

UCLA

UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Ascending the Hall of Great Elegance: the Emergence of Drama Research in Modern China

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4kg4p98s>

Author

Wu, Hsiao-Chun

Publication Date

2016

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Ascending the Hall of Great Elegance:
the Emergence of Drama Research in Modern China

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

Hsiao-Chun Wu

2016

© Copyright by

Hsiao-Chun Wu

2016

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Ascending the Hall of Great Elegance:
the Emergence of Drama Research in Modern China

by

Hsiao-Chun Wu

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016,

Professor Andrea Sue Goldman, Chair

This dissertation captures a critical moment in China's history when the interest in opera transformed from literati divertissement into an emerging field of scholarly inquiry. Centering around the activities and writings of Qi Rushan (1870-1962), who played a key role both in reshaping the modes of elite involvement in opera and in systematic knowledge production about opera, this dissertation explores this transformation from a transitional generation of theatrical connoisseurs and researchers in early twentieth-century China. It examines the many conditions and contexts in the making of opera—and especially Peking opera—as a discipline of modern humanistic research in China: the transnational emergence of Sinology, the vibrant urban entertainment market, the literary and material resources from the past, and the bodies and

identities of performers.

This dissertation presents a critical chronology of the early history of drama study in modern China, beginning from the emerging terminology of genre to the theorization and the making of a formal academic discipline. Chapter One examines the genre-making of Peking Opera in three overlapping but not identical categories: temporal, geographical-political, and aesthetic. It argues that it is within the context of emerging theatrical genres and heated debates on drama in early twentieth-century China that a “researcher mode” of theatrical appreciation became meaningful for Qi Rushan and his contemporaries.

Chapter Two and Three study the link between the urban theater and the emergence of modern drama research in China. Chapter Two examines from a material point of view how studies on China’s native theater were shaped by the local conditions of Republican Beijing. It investigates how the city’s well-established cultural market, unique thriving opera scene, and long-standing performing community fueled the collecting of theatrical materials, thereby providing a solid basis of research artifacts in the transnational competition for texts and things pertinent to Sinological studies. Chapter Three explores the urban theater from the production side and revises the assumption of a linear temporal sequence between theatrical knowledge and production with attention to the local conditions (audiences preferences and entertainment fashion) of the site where the theatrical art develops. It shows that Mei Lanfang’s signature plays were responding to contemporary market trends rather than being the materialization of any pre-existing aesthetic ideas. It was not until these productions were translated to contexts different from the entertainment market in 1910s and 1920s China that they came to be identified as illustration of an aesthetic representing Chinese theatrical art.

Chapter Four examines the formation and transition of theatrical knowledge through discussion of two kinds of performer education: for career actors and for amateurs. The discussion on education for career actor uncovers a tension between aspiration for full-rounded preparation and the economic and social restraints encountered, while the controversies surrounding amateur performers were windows onto the identity-claims of insiders and outsiders to the performing business. This chapter shows that it was in the course of contemporaneous discussions on what and how to learn about opera performance that the scope and content of theatrical knowledge came into shape.

Chapter Five discusses Qi Rushan's effort to stabilize an understanding of Chinese theatrical art by writing a history of Chinese opera with textual resources from Chinese antiquity and the early imperial dynasties. It shows how Qi theorized Chinese opera with the constructed *gewu*—song-and-dance—notation and how he depicted an unbroken genealogy of the Chinese performance tradition dating from the ancient period to recent times. For Qi, *gewu* was the guiding principle to connect the past and present of Chinese theater and to make an aesthetic that attested to the superiority of Chinese theatrical art.

The concluding chapter reflects the irony of knowledge production about an art form dislocated from its native place and ponders the links between the birth of a scholarship and the loss of the thing being studied. Reviewing Qi Rushan's immigrant years on Taiwan after he moved there in 1947, it argues that the “geographical” rupture due to the Chinese Civil War engendered new incentives to nationalize the interest in opera in service of the party-state. When theatrical connoisseurs and researchers relocated to Taiwan because of the loss of their homeland, their indulgence in opera was finally accepted as “elegant.”

The dissertation of Hsiao-Chun Wu is approved.

Roy Bin Wong

William Marotti

Richard E. Strassberg

Andrea Sue Goldman, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DISSERTATION ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
CURRICULUM VITAE	xi
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: The Making of the Genre of Peking Opera	
Introduction	21
When: Is Pihuang Old or New	25
Where: Is Pihuang National or Regional	40
What: Is Pihuang Spoken Drama, Opera, or Something Else	57
Conclusion	67
CHAPTER 2: Qi Rushan's Collecting Activities in Republican Beijing	
Introduction	68
Motivation: Seeking a Theory of Chinese Drama	71
The Beijing Wonderland: Collecting the Tangible	81
Oral Wisdom: Collecting the Intangible	108
Conclusion	127
CHAPTER 3: Legendary Beauties Revived Onstage	
Introduction	129
The New Role of Dramaturge	131
The Plays	137
Reflections and Critiques	151
Conclusion	157
CHAPTER 4: Bodily Learning, Book Learning	
Introduction	161
Reform Education for Career Actors	166
The Piaoyou: A Programmatic Role in the Theatrical Realm	195
Conclusion	218

CHAPTER 5:	
Writing a History of Chinese Drama with the Classics	
Introduction	219
Escape from the Recent Past	222
Writing the History of Song-and-Dance in Chinese Drama	235
Conclusion	261
CONCLUSION	263
BILBIOGRAPHY	270

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is an expression of my life-long love for the performing arts. My deep thanks go my mother for raising me in an environment that encouraged me to explore the wonderful world of the arts. I thank my mentor Andrea Goldman for nurturing this love into serious scholarly pursuit. Without her steadfast support, it would have been impossible to complete this dissertation. From the first day I arrived on the UCLA campus, she has been my source of inspiration and encouragement. Over the years, she has guided me to shape my original, sometimes random ideas into well-founded arguments. Because of her deep knowledge of the field, I have always been able to see the dissertation in new lights and regain the momentum to continue the research after hours of rewarding conversation with her. Bin Wong reminds me of the pleasure and craft of a historian. I am grateful for the time and patience he has spent on me despite his busy administrative schedule. Based on his teaching, I will continue to explore shared human experiences and questions across cultures in my future endeavors. The annual dinner feast at Richard von Glahn's place was always one of the best ways to start a new academic year. William Marotti showed me the possibilities of reading theory and history together. I was thrilled by the beauty of the literary conversation between Eastern and Western languages in the classroom of Richard Strassberg. I will always admire his passion for Chinese culture.

Friends at UCLA have been wonderful companions over the course of writing the dissertation. Amy Gordanier proofread chapters of the dissertation with great carefulness. Guo Xing has been a wonderful roommate to share sweets and conversations about life. Mari Ishida has been the best friend to share the ups and downs of graduate student life. Chien-Ling Liu,

Meng Zhang and Sun Kyu Lee have been cordial friends with whom to grow together in the graduate program. Thanks to Yunshuang Zhang and her parents, I was fortunate to experience and enjoy life in a hutong alley in Beijing.

The comradeship of Shiau-Yun Chen, Hsin-Yi Lin, and Yun-Ju Chen has been instrumental to the completion of my doctoral study. I remember the great times I spent with you in Ithaca, Chicago, and Oxford. The dissertation writing group I formed with Hsin-Yi and Yun-Ju has been my periodic outlet for the boredom of the long writing process. Shiau-Yun's laughter always fuels my research life. Our friendships across the many corners of the world are preserved in the pages of this dissertation.

National Tsing Hua University, my alma mater, prepared me to become a scientist and a humanist. The education I received at NTHU shaped the outlook of my later career. Cho-Ying Li and Yuehtsen Juliette Chung at the Institute of History, NTHU, guided an ambitious but tender mind to turn a voyage into a dream. Friendships I built as a visual art assistant curator at the Arts Center, NTHU, have been invaluable assets. I especially thank Mu-Jung Wang for introducing me to the thrilling world of Chinese opera.

My research in Beijing would not have been as fruitful without the kind help of Lu Yingkun and Qin Huasheng. I benefitted from responses to my research at the Annual Meetings of CHINOPERL. I am also thankful for the engaging discussion on Chinese operatic art and literature at the Rehistorizing Kunqu workshop at UCLA in 2016. At the workshop, comments from Professors Joseph Lam, Hua Wei, and Chen Fang were especially insightful and helped me to sharpen my arguments in the last chapter of the dissertation.

