai 1930 niandai zhi Shanghai” (向左转: 波西米亚式艺术家1930年代之上海 Turn Left: Bohemian Artists in 1930s Shanghai), *Hainan shifan daxue xuebao* (海南师范大学学报 Journal of Hainan Normal University) 25, no. 122 (2012): 33. More information about the 1930s as a “red decade” can be found in Chapter 3.

72. Ping Liu, “The Left-Wing Drama Movement in China and Its Relationship to Japan,” *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 14, no. 2 (2006): 452.

73. Bo Bin, *Zhongguo huaju shigao* (中国话剧史稿 The History of Chinese Spoken Drama) (Shanghai: Shanghai fanyi chuban gongsi, 1991), 119–30. Early activities by the Shanghai Art Drama Society included staging Western plays that “had less explicit political color but insisted on a certain political stance,” such as Lu Märten’s (1879–1970) *Bergarbeiter* (1908). Tian Han, Ouyang Yuqian, et al., eds., *Zhongguo huaju yundong wushinian shiliao ji* (中国话剧运动五十年史料集 Historical Materials on the Chinese Drama Movement of the First Fifty Years), vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1958), 308–9.

74. Ge, *Xiju, geming yu dushi xuanwo*, 40. Other *juren* that contributed to the left-wing drama movement included members of the Creation Society (Chuangzao she 创造社), Sun Society (Taiyang she 太阳社), Ying Yunwei’s Shanghai Theatre Association, and Tian Han’s Southern Society.

75. Liu, “Left-Wing Drama Movement in China,” 461.

76. Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896–1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 247.

77. Liang Luo, *The Avant-Garde and the Popular in Modern China: Tian Han and the Intersection of Performance and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 61.

78. Ge, *Xiju, geming yu dushi xuanwo*; Ge, “Xiangzuo zhuan.”

79. Diana Lary, *The Chinese People at War: Human Suffering and Social Transformation, 1937–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 112.

80. Wu Bin, “Zhonghua juyi she ‘lianyan zhi’ yu Zhongguo huaju de chengshu” (中华剧艺社“连演制”与中国话剧的成熟 The “Ferris Wheel” of China Dramatic Art Society and the Maturation of Chinese Spoken Drama), *Xiju yishu* (戏剧艺术 Drama Art) no. 4 (2010): 56.

81. Xia Yan, “Xia Yan huainian Ying Yunwei” (夏行懷念應雲衛 Xia Yan Remembers Ying Yunwei), *Xin wenhua shiliao* (新文化史料 Historical Materials of New Culture) no. 4 (1990): 53.

82. Xia Yan, Song Zhidi, and Yu Ling, *Xiju Chunqiu* (戏剧春秋 Annals of Theatre) (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chuban she, 1981), 182.

83. Xia, Song, and Yu, *Xiju Chunqiu* (1981): 183.

84. Ma, “Lun Guomindang huaju zhengce de liangqixing jiqi weihai,” 145.

85. During the war period, it was not uncommon for film studios to also stage *huaju*. Weihong Bao, “Diary of a Homecoming: (Dis)Inhabiting the Theatrical in Postwar Shanghai Cinema,” in Zhang Yingjin, ed., *A Companion to Chinese Cinema* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 385.

86. The Nationalist government’s evolving censorship policies represented a strengthening of state authority. Prior to the establishment of the Central Books and Journals Censorship Committee in 1942, the power to censor had rested with various local bureaucratic organizations. Ma, *Yanju zhiyehua yundong*, 248.

87. In fact, Xia Yan was already well acquainted with Nationalist censorship before cofounding Zhongshu. A decade prior, his Shanghai Art Drama Society was forced to disband by the Shanghai Public Security Bureau due to the troupe’s promotion of “proletarian drama” (*wuchan jieji xiju* 無產階級戲劇). Tian, Ouyang, et al., eds., *Zhongguo huaju yundong wushinian shiliao ji*, vol. 1, 308–9.

88. Xia, Song, and Yu, *Xiju Chunqiu* (1981): 182.

89. Xia, Song, and Yu, *Xiju Chunqiu* (1981): 185.

90. Xia, Song, and Yu, *Xiju Chunqiu* (1981): 185.

91. Chen, “Modern Chinese Spoken Drama,” 848–77; Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 49–93.

92. *Thunderstorm* ran over forty-four, *Wu Zetian* ran over twenty-eight, and *Sai Jinhua* ran over forty performances in a row. Ge, *Xiju, geming yu dushi xuanwo*, 223.

93. Bao, “Diary of a Homecoming,” 385.

94. Chang-tai Hung points out that, since it remains impossible to calculate the total number of *huaju*’s audience, this figure remains an underestimate. Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, 50.

95. Ge, *Xiju, geming yu dushi xuanwo*, 126.

96. Ge, *Xiju, geming yu dushi xuanwo*, 126.

97. Ge, *Xiju, geming yu dushi xuanwo*, 137. This final semi-educated group was akin to the “petty intellectuals” identified in Chapter 3.