A Fulbright fellowship made my study in the U.S. possible. During my studies at UCLA,

I received financial support from the UCLA History Department, the Center for Japanese Studies, the Center for Chinese Studies, the Asia Institute, and UCLA's Graduate Division. Grants from the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation, AAS China, and the Inner Asia Council were key to the research and completion of the dissertation.

Chun-Chieh Wang ran into me for a jog together on a warm West L.A. afternoon. His coming into the later part of my graduate student career brought the gift of balance into my life as a dissertation writer.

Curriculum Vitae

Hsiao-Chun Wu
吳曉鈞

DEGREE AWARDED

M.A., Institute of History, National Tsing Hua University, 2008

B.S., Department of Physics, National Tsing Hua University, 2005

SELECTED GRANTS AND FELLOWSHIPS

Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship, Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange, 2014-2015

Small Grants, China and Inner Asia Council, Association of Asian Studies, 2014-15

Graduate Fellowship, Asia Institute, UCLA, 2013-2014

Pre-dissertation Year Fellowship, Department of History, UCLA, 2012-2013

Hans Rogger International Student Funds in History, Department of History, UCLA, 2011-2012

Graduate Fellowship, Center for Chinese Studies, UCLA, 2010-2012

Sasakawa Language Fellowship, Center for Japanese Studies, UCLA, 2010 summer

Fulbright Graduate Study Grant, Institute of International Education, 2009-2011

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

“Writing a History of Chinese Drama with the Confucian Classics,” at Rehistoricizing Kunqu: China’s Classic Opera, UCLA, June 8-9, 2015.

“Making National Drama in a Wandering State: Qi Rushan and Research on Peking Opera in Post-1949 Taiwan,” at 21st Annual Conference of the North American Taiwan Studies Association, Harvard University, June 12-13, 2015.

“Collecting of Theatrical Materials in Early Republican Beijing,” at CHINOPERL Permanent Conference on Chinese Oral and Performing Literature, Chicago, March 26th, 2015.

“What, Where, and When: The Making of the Genre of Peking Opera, 1911-1937,” at CHINOPERL Permanent Conference on Chinese Oral and Performing Literature, Philadelphia, March 26th, 2014.

Introduction

“Sincere, modest comrades and fellow enthusiasts, come, come, come!”¹ —1932

This ardent call to action issued in January 1932 was directed at neither political nor social activism. Published as one of the prefatory essays in *Dramaturge Monthly* (*Juxue yuekan* 劇學月刊), the author exhorted his readers to engage in serious research on China’s native theatrical arts. The tone of this appeal speaks to the imagined revolutionary nature of this endeavor. Although opera had been a popular cultural commodity for everyday consumption since China’s late imperial period, it became a topic for serious scholarly engagement only at the turn of the twentieth century. Long considered as a minor path (*xiaodao* 小道) in cultural discourses, opera had been more often linked with something vulgar, as something “not [worthy] of ascending the hall of great elegance” (*bu deng da ya zhi tang* 不登大雅之堂).² This undervaluation of opera stands in sharp contrast with the pervasive existence of opera in Chinese society.³ Until the last decade of the nineteenth century, however, the gap between opera as art (*yishu* 藝術) and opera as a subject of scholarly inquiry (*xuehsu* 學術) still seemed unbridgeable.

¹ Lingxiao, “Buchong Huilu de hua [Supplement to Huilu’s words],” *Juxue yuekan* [Dramaturge Monthly], vol. 1 no. 1 (January 1, 1932).

² This view on drama persisted well into the twentieth century. For instance, one of the major collectors of theatrical texts in the Republican period, Ma Yuqing 馬隅卿 (1893-1935), named his studio “*Bu deng da ya zhi tang*” 不登大雅之堂 (The Studio of Not Ascending Great Elegance), see Beijing daxue tushuguan, *Bu deng da ya wenku zhenben xiqu congkan* [Collections of precious theatrical scripts from the *bu deng da ya* studio] (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2003), p. 2.

³ For the ubiquity of theatrical performance in Chinese society, see David Johnson et. al. eds., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1985).

This dissertation captures a critical moment in China's history when the interest in opera transformed from literati divertissement into an emerging field of scholarly inquiry. It explores this transformation from the activities and discourses of a transitional generation of lettered men who were deeply involved in the theatrical realm. Born in the last decades of Qing rule, they witnessed the fall of the empire and the political uncertainty in the making of the Chinese nation-state. They received classical education in the preparation for the civil service examination but pursued alternatives to official careers as the imperial order crumbled. For them, theatrical appreciation was an integral part of their upbringing. Together with the institutions and modes of theatrical consumption established in Qing times, their engagement in the theatrical realm withstood the political upheavals of twentieth-century China. Because of the juxtaposition of rupture and continuities, I identify their involvement along a continuous spectrum: on one end is the "connoisseur" mode that continues the language and aesthetics of Qing commentary on opera to appreciate individual players or performance styles. On the other end is the "researcher" mode, which consciously claims to be a more objective, and, therefore, allegedly scientific approach to evaluating China's theatrical arts. All of the modes along this spectrum (and any combination of them) are performance-oriented: they concern the production and onstage performance of opera instead of the text-oriented approach that focused mostly on drama as literature. This performance-oriented approach invited, even demanded, closer observation of and interaction with the contemporary theatrical realm to gain knowledge "in-the-field."

With their exclusive interest in operatic performance, theatrical connoisseur/researchers partook in a wide range of activities. They enjoyed theater-going, wrote performance critiques and commentaries on theatrical culture, and practiced amateur singing. Some of them also

established careers as playwrights and/or producers for leading actors, or they served as editors-in-chief of new drama periodicals. Their activities were deeply embedded in the thriving urban theater in major cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, and were fueled by the rapid development of the mass press in modern China.⁴ Between the three decades from 1900 to the 1930s, more than forty local Beijing newspapers ran columns on opera.⁵ The numbers of popular publications on drama in the early twentieth century also indicates a reading public for such material larger than the elite connoisseur/researcher cohort who wrote and published on this topic. Republican readers consumed not only onstage entertainment but also writings about performance.

The genre that caught the greatest attention within contemporary discussion on opera was pihuang 皮簧, the name being a contraction of its two constituent major musical styles, xipi 西皮 and erhuang 二簧. As a theatrical genre that emerged from the synthesis of various local varieties of Chinese opera, by the turn of the twentieth-century, with imperial patronage and the growth of public commercial theater in the capital, pihuang had secured large audiences.⁶ Due to its gradual ascendance within the opera hierarchy in the urban theater of Qing Beijing, pihuang became a ready-made candidate to become the “national drama” of the Chinese nation-state after the Qing fell. In addition to its popularity, the efforts of connoisseur/researchers provided pihuang with the epistemological grounding to represent the aesthetic essence of Chinese theater. The nationalizing of pihuang went hand in hand with knowledge production of the genre, taken to be

⁴ For a case study on the press and the urban theater in early twentieth century, see Catherine Yeh, “The Press and the Rise of Peking Opera Singers to National Stardom: the Case of Theater Illustrated (1912-17),” *East Asian History*, No. 28 (December 2004), pp. 53-86.

⁵ Zhongguo xiqu zhi bianji weiyuanhui, *Zhongguo xiqu zhi—Beijing juan* [All-China drama gazetteer—Beijing volume](Beijing: Xinhua shudian Beijing faxingsuo, 1999), pp. 950-68.

⁶ For the formation of pihuang, see Beijing shi yishu yenjushuo and Shanghai she yishu yenjushuo, *Zhongguo jingju shi* [History of Peking Opera in China] (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1999), vol. 1, pp. 137-247.

the epitome of Chinese drama. Because of its dominance in the Republican theatrical scene, pihuang, or its common synonym, Peking opera, was a key term in the general discussion on drama (xiju 戲劇) in early-twentieth century China, despite the fact that pihuang is now categorized as song-drama, or xiqu 戲曲, rather than drama (which often implies spoken theater).

The canonization of pihuang would likely not have been achieved without Qi Rushan 齊如山 (1875-1962), who played a key role both in reshaping the modes of elite involvement in opera and in systematic knowledge production about opera. Born in 1875, Qi received a classical education but later acquired training in foreign language and science at the Tongwenguan 同文館 (School of Combined Learning), the new Qing court institution founded in the wake of Qing defeat in the Second Opium War (1857-1860) and a major fixture in late Qing reform efforts. Qi's exposure to western learning raised his interest in traveling abroad, which he did by seizing upon the opportunity to help send Chinese workers to his brother's tofu factory in France. In Europe, Qi had opportunities to watch Western theater, an experience that gave him a comparative perspective from which to examine China's native theatrical arts in a transnational framework. During the turbulent years of the late Qing, Qi also developed a successful career as a businessman, which gave him the solid financial wherewithall to support his involvement in opera after he settled again in Beijing in 1911. In his long engagement with the theatrical realm, Qi took on a variety of roles: as audience, critic, playwright, producer, and, most prominently, self-fashioned researcher.⁷ Without formal institutional affiliation, his contribution to the “long-

⁷ For Qi's self-described family background, exposure to westerners during the Boxer Rebellion, and experiences in commerce, see Qi Rushan, *Qi Rushan huiyilu* [A Memoir of Qi Rushan] (Taipei: Zhongyang wenwu gongying she, 1953), pp. 1-79.

neglected research on national drama” was well-recognized by contemporaries for his novel approach to “[studying] modern Chinese [theater] from insider [knowledge] (neihang 內行).”⁸ Qi is both representative and unique to his generation of theatrical connoisseur/researchers. Many of his contemporaries participated in some of the same activities in which Qi partook, but few of their engagements were as comprehensive as those of Qi Rushan, nor did they establish as long a career as a connoisseur/researcher as Qi did.

To date, Qi Rushan is best known for his theorization of Chinese operatic art: “there is no sound that is not song; no movement that is not dance (wu sheng bu ge 無聲不歌, wu dong bu wu 無動不舞).” This theorization has remained extremely influential in understanding the genre even to this day, whether among scholars or practitioners of opera. It upholds the status of opera to present an aesthetic unique to China, thereby justifying the interest in opera as a serious endeavor. However, this pithy encapsulation implies a teleological opera history, namely, pihuang, constructed and construed as the national drama, is the genre that includes all performative characteristics of China’s theatrical arts. It can also be read as an ahistorical tautology in which opera is a subject of humanistic research *because of* its aesthetic values. In this study, through contextualizing the connoisseur/researcher career of Qi Rushan and his contemporaries, I examine the many conditions and contexts in the making of opera—and especially Peking opera—as a discipline of modern humanistic research in China: the transnational emergence of Sinology, the vibrant urban entertainment market, the literary and material resources from the past, and the bodies and identities of performers. I aim to uncover the

⁸ Yansheng, “Qi Rushan zhi shengping [The career of Mr. Qi Rushan],” *Beiping chenbao* [Beiping morning post], March, 27, 1936.

coming-into-being of modern drama research before Qi's theorization of the art gained the status of unquestioned authoritative common knowledge.

Literature Review

The dissertation makes three contributions to historical research: it engages with scholarship on colonial modernity; it analyzes the study of opera as an emerging modern humanistic research; and it reads the debates surrounding the production of knowledge about opera as a case study in the development of modern Chinese intellectual history.

The transformation of interest in opera unfolded in a time period of the simultaneous emergence of modernity. Indeed, the global competition over colonial dominance in modern times involved every corner of the world and betrayed the fixed boundary of the West and non-West. Seeking to move beyond the Eurocentric conceptualization of modernity and the assumed temporal differentiation of development between colonial metropolis and peripheries, scholars such as Tani Barlow deploy the notion of "colonial modernity" as "a way of posing a historical question about how our mutual present came to take its apparent shape."⁹ Building upon current scholarship on the hybridity of cultural products and the transforming impact of technology across geographical boundaries, my discussion engages with colonial modernity by exploring the potential for indigenous modernity as illustrated via the emerging study of opera: the well-established modes of opera consumption in Chinese theatrical culture and the textual resources derived from the classics.

⁹ For discussion of the definition and applications of the colonial modernity, see Tani E. Barlow, "Introduction: on 'Colonial Modernity,'" in Tani E. Barlow ed., *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 1-20.

New modes of cultural consumption have been the focus in the examination of the “mutual present” of modern times. For instance, investigating the recording industry in Republican China, Andrew Jones observes that African-American musicians performed Chinese songs in jazz style in Shanghai nightclubs and local Chinese folk melodies incorporated western instruments as “colonial modernity in a transnational network of gramophone industry” unfolded globally.¹⁰ Joshua Goldstein investigates similar hybrid formations in the opera world. He discusses in great detail the rise and decline of so-called “hybrid drama,” which combined the acting techniques of Peking opera with up-to-date costume/stage design to address contemporary issues on stage.¹¹ Rebecca Karl reminds us that issues of concern to Chinese theatrical reformists were transnational and illustrated the ways in which global spatial simultaneity could be articulated in the late Qing Chinese context.¹² Targeting local audiences in a global market of cultural consumption, these musical and theatrical productions combined local contents with foreign forms, blurring the boundaries of West and non-West.

The hybridization of cultural products would not have been possible without the introduction of colonial technology, by which I mean the technology that came to China with the presence of colonialism. As pointed out by Jones, “new media technologies such as wireless broadcasting, sound cinema, and mass circulation magazines in urban China” were critical to the emergence of hybrid forms.¹³ In terms of opera, Goldstein shows how railways linked the urban

¹⁰ Andrew Jones, *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 4,7, 67.

¹¹ Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-Creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2007), p. 94.

¹² Rebecca Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), p.48.

¹³ Jones, *Yellow Music*, p. 17.

centers of Tianjin, Beijing, and Shanghai into one connected network of opera consumption, in which Shanghai led new fashions of advertising and Beijing provided talented actors with its well-established training system.¹⁴ He also shows how colonial technology such as lighting, stage design, and theater construction created the modern playhouse, a “rationalized public space” that disciplined audiences to be modern citizens by imposing upon them modern codes of behavior.¹⁵ Equally notable is the politics of these technological adaptations. Borrowing the concept of “enframing” from historian Timothy Mitchell, Goldstein maintains that the reconfiguration of theatrical space indicates the transformation to an orderly, representational regime that shows “the superiority of colonial technology over the supposedly disorganized technologies they come to replace.”¹⁶

Although I agree with the above arguments, my dissertation shows that examination of preexisting modes of cultural consumption is equally critical to the development of colonial modernity. It was Beijing’s thriving opera scene that provided the tangible (material and written objects) and intangible (oral transmission and circulation of knowledge and experience) research materials for the scholarly project on Chinese opera. Taking Qi Rushan’s career as a theatrical collector, for example, the hybridity of modern opera research lies largely in his deployment of existing practices of opera consumption for new ends: namely, to historicize, aestheticize, and nationalize an ever-changing native art form.

In this regard, my research has benefitted from scholarship that pushes the notion of colonial modernity one step further to search for the presence of indigenous modernity that has

¹⁴ Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, p. 47.

¹⁵ Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, p. 83.

¹⁶ Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, p. 85.

been dismissed or neglected in later time. With their urban-historical approach, historians have uncovered China's native ways of responding to the advent of modernity through their examinations of both colonial and non-colonial Chinese cities. In *Shanghai and the Edges of Empires*, Meng Yue devotes considerable attention to the ways that indigenous modernity could be possible even in a city so deeply shaped by colonialism. She considers opera as one among other examples that testify to the emergence and origin of an "unruly," non-capitalist modernity in Shanghai at the turn of twentieth century.¹⁷ For Meng, the "uncontrolled" urban festivity observed in Shanghai theaters points to indigenous possibilities of modernity, with its rebellious vitality to resist both imperial and imperialist ambitions. Turning away from the treaty-port city of Shanghai, Madeleine Yue Dong explores the potential for modernity in the non-treaty port city of Beijing in the Republican period. In her close scrutiny of the material life at Tianqiao, the city's center for second-hand, low-priced goods, she discusses how Beijing's residents survived the coming of modernity by recycling "material and symbolic elements from the past," in the process betraying a modern consciousness of the pre-existing order.¹⁸

Both Meng and Dong present convincing illustrations of China's indigenous potentials for modernity; however, their studies invoke further considerations. Although Meng persuasively composes an "unruly" genealogy of Shanghai theater, she focuses mostly on the unruly behaviors of theater managers and audiences without examining how the diversity of genres was evaluated against the backdrop of the theatrical marketplace. Also, Dong conceptualizes the evocation of the past in the Republican period mainly from the material aspect of the notion

¹⁷ Meng Yue, *Shanghai and the Edges of Empires* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), pp. 65-105, 210-231.