98. For a detailed analyses of Sai Jinhua’s “larger-than-life” persona and the

many literary treatments of her, see David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849–1911* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 101.

99. Ke Ling, “Cong Qiu Jin zhuan shuodao Sai Jinhua” (从秋瑾传记说到赛金花 From the Biography of Qiu Jin to Sai Jinhua), in Xia Yan, Hui Lin, and Shao Wu, eds., *Xia Yan xiju yanjiu ziliao* (夏衍研究资料 Research Materials on Xia Yan’s Dramas), vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1980), 72.

100. For Lu Xun’s comments on Xia’s faction, see Lu Xun, “Da Xu Maoyong guanyu kangri tongyi zhanxian wenti” (答徐懋庸关于抗日统一战线问题 Answer to Xu Maoyong’s Question Regarding the United Anti-Japanese War), in *Lu Xun quanji* (鲁迅全集 Complete Works of Lu Xun), vol. 6 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1981), 534.

101. Lu Xun, “Zhe yeshi shenghuo” (这也是生活 This Is Also Life . . .), in *Lu Xun quanji* (鲁迅全集 Complete Works of Lu Xun), vol. 6 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1981), 602.

102. Zhou Yang, “Guanyu guofang wenxue” (關於國防文學 On National Defense Literature), in *Zhou Yang wenji* (周扬文集 Works of Zhou Yang), vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1984), 170–77.

103. Lu, “Zhe yeshi shenghuo,” 602.

104. Zhou Xuliang, “Sai Jinhua juban de xieshixing” (赛金花剧本的寫實性 The Realism of the Play *Sai Jinhua*), *Wenxue zazhi* (文學雜誌 Literature Magazine) 1, no. 1 (1937): 5.

105. Zhang Geng, “Sai Jinhua zuotan hui” (赛金花座談會 Seminar on *Sai Jinhua*), in Xia Yan, Hui Lin, and Shao Wu, eds., *Xia Yan xiju yanjiu ziliao* (夏衍研究资料 Research Materials on Xia Yan’s Dramas), vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1980), 48–49. The Saturday School was another name for the “Mandarin duck and butterflies” style of popular fiction, which was derided by leftist critics for its mawkish sentiments and commercial leanings.

106. Hong Shen also worked with the Mingxing Studio, as mentioned in Chapter 3.

107. Jiang Jin, “Chinese Salomés on the Modern Stage,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 176. Another well-known resurrection of a historical beauty on the *huaju* stage was Ouyang Yuqian’s *Pan Jinlian* (1928).

108. Wagner, *Contemporary Chinese Historical Drama*, 87.

109. Mao Dun, “Guanyu Wu zetian” (关于武则天 Regarding *Wu Zetian*), in *Song Zhidi yanjiu ziliao* (宋之的研究资料 Research Materials on Song Zhidi) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan wenxue yanjiusuo, 2010), 163.

110. Song Zhidi, “Xiezu Wu Zetian de zibai” (寫作武則天的自白 The Confession of Writing *Wu Zetian*), in *Song Zhidi yanjiu ziliao* (宋之的研究资料 Research Materials on Song Zhidi) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan wenxue yanjiusuo, 2010), 97.

111. Xia and Song later condemned these works in the 1950s in the face of considerable political pressure.

112. The other three major Shanghai drama societies were Zhu Rangcheng’s Xinyou Drama Society, Tian Han’s Southern Society, and the Fudan Dramatic Club (Fudan jushe). Huang Shizhi, “Lun Shanghai xiju xieshe zuzhi yu guanli de xiandai hua” (论上海戏剧协社组织与管理的现代化 On the Shanghai Drama Society and Its Modern Management), *Wenhua yishu yanjiu* (文化艺术研究 Study on Culture and Art) no. 6 (2009): 219.

113. Hong Shen deserves chief credit for making these major achievements in the professionalization of modern Chinese theatre possible. In addition to establishing the performative norm of gender-aligned casting in 1923, Hong applied modern drama schemes to amateur productions. *Young Mistress' Fan*, Hong's adaptation of Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan*, was performed in 1924 on the Laughter Stage (Xiao wutai 笑舞台) in Shanghai to considerable box-office success. Alongside a mixed-gender cast, Hong implemented, for the first time in the history of Chinese drama, a coherent directorial vision as a reaction against the Chinese theatre's reliance on actors' improvisation. Hong created the role of theatrical director, charged with overseeing the aesthetic qualities of the play. He also set up regular schedules for multiple rehearsals, which further limited the need for ad-libbing. In this manner, *Young Mistress' Fan*, despite being presented in a Shanghai mise-en-scène, is generally recognized as the first "authentic" *huaju* production to adhere to modern (Western) theatre conventions. Siyuan Liu, "Hong Shen and Adaptation of Western Plays in Modern Chinese Theatre," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 27, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 106–7.