¹⁸ Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing: the City and its Histories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 11, 172-210.

“recycling,” but does not address the gap between material consumption and ideological construction. To study how contemporary theater is evaluated with reference to non-material sources, I examine how textual resources on performance of the recent past and distant past in Chinese history are appropriated in writing a nationalized history of contemporary theater in early twentieth-century China. Placing this endeavor within larger the historiographical trend and the transnational context of emerging Sinology, I attest to the “modernity” of the constructed historical continuity that aims to bridge China’s theatrical past and present.

It was not until the early twentieth century that opera became a subject of History writ large, that is, as a discipline of humanistic research. Through the case study of emerging modern drama research, I explore the formation of humanistic research in modern China. The humanistic disciplines that emerged in China in the early twentieth century—history, archeology, and linguistics, to name a few—were often colored as “modern” by contemporary Chinese intellectuals. Recent scholarship has shown, however, that the connections between older practices and new disciplines of knowledge persisted, and thus are too critical to be dismissed in the examination of China’s emerging humanistic disciplines. In her monograph about Chinese antiquarianism in modern times, Shana Brown carves out a way to examine the “persistence of traditional learning in the twentieth century,” while being mindful of modernists’ rejection of the “shortcoming of their predecessors.”¹⁹ She shows how the established practices of antiquarianism paved the way for a modern epistemology (xue 學) about studying the material remains of the past. Through the critical figure Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877-1927), who could

¹⁹ Shana Brown, *Pastime: from Art and Antiquarianism to Modern Chinese Historiography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2011), p. 9.

“access material evidence and inscriptions like an antiquarian” to “write theoretically complex and analytical accounts like a modern historian,” the once-questionable jinshi 金石 tradition was turned into a solid foundation for modern humanistic research.²⁰

Taking the study of opera as my case, this dissertation enriches current understanding of emerging humanistic research by expanding the discussion on research methodology, activities, and sites. For Republican-era drama researchers, two options were at hand from which to choose: a textually oriented approach to drama studies through research on the writing and editing of scripts; and a performative-oriented approach that addressed the production and performance of plays. In the early 1910s, at roughly the same time at which Qi Rushan launched his research on drama from the performance-oriented approach, the textual approach was being championed by none other than that progenitor of modern history, Wang Guowei, as he had just published his *History of Song and Yuan Drama* (*Song Yuan xiqu shi* 宋元戲曲史) in 1913. As shown by Yuming He, Wang was supported by a transnational network connecting Beijing, Shanghai, and Kyoto to “discover” a native tradition of tragedy within Yuan drama, thereby placing China on an “equal footing” in the realm of world literature.²¹

Although Wang Guowei presented himself as the founding father of the discipline, the diversity of drama/opera research was far too complex to be reduced to single authority. Following the performance-oriented approach of theatrical connoisseur/researchers, I explore the tension between new objectives of drama research and age-old modes of theatrical consumption

²⁰ Brown, *Pastime*, p. 140.

²¹ For detailed discussion on this network, see Yuming He, “Wang Guowei and the Beginning of Modern Chinese Drama studies,” *Late Imperial China* 28:2 (December 2007), pp. 129-56. Patricia Sieber, *Theater of Desire: Authors, Readers, and the Reproduction of Early Chinese Song-Drama, 1300-2000* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 5, 28.

for literati divertissement. The connoisseur/researchers stepped backstage, where they snooped into prop boxes and breathed in the smells of grease paint and sweat, and they mingled with career acting communities to explore all aspects of onstage production. Much as they relied on personal interactions with theatrical practitioners to collect theatrical knowledge (making extensive use of “oral histories”), they were also highly aware of and sensitive about the negative connotations of literati association with actors.²² Their reservation shows that the literary tradition of theatrical connoisseurship, which had been so deeply embedded in Chinese theatrical culture since late imperial period, remained influential well into the early twentieth century. Andrea S. Goldman has shown that literati audiences of commercial theater in Qing Beijing partook in a communal writing project to maintain their self-identification as true, sophisticated connoisseurs in a theatrical culture that was increasingly dominated by the power of money. On account of the homoeroticism and gender-bending literary games and practices of Qing literati commentators, many Republican-era connoisseur/researchers kept mindful distance from the late imperial mode of theatrical consumption.²³ The new generation of opera connoisseurs justified their involvement in the theatrical realm in the name of research (yanjiu 研究) and undertook the new role of opera researcher, even if the shift of modes was never complete.

The performance-oriented approach to theater adopted by Qi Rushan and other opera researches of his generation also invites attention on the bodies and identities of all figures within the theatrical realm. Focusing on performer education, I examine how bodies are viewed

²² For instance, Qi Rushan insisted on communicating with Mei Lanfang through writing rather than in person for over two years at the beginning of their cooperation. See Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 106.

²³ Andrea S. Goldman, *Opera and the City: the Politics of Culture in Beijing, 1770-1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), pp. 17-60.

as indispensable carriers of theatrical knowledge and how mastery of theatrical knowledge informed the identity-making of theatrical insider and outsider. As different learning methods intersected with and supplemented one another, the boundary separating the insiders and outsiders was constantly shifting. It is from this fluidity that the scope and content of theatrical knowledge becomes clear and its production and transmission possible. Through the on-going discussion and reflection on performer education, and performance more generally, I also incorporate multiple voices, including those of the actors, to move beyond the elite connoisseurs' representation of theatrical life.

Through the various voices expressed in the process of knowledge production, I hope to shed light on current scholarship in modern Chinese intellectual history. My research contextualizes the emerging modern drama study within the current discussion about the shared concerns of both radicals and conservatives in the May Fourth moment. To date, much of the work on May Fourth intellectual history has focused on radical discourses as well as their association with leading academic institutions such as Peking University. I contend that the significance of knowledge production cannot be fully appreciated if examined in a solely academic or institutional setting. This study enlarges the scope of intellectual history by broadening attention to those who did not hold formal institutional positions and rethinking the relation between theory and practice.

Recently, scholars have critically re-evaluated the historical significance of the May Fourth moment. Unlike earlier scholarship that takes all May Fourth agendas for granted, the revisionist approach questions the self-portrait of May Fourth intellectuals as harbingers of enlightenment,

progress, science, and the nation.²⁴ Refusing the teleology that relegated historical moments prior to the May Fourth as merely transitional, literary scholar Theodore Hutters argues that the years from late Qing (1895) to May Fourth (1919) was a time of “anxiety of inclusiveness,” and it would be an anachronism to dismiss that intellectual diversity existed prior to and during the May Fourth moment.²⁵ Since it was only when iconoclasts such as Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879-1942) called for a total break with the “old” that intellectuals searching for alternatives ways were relegated to the conservative camp, the dichotomy of radical/conservative should not be applied as fixed historiographical concepts to examine the May Fourth moment as it was actively constructed during that period.

Cultural historians have shared the revisionist approach to May Fourth historiography. Reading from the debate on drama during the May Fourth era, Goldstein shows that historical figures engaged in the debate were all “caught up and actively participating in the May Fourth moment.” Both the “conservative” Qi Rushan and his “radical” counterparts were participating in the discursive shift engendered by “relentless assertion of a fundamental split between representation and the real,” in modern urban theaters.²⁶ While the “radicals” held realism as the essence of drama and despised Chinese opera as backward since it was full of “ornamentation of song, music or mime,” the “conservatives,” such as Qi Rushan, solidified their footing in the purely representational realm. Qi constructed Chinese drama as “realism’s other,” emphasizing that the value of Chinese drama lay in its full capability for aesthetic representation, not portrayal

²⁴ For earlier scholarship about the May Fourth moment, see Tse-tsung Chow, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967).

²⁵ Theodore Hutters, *Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), p. 5.

²⁶ Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, pp. 136.

of the real. This orientation also locked Chinese opera firmly “in the realm of the ancient, the traditional, the quintessentially—and exclusively—Chinese.”²⁷

It is, perhaps, too easy to label Qi Rushan as a conservative given his re-creation of an opera genre that was meant to present the traditional uniqueness of the nation-state, as well as his decision to move to Taiwan in advance of the retreating Nationalist Government (GMD) in 1947. In the case of Chinese national drama, the “invented tradition that automatically implies continuity with the past,” was a mindful construction responding to contemporary issues that concerned both radicals and conservatives.²⁸ Goldstein convincingly shows how Qi Rushan’s participation in the May Fourth moment led to his aesthetic construction of Peking opera as “national drama.” I further the discussion of nationalizing Chinese opera to include the participation of a larger cohort of connoisseur/researchers. Although their names did not appear on leading journals of the New Culture Movement, such as *New Youth*, they wrote with neologism such as realism in their own theatrical commentaries on Chinese opera. By exploring this larger body of writings published via newspapers and drama periodicals, I hope to gain more nuanced understanding of how the New Culture/May Fourth rhetorics (whether of the radicals or the conservatives) was circulated, reinterpreted, and appropriated across a longer time span and among wider readership. More importantly, I see the making of national drama not by a few renowned individuals, but by historical figures who seldom left their traces in intellectual history. In so doing, I will show how the aestheticized, nationalized drama that was invoked across the political divide (after 1949) was made possible by mobilization and appropriation of theatrical

²⁷ Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, pp. 163-64.

²⁸ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 1.

culture in early twentieth-century China.

My research also rethinks the relation between performance practice and theory. During the 1910s, Qi Rushan cooperated with Mei Lanfang to produce many of Mei's signature plays, and it was not until 1928 that Qi published *The Organization of Chinese Drama* 中國劇之組織 (*Zhongguo qu zhi zuzhi*), his first monograph on Chinese opera. However, in the historiography on Chinese opera, as Qi Rushan's identity as a drama researcher comes to fore, his theatrical productions are often taken as materialization of his aesthetization of Chinese drama.²⁹ Considering that pihuang was a very popular entertainment option in the first half of the twentieth century, such an ahistorical view underestimates the influence of the market in the process of knowledge production. In my dissertation, I restore the temporal sequence between the making of theatrical productions and theories, capturing the interaction between market dynamics and performances and explaining how later theory sustained earlier theatrical productions. By so doing, I complicate the single reason (i.e., the debate between realism and aestheticism) in understanding Qi's conceptualization of Chinese drama and uncover the key role that the contemporary entertainment market played in the knowledge production of a living art.

Chapter Arrangement

This dissertation is composed of five chapters. As a whole, it presents a critical chronology of the early history of drama study in modern China, beginning from the emerging terminology of genre to the theorization and the making of a formal academic discipline. Chapter One, "The Making of the Genre of Peking Opera," presents an overview of the emerging genres of the

²⁹ For instance, see Liang Yan, *Qi Rushan juxue yanjiu* [A study on Qi Rushan's opera research] (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2008), chap. 5.

Chinese theatrical world in the early twentieth-century as a backdrop against which modern scholarship on Peking Opera developed. It examines the genre-making of Peking Opera in three overlapping but not identical categories: temporal, geographical-political, and aesthetic. The terminology surrounding genre constituted a frame of reference with which theater connoisseur/researchers situated their discussions on Peking Opera and engaged in conversation with their intellectual counterparts. The continuing debates on the characteristics of pihuang also showed that although pihuang had become one of the most popular performance styles, its characterization was highly contestable and remained fluid throughout the time. It is within the context of emerging theatrical genres and heated debates on drama in early twentieth-century China that a “researcher mode” of theatrical appreciation became meaningful, even pressing, for theatrical connoisseurs/researchers such as Qi Rushan and his contemporaries.

Chapter Two, “Qi Rushan’s Collecting Activities in Early Twentieth-Century Beijing,” examines from a material point of view how studies on China’s native theater were shaped by the local conditions of Republican Beijing. It investigates how the city’s well-established cultural market, unique thriving opera scene, and long-standing performing community fueled the collecting of theatrical materials, thereby providing a solid basis of research artifacts in the transnational competition for texts and things pertinent to Sinological studies. Focusing on Qi Rushan’s collection of tangible and intangible theatrical materials, I discuss how the long-standing collecting practice of Chinese literati became an indispensable component of the production of theatrical knowledge within the transnational context of emerging Sinology.

Chapter Three, “Legendary Beauties Revived Onstage,” views theatrical production as a means to producing and delivering theatrical aesthetics and knowledge. It focuses on the two

plays that harbingered Mei's signature aesthetics: *Goddess Chang E Flies to the Moon* (*Chang E ben yue* 嫦娥奔月, 1915) and *The Celestial Lady Scatters Flowers* (*Tiannu sanhua* 天女散花, 1917) produced through Mei Lanfang's cooperation with Qi Rushan. It examines the production process of these plays, showing how they were the products of customary practices of the urban theater and responses to capricious market tastes and demands. Within the vibrant entertainment market in early Republican Beijing, Qi Rushan's promotion of song-and-dance, what I call his gewu notion and the key feature that sustained Qi's later theorization of Chinese drama—first appeared as carefully crafted onstage production strategy to win audiences. This chapter, then, revises the assumption of a linear temporal sequence between theatrical knowledge and production with attention to the local conditions (audiences preferences and entertainment fashion) of the site where the theatrical art develops.

Chapter Four, "Bodily Learning, Book Learning," examines the formation and transition of theatrical knowledge through discussion of two kinds of performer education: for career actors and for amateurs. It analyzes Qi Rushan's unpublished manuscript, *On the Reform of Regular Professional Training* (keban gailiang chuyi), which he, as a self-assigned advisor to career actors, wrote to propagate his version of theatrical knowledge among a new generation of performers. Reading Qi's manuscript with historical sources on Fuliancheng 富連成, the long-running training troupe in early twentieth-century Beijing, I discuss the ideal and reality of career actor training. By reading commentaries about amateur singing, this chapter further delves into the shifting boundary separating insiders from outsiders, a boundary defined not only by engagement in the performance business, but also mastery of performance knowledge. Exploring such fluidity, this chapter shows that it was in the course of contemporaneous discussions on

what and how to learn about opera performance that the scope and content of theatrical knowledge came into shape.

Chapter Five, “Writing a History of Chinese Drama with the Classics” analyzes Qi Rushan’s appropriation of the ancient classics and pre-Song literature in his theorization of Chinese opera. It compares the writings on theatrical life of Qi Rushan with those of his Qing literati precedents to probe into the relation between Qi’s project on Peking Opera and its recent, late imperial past. Situating Qi Rushan’s writing on the *gewu* notion within contemporary historiographical trends, it investigates Qi’s motivations for tracing his conceptualization of national drama to Chinese antiquity, or rather, the distant past. Focusing on the historization of the *gewu* notion, this chapter then explores Qi Rushan’s invocation of references from the Chinese classics to endow Chinese drama with an essential history and to forge a connection between Chinese antiquity and contemporary stage performance. As the synchronicity of song-and-dance was given historical evidence, the aestheticization of Chinese opera was brought to near completion.

Qi Rushan’s project on *pihuang*—later patronized as Chinese national drama, was interrupted by the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) and the Chinese Civil War (1946-) that followed. The cross-strait competition between the Nationalists and the Communists to represent authentic Chineseness enabled the final stage of making drama study a formal discipline of humanistic research. The concluding chapter briefly reviews Qi Rushan’s immigrant years on Taiwan after he moved there in 1947. As Qi was canonized as the founder of Chinese drama research, interest in opera was fully validated as serious scholarly engagement in post-1949 Taiwan, in the service of political legitimacy. Reflecting the irony of knowledge production

about an art form dislocated from its native place, the Conclusion ponders the links between the birth of a scholarship and the loss of the thing being studied.

Chapter 1:

The Making of the Genre of Peking Opera

Introduction

Early twentieth-century China was an exciting and yet confusing time for theater lovers and researchers alike because of the multiplicity of genres emerging from the theatrical scene. In addition to Chinese local opera melodies, which were well-known to the general public, new theatrical genres, mostly notably spoken drama (huaju 話劇), also became known to Chinese audiences along with intellectuals' efforts to introduce western culture and thought into China. "Drama" had become a fluid and highly contested field, in which China's educated audiences examined the definitions of genres as well as compatibilities and incompatibilities among the existing and newly introduced varieties. Since intellectuals also debated over which genre might be the best carrier of political messages and intellectual inspiration in this era of intensified nation-state building, the defining and redefining of theatrical genres were closely intertwined with the pressing intellectual and political issues of the day. As genre-making and identifying became heated issues within the theatrical world, China's popular local melodies could no longer mark their place simply as cultural products for popular consumption in their own right. Instead, pihuang and other popular tunes came to be defined with a set of key words both for intellectual speculation and popular consumption. As will be shown in this chapter, the emerging multiplicity of theatrical genres and intellectual debates centered on the problem of genres paved the way for an epistemological project on Chinese opera with specific interest in Peking opera, or pihuang.