114. Huang, *Shanghai Filmmaking*, 125.

115. Zhang Geng, *Zhang Geng wenlu buyi juan* (张庚文录 补遗卷 Writings of Zhang Geng, Supplementary Volume) (Hunan: Hunan wenyi chubanshe, 2004), 89.

116. Zhu Xiaobing, "Zuoyi xiju yanjiu (左翼戏剧研究 A Study on Left-Wing Drama)," PhD dissertation, Nanjing University, 2001, 5.

117. Hong Shen, "Wo de dagu shiqi yijing guo le ma?" (我的打鼓时期已经过了吗? Has My Time Beating the Drum Already Passed?), in *Hong Shen wenji* (洪深文集 Collected Works of Hong Shen), vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju, 1957), 533; Liu, *Performing Hybridity*, 118. Soon after returning to Shanghai from New York and joining STA in 1923, Hong Shen, claiming to "have read too much of Professor Freud's book on 'sexual perversity'" and uneasy with the practice of "men playing women," strove to make gender-aligned casting de rigueur in Shanghai.

118. Ying Yunwei, "Huiyi Shanghai xiju xieshe" (回忆上海戏剧协社 Reminiscences of the Shanghai Theatre Association), in Tian Han, Ouyang Yuqian, et al., eds., *Zhongguo huaju yundong wushinian shiliao ji* (中国话剧运动五十年史料集 Historical Materials on the Chinese Drama Movement of the First Fifty Years), vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1958), 3.

119. Ying, "Huiyi Shanghai xiju xieshe," 3.

120. Xia, Song, and Yu, *Xiju Chunqiu* (1946): 12–13.

121. Christopher G. Rea, "Comedy and Cultural Entrepreneurship in Xu Zhuodai's *Huaji* Shanghai," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 20, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 66.

122. Chen Baichen, *Dui chenshi de gaobie* (对尘世的告别 Farewell to the World) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1997), 301.

123. Here *Annals* interestingly "conflates" two rival art institutes, the Southern Society, which was privately funded by Tian Han and pursued the left-wing ideal of "going to the people," and the West Lake Art Institute (Xihu yishu xueyuan 西湖艺术学院) in Hangzhou, which was funded by the Nationalist government.

124. Xia, Song, and Yu, *Xiju Chunqiu* (1946): 38.

125. Xia, "Xia Yan huainian Ying Yunwei," 2.

126. It was not until the mid-1930s, when *huaju* gained stable performance schedules in modern cinema houses, that the professional splitting system was finally

established. This was an agreement between drama troupes and cinema owners in which between 30–40 percent of box-office revenue would go to the cinema owner.

127. Each of the established drama societies had its own means of finding financial support. The Southern Society mainly relied upon Tian Han's personal charisma to woo donors, the Xinyou Drama Society owed its success to Zhu Rangcheng, and the Fudan Dramatic Club operated under the auspices of Fudan University. Huang, "Lun Shanghai xiju xieshe zuzhi yu guanli de xiandai hua," 219.

128. Rea, "Comedy and Cultural Entrepreneurship," 53.

129. For more details regarding the history, translation, and performance of *Roar, China* in Russia, Japan, and China in the 1930s, see Xiaobing Tang, *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 213–28; and Qiu Kunliang, "Xiju de yanchu, chuanbo, yu zhengzhi douzheng: yi Nuhouba, Zhongguo jiqi dongya yanchu wei zhongxin" (戏剧的演出, 传播, 与政治斗争: 以怒吼吧中国及其东亚演出为中心 The Performance, Propagation, and Political Struggle of Drama: A Case Study Centered upon *Roar, China* and Its Performances in East Asia), *Xiju yanjiu* (戏剧研究 Journal of Theatre Studies) no. 7 (2011): 107–50.

130. Ying Yunwei, "Nuhouba, Zhongguo shangyan jihua" (怒吼吧中国上演计划 The Staging Plan for *Roar, China*), in Du Xuan, ed., *Xiju hun: Ying Yunwei jinian wenji* (应云卫纪念文集 The Drama Soul: Collection Memorializing Ying Yunwei) (Beijing: Xiju chubanshe, 2004), 61.

131. Huang Aihua, "'Gan wei tianxia xian' de Ying Yunwei" (敢为天下先的应云卫 Ying Yunwei, the One Who Dares to Be the First), *Zhongguo xiju* (中国戏剧 Chinese Theatre) no. 1 (2005): 63.

132. Ying, "Nuhouba, Zhongguo shangyan jihua," 59.

133. Xia, Song, and Yu, *Xiju Chunqiu* (1946): 60.

134. Xia, Song, and Yu, *Xiju Chunqiu* (1946): 107.

135. Xia, Song, and Yu, *Xiju Chunqiu* (1946): 133.

136. Xia, Song, and Yu, *Xiju Chunqiu* (1946): 131.

137. *Annals'* ending is strikingly similar to those of the patriotic plays *Extras* and *Joy of Joining the Army*, covered in Chapter 4.

138. Xia, Song, and Yu, *Xiju Chunqiu* (1946): 1.

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