Focusing on the terminology surrounding genre as keywords with which Chinese intellectuals and theater connoisseur-researchers envisioned their contemporary theatrical scene,

this chapter explores the frame of reference with which theater connoisseur-researchers situated their scholarly project on Peking opera. Moreover, understanding the terminology of genre as shared notions among groups with diverse opinions about culture, this chapter investigate how theater connoisseur-researchers engaged in a conversation about Chinese opera with their intellectual contemporaries. As will be shown, it was with these shared notions that the local melody of pihuang came to be distinguished as an independent genre with a set of invested characteristics, especially its music, acting style, and stage design. As a direct response to the debate on the relative merits of theatrical realism versus aestheticism in the New Culture era (1915-25), the resultant characterization of Peking opera made it possible for theater connoisseur-researchers such as Qi Rushan to come up with rationales to devote most of their resources to pihuang in their project on Chinese drama.¹ This scholarly project spoke not only to the theater connoisseur-researchers' intellectual counterparts but also to imagined transnational audiences. This chapter will show that the attempt to understand native performance melodies with the terminology of emerging theatrical genres was the first step in conceptualizing a notion of "Chinese national drama," enabling appreciation and criticism of native dramatic forms in a transnational context of cultural exchange and competition.

As is well illustrated in Qi Rushan's comparative writings on Peking opera and other opera genres, many characterizations of Peking opera were also applied to define the national drama (guoju 國劇) of China's emerging national-state, making Peking opera synonymous with Chinese national drama. By writing a critical account of the emergence of genres of the time, this chapter aims to shed light on the early stage of conceptual formation of China's national drama

¹ For the debate on theatrical realism versus aestheticism, see Goldstein, *Drama King*, Chapter 4.

in early twentieth-century China.

In his discussion of the formation and conceptualization of Peking opera as a genre of national importance during the critical period from late Qing to early Republican times, Joshua Goldstein begins by describing certain institutional changes in the theatrical realm: actors' training and professional organizations, performance venues, and the operating mechanisms of the entertainment business.² He also examined the disciplining power and political implications these changes embodied. Diverging from Goldstein's social historical approach, I aim to uncover a lexicological basis with which the discourses of nationally important genre became possible. Taking clues from contemporary periodicals and publications, this chapter examines the emerging genres of early twentieth-century China according to three categories: temporality (old drama, *jiuju* 舊劇 versus new drama, *xinju* 新劇), geographical-political association (national drama, *guoju* 國劇 versus regional drama, *difang xi*, 地方戲), and aesthetic features (spoken drama, *huaju* 話劇 versus sung opera, *geju* 歌劇). It will address how the focus of research on *pihuang* came to be both identified and criticized with a series of questions regarding these categories. At first glance, the identification of this popular performance style might have been confusing, even contradictory, to its contemporary audiences. For instance, as a genre that had been developing since the late imperial period, was *pihuang* to be conceived of as old or new in modern times? Given its dominating popularity in the theatrical marketplace of the former imperial capital of Beijing, could this local performance style represent the national drama for the burgeoning Chinese nation-state? Was *pihuang* to be identified as opera because of its singing and dancing elements? Did it totally differ from spoken drama solely because of its strong

² For related discussion, see Goldstein, *Drama King*, Chapters 1 and 2.

musical dimension? Contemporary answers to these questions show how Chinese audiences grasped the characteristics of a native artistic form with reference to (implicitly or not) a transnational rubric of performing arts and its cultural implications. Moreover, as this chapter will illustrate, genre identification was in fact genre-making at a conceptual level. Identifying the characteristics of pihuang, therefore, was an attempt to mark out a space for the genre, making it a discreet object of scrutiny in modern scholarship on Chinese theater. Rather than answering these questions with fixed dictionary definitions, my discussion explores how contemporary Chinese audiences debated over the various identifications of the genre. Reading these debates together with the ascendance of pihuang at the turn of the twentieth century, I investigate how this native theatrical form was reexamined within a new rubric of theatrical arts in modern times.

A note on terminology: the following discussion pays attention to terms that refer to the same genre-in-the-making but with different connotations, such as pihuang and Peking opera. Although these two terms were indeed treated as interchangeable in most of the general discussions about Chinese theater in early twentieth-century China, it remains critical to understand the implications of different labels. To explore these nuances, the following sections use “pihuang” to refer to the genre as it was understood as a popular regional melody, and “Peking opera” when this melody is discussed within the context of early republican Beijing and the ensuing heated discussion about drama and the Chinese nation-state. Similar caution applies to the usage of “opera” and “drama” in the discussion of contemporary debate on the aesthetic characteristics of pihuang. In addition to using “opera” as the translation of 劇 ju in yueju 樂劇 and geju 歌劇, I use the term “opera” in my discussion of the musical dimension of pihuang or Chinese song-drama (xiqu 戲曲, the theater of song) more generally. As a translation convention,

“drama” is used to refer to theatrical forms with little or no vocal performance of actors, as in spoken drama, huaju 話劇. I use “theater” as an inclusive category for all forms of theatrical performance, treating it as an English equivalence to the Chinese term juchang 劇場.

When: Is Pihuang Old or New?

The founding of the Chinese Republic impacted the identifications of *pihuang* in many ways. The making of the Republic marked a temporal rupture in recent Chinese history, making it easy to consider what existed before the nation-state as old and what emerged with it or after it as new. In the theatrical realm, this temporality was designated by the terminology of *jiuju* (old drama), which stood in contrast to theatrical forms that emerged simultaneously or after the nation-state, *xinju* (new drama). Certainly, these were not neutral categories: they were associated with connotations of backwardness and progressiveness and raised debates on the value of theatrical genres among intellectuals and connoisseur-researchers alike. However, *pihuang* was a relatively young genre in the history of Chinese theater. As an ever-shifting synthesis of local melodies and performing styles, *pihuang* had to wait until the second half of the nineteenth century to develop a set of independent recognizable features of singing and performing styles due to the creativity and efforts of a generation of leading actors.³ Given the compound of its recent historical development and the sudden temporal rupture in the context of which the development took place, it was a challenging task to examine the temporal quality of *pihuang*.

This section examines how certain characteristics of the “old” were attributed to *pihuang*

³ *Zhongguo jingju shi*, vol. 1, pp. 153-181.

as the temporal separation of the old and the new evolved in modern China. It shows how these characteristics were employed by theater connoisseur-researchers to justify the scholarly project of *pihuang*. In so doing, the following discussion engages in conversation with the revisionist scholarship on the reexamination of the drama debate in the May Fourth era. Generally speaking, older scholarship contends that New Cultural intellectuals (such as Hu Shi and Fu Sinian) characterized drama of the “new” (namely spoken drama) as both carrier and symbol of progressiveness, whereas the “old,” as the opposite to the new, was associated with backwardness. The old drama, however, was keenly embraced by a group of theater connoisseur-researchers for its seemingly traditional (thereby conservative) nature. Recent research has indicated that both “progressive” New Culture intellectuals and politically conservative theater connoisseur-researchers (such as Qi Rushan) shared the same concern with the advent of theatrical realism but took different approaches to the issue. What is lacking in the current revisionist discussion is 1) a more extended discussion of the “conservative group” despite their shared stance in favor of old drama; and 2) an examination of the earlier transformation that theater connoisseur-researchers might have undergone to reach their later position in the debate. In response, this section analyzes the commentaries on the temporal attributes of drama to examine how the rationales of theater connoisseur-researchers were discussed and circulated in a wider context. Extending the time period under examination prior to the May Fourth era, it considers Qi Rushan as a transformative figure in the formation of the dichotomy between old and new dramas, with special attention to his changing conceptualization of the temporality of *pihuang*. To trace these changes, I examine Qi’s writings prior to the May Fourth era such as *Advice on Theatrical Appreciation* (*Guanju jianyan* 觀劇建言, 1913) to compare and contrast

with his later historicization of Chinese drama under the rubric of old drama. This section argues that old drama, namely pihuang, became a research topic arguably worth studying because of the historical depth engendered by the drama debate, as well as its genuine popularity.

The contrasting characterization of old and new dramas emerged well before the May Fourth era. But it only became a heated issue as intellectuals and theater connoisseurs launched the drama debate in *The New Youth* in 1918. As early as in 1914, Qi Rushan had noticed the phenomenon of emerging theatrical productions that differed from existing forms:

Nowadays, there are two kinds of drama in China: the old and the new. Old drama is naturally that passed down from olden days, whereas new drama imitates western style. In general, people who have only watched western new drama (xiyang xinxi 西洋新戲) and have not researched old drama, think that there is no need to keep old drama. In fact, old drama has its own advantages, too. In general, people who have only watched old drama consider new drama as no better than excrement. The new drama in China can be generally divided into three categories: one is new drama in old form, which mostly steals from old drama but in which the longer the scene the better. In fact, [this kind of drama] is mostly showy and has no real advantage. Another kind mimics movies and is very popular in Shanghai. It actually is more similar to a magic show, and is even further from the definition of “new drama.” Another kind is modeled after Western drama. However, it is not too distinct from speech and has no aesthetic concepts at all. However, it at least is an embryonic form of drama and seems to be better than the other two kinds. No wonder the public wants nothing to do with these three kinds of new drama; they are truly not good models of drama. However, western drama is totally different from these dramas. If we compare genuine western drama with the old drama of China, [we can see] each possesses its own difficulties.⁴

⁴ Qi Rushan, *Guanju jianyan* [Advice on theatrical appreciation], in *Qi Rushan wencun* [Collected writings of Qi Rushan] (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 2010), pp. 327-28.

After categorizing the failing candidates for “new drama” in China,” Qi Rushan compares “real western drama” with what his readers might be more familiar—the old drama of China (zhongguo jiuju 中國舊劇)—in terms of playwright, performance, and stage design to illustrate the essence of western drama. In these comparisons and contrasts, Qi substitutes “western” with the new. He suggests that both old and new dramas pose challenges in these respects, and, intriguingly, disadvantages sometime turn out to be advantages. For instance, Qi observes that old drama had very high demand on the precision of onstage movement; however, conventions of acting in old drama arguably made it easier to present human emotion than in new drama, in which performers strove to approach realistic representation without the aid of formalism.⁵ After comparison, Qi comes to his overall assessment of old and new dramas: “If we are to talk about which [old or new dramas] is better, certainly new drama is better than old drama. Why? Because the performance of new drama is more realistic; it has greater strength than old drama to emotionally engage audiences.”⁶

Qi Rushan’s early discussion of the old and new dramas presented a two-fold conceptualization of newness in the theatrical realm prior to the May Fourth era. First, in a sole Chinese context, Qi’s categorization of Chinese new drama (zhongguo xinxi 中國新戲) suggested that being “new” mostly meant being “different” from other existing theatrical forms in terms of content and (colonial) technology. The “newness” of these emerging new forms was only in appearance but not in essence since they contained no connotation of progressiveness. However, within a transnational context, Qi’s comparison between old and new dramas clearly

⁵ Qi, *Guanju jianyan*, in *Qi Rushan wencun*, p. 329.

⁶ Qi, *Guanju jianyan*, in *Qi Rushan wencun*, p. 330.

indicated that only realistic western drama (taken as a reference point) was the genuine new drama. In this regard, Chinese new drama lost its charm of newness since it was at best doubtful imitation of drama in the West. Nevertheless, even at the transnational level, Qi's conceptualization of the new implied no ideological preference. The theatrical realism exemplified by new drama won his favor for its greater potential to speak to the heart. It did not necessary hold for him the ideological attachment to progressiveness that came with the distinct temporality of the "new" as eagerly embraced by New Culture intellectuals later. In other words, the correlation between realism and progress was not yet absolute in Qi's early discourse on old and new drama. The issue that could be grasped in Qi's early writing, which became pronounced in later debates, is that the difference between the old and new was roughly mapped upon a geographical-historical differentiation of China and the West. Qi's early formulation of old and new drama implied the former was native and continuing whereas the latter was foreign (western) and emerging. However, it was also the dichotomy between native and foreign within an uneven global power structure that led to the geographical assignment of temporalities of linear progressiveness and complicated the characterization of old and new drama.

It was during the May Fourth era that the notion of evolution was directly applied to the discussion of drama. For instance, Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962), among his fellow intellectuals, made it clear that certain theatrical forms were doomed for the dustbin of history in his critique of supporters of China's popular native drama:

Nowadays, those who talk about literature have no idea about historical evolution (lishi jinhua 歷史進化) ... In regard to the issue of drama, it is certainly not even worth arguing against those who glorify xipi and erhuang as "the pride of Chinese literature and art."

These people do not understand the law of the rise and fall of literary [genres]...Therefore, I say that people who suggest reviving Kun opera and worshipping *pihuang*, similarly, lack the concept of literary evolution.⁷

The intellectual position in the drama debate has been well examined by recent scholarship and there is no need to repeat the discussion here. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that Hu Shi actually understood drama more as a literary genre than theatrical performance in his critique of some of the most popular theatrical forms of his time. In line with Wang Guowei's textual approach to drama, Hu Shi found supporting evidence for the evolutionary nature of literature in Wang's examination of Yuan drama in *A History of Song and Yuan Drama*.⁸ However, the New Cultural intellectuals' pursuit of pure theatrical realism—the only medium for driving political progress, which could only be achieved by new drama—differentiated their position from that of Wang Guowei. For the New Culture intellectuals, if the evolution of Chinese drama—carrying the mission of national enlightenment—had begun and would continue, popular tunes such as *xipi* and *erhuang* (the longhand form of the two terms indicated by *pihuang*) in the contemporary theater market needed to be replaced by a newer genre with greater potential for theatrical realism. The contention between the orientations of intellectuals and the contemporary theater market unfolded as the debate over old and new dramas evolved.

Qi Rushan, refusing the temporality of backwardness assigned to existing native theatrical forms such as *pihuang* in the intellectuals' evolutionary teleology, developed his concept of aestheticization to defend the potential of *pihuang*. With the emphasis on presenting

⁷ Hu Shi, "Wenxue jinhuaguan yu xiju gailiang [Literary evolution and drama reform]," in Weng Sizai ed., *Jingju cuntan bainian lu* [Miscellaneous writings on Peking Opera over one hundred years] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999), p. 10.

⁸ Goldsetin, *Drama Kings*, p. 146.

human emotions in aestheticized (therefore abstracted) theatrical forms, Qi shifted discourse around China's native drama from insufficiency to realize realism to potential to fulfill aestheticism.⁹ The split between the real and the aesthetic constructed by Qi's aestheticization of native drama, as convincingly argued by Goldstein, "locked [the genre] firmly in the realm of the ancient, the traditional, the quintessentially—and exclusively—Chinese."¹⁰ In other words, old content could only be represented by "old" theatrical forms. Sharing the same concern with his May Fourth counterparts on the advent of realism in modern times, Qi Rushan became the defender of the theatrical genre that was considered "old" in his contention against the new intellectual narrative of Chinese drama. For Qi, from the May Fourth era on, old and new dramas were no longer neutral categories that simply coexisted in China's theatrical marketplace. As the temporalities of progressiveness and backwardness of new and old dramas came to be fixed after the drama debate, Qi seldom used the term "old drama" when he launched his writing and production projects to promote the nationalization of pihuang in the 1920s and 1930s. He thereby avoided the negative connotations attached to the temporality of the old, and in his writings *jiuju* was less often interchangeable with terms such as *jingju* 京劇 when referring to the popular tunes of Republican Beijing. Nevertheless, the nationalized regional drama that Qi Rushan researched and promoted belonged to the realm of the "old."

Qi Rushan's historicized aestheticization of old drama refuted a linear succession of theatrical forms and paved a common ground for coexistence of old and new dramas (as both were responses to realism). Nonetheless, Qi was not alone among his contemporaries in

⁹ Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, p. 153.

¹⁰ Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, p. 164.

envisioning alternatives to the domination of realistic drama and calling for the simultaneous existence of the old and the new. Unlike Qi, who positioned existing native drama as the total opposite of new drama, others attempted to strike a more balanced position between the two extremes. Indeed, given the long-time popularity of the “old” drama, the New Culture intellectuals’ aspiration to thoroughly replace it with new drama was more idealistic than realistic. As pointed out by Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885-1967), one of the leading figures of the New Culture movement, the intellectuals could at best hope for coexistence of the old and new in the theatrical realm but no abrupt revolution. “It is basically a very nice thing to promote new drama in China nowadays. However, to say that old drama will die out because of this is rather premature. In my opinion, old drama will definitely not die out even if new drama arises.”¹¹ Zhou then continued to promote the “three directions of Chinese drama,” namely, pure new drama (chuncui xinju 純粹新劇), pure old drama (chuncui jiuju 純粹舊劇), and reformed old drama (gailiang jiuju 改良舊劇). For Zhou, new and old dramas in pure forms were for experimental or research purposes only and should be performed exclusively for a small group of researchers and professionals. Reformed old drama, on the contrary, targeted the general public. It maintained the original form of performance (acting, singing, and stage design) of old drama to appeal to popular taste with only moderate modification to the scripts. In this way, Zhou separated general theatrical consumption from intellectual debate over theatrical newness. Such separation was the ineluctable recognition of the bleak reality that “new art could never conquer

¹¹ Zhou Zuoren, “Zhongguo xiju de santiao daolu [Three directions for Chinese drama],” in *Jingju cuntan bainian lu*, p. 52.

the public” and “personal taste [in arts] could never be equalized.”¹² Negotiating with social preference for popular performance styles, Zhou Zouren indicated that the solution to the debate between old and new was reconciliation to the coexistence of both.

Zhou accepted the status quo in the theatrical realm as a result of intellectuals’ inability to bring about total change. Others, such as Song Chunfang (宋春舫, 1892-1938), a versatile theater scholar and playwright, began his argument favoring coexistence of old and new drama first by criticizing the intellectual celebration of new drama as a byproduct of western materialism. The intellectuals, whom Song termed “radicals” (jilie pai 激烈派), lacked the capacity to appreciate old dramas because of their materialistic, if not realistic, aestheticism. Their westernized mindset limited the intellectuals’ conversation about the issue of Chinese drama, and so they could only propose abandonment but not reform, replacement but not coexistence:

The radicals advocating drama reform consider the plays of our nation’s old drama as too crude to have any literary value... They [suggest that] unless we cast away everything and only adopt plays of spoken drama there will never be any progress in Chinese drama. People who make such suggestions generally have had no initiation into the drama of our nation, and their sensibilities are too heavily impacted by the material cultural of Euroamerica. They miss the essential for slight shortcomings and only call for destruction. They do not know that spoken drama cannot stand independently from opera. This is a common rule of all countries around the world; how could [the drama of] our country be an exception?¹³

¹² Zhou, “Zhongguo xiju de santiao daolu,” in *Jingju cuntan bainian lu*, p. 54.

¹³ Song Chunfang, “Xiju gailiang pingyi [Opinion on drama reform],” in Song Chunfang, *Song Chunfang lunju* [Song Chunfang on drama] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1923), p. 264.

Song's argument indicates his belief in the limit of western materialism to achieve universal aestheticism that speaks to human hearts across specific times and spaces. For him, "Aestheticism is capable of transcending ages beyond the [confinement] of 'isms' (zhuyi 主義). Upholding musicality as "an indispensable component of human nature" and thereby a critical aspect of universal aestheticism, Song contends that aestheticism (meishu de 美術的) was exactly the reason for opera to exist. "There is no reason to object to the coexistence of operatic and spoken dramas." Following this line of argument, he suggested that "we should never totally abandon opera," and regretted that "those intellectuals who failed to grasp [this idea] would not be embraced by the general public."¹⁴ Each era of human history, he maintained, had its own zeitgeist. Spoken drama was titled "new" since it rose with the tide of the ideology of modern times, namely materialism/realism. However, old drama, as Song implied, touched a deeper realm of human sensibility and would persist over time. By treating "operatic" and "spoken" as the synonyms of the old and new, respectively, Song twisted the contention about the old and new dramas from an ideological zero-sum game to a matter of aesthetic choice. This aesthetic shift, in turn, allowed him more space to argue for the coexistence of old and new dramas. The coexistence of old and new dramas, in Song's argumentation, was a natural outcome given that which changed and that which remained unchanged in human aesthetics.

Song's defense of old drama reads as in tune with Qi Rushan's concept of the aestheticization of Peking opera. Both Qi and Song resorted to the vaguely defined notion of aestheticism to legitimize the persistence of native theatrical forms in the face of the surging call for novel alternatives. They differed in that Qi's formulation was a holistic one

¹⁴ Song, "Xiju gailiang pingyi," in *Song Chunfang lunju*, pp. 280-81.

encompassing all aspects of theatrical performance and was associated with a performing tradition of singing and dancing that, he argued, originated in Chinese antiquity (see Chapter Five for detailed discussion), whereas Song's argument focused solely on the aesthetic potential of theatrical musicality without further discussion of the historical formation of Chinese drama broadly defined. Aestheticism also functioned for Qi and Song in subtly different ways. On the one hand, Qi applied aestheticism to solidify and preserve his envisioned system of old drama; Song, on the other hand, used aestheticism as grounds to defend moderate reform of old drama. Despite these differences, the commonalities between Qi Rushan and Song Chunfang illustrate that Qi shared across intellectual and institutional fault lines more than just the awareness of the advent of realism. Qi Rushan was not unique, in other words, in turning to the notion of an alleged universal aestheticism to counter the New Culture call for drama to serve an ideological purpose and to be novel in form.

As these arguments came to be picked up in the mass media in the following decades, contemporary commentators shared the stress on musicality as a defining character of the old drama. Commentary in local Beijing newspapers in the 1930s shows that the contrast between old and new dramas was centered around the issue of musicality. One author explained new drama as “modern spoken drama developed from civilized drama (wenmingxi 文明戲), which first emerged under the impact of European fashion coming to the East”; and further referred to old drama as “antique genres such as pihuang, Kun opera, and bangzi.” Again, musicality was the key quality that distinguished the two genres from one another, since: “what differentiated the outlook of old and new drama seems to be ‘singing,’ chang 唱, and ‘non-singing, buchang 不唱.’ In other words, it is equally justifiable to say that “singing could not be added on top of new

drama, while it is an indispensable component of old drama.” Based on this contrast between old and new dramas in regard to musicality, the author asserted: “old drama entertains the eyes and ears with sensual pleasure, while new drama stirs up hearts and minds by vivid and meticulous descriptions.” However, he maintained that “the artistic value of old drama is no less than new drama.” and concluded the commentary by advocating proper reform of old drama for a brighter future of the genre.¹⁵ Whether exemplified solely as musicality or as the more complicated formulation proposed by Qi Rushan, aestheticism—the power of speaking to human sensibility—was first proposed as the *raison d’être* of old drama in the 1920s and then solidified in the 1930s.

The validity of the claim of an “aesthetic” old drama, nevertheless, depended very much upon the quality of actual production and audiences’ mastery of theatrical appreciation. If old drama was not dead drama, then the disparity between ideal and reality of its aestheticization had to be examined against the backdrop of the execution of and responses to real performance. Although Qi Rushan had eagerly advertised the enticing power of aesthetic old drama, the lament for the decline of theatrical artistry in Republican Beijing shows that urban audiences might not find contemporary performance of old drama very satisfying:

It is so sad! How expertise in theatrical appreciation of residents in the old capital has declined! The former capital (gudu 故都) was renowned for old drama (jiuju) since Qing times. [Back then] fabulous actors all gathered [in the city] and great talents appeared one after another. Theaters were filled with elegant melodies and refined songs; the sounds of the orchestra carried the audiences hearts away... Thus it was that actors had no interest in showing off peculiarity and wildness, while audiences deeply appreciated the enjoyment

¹⁵ Haozhi, “Guanyu xin jiu ju [On new and old dramas],” *Beicheng bao* [Northern dawn], January, 1, 1934.

of refined elegance. [Everyone in the theatrical world] followed the rules and never indulged in excess. [The performers] made no mistakes in reciting any lines and engaged in no awkward acting. They were meticulous about every gaze and gesture and dared not to deviate from the standard!¹⁶

With regard to performance, the commentator here concerned himself with morality as much as aesthetics, which actually were the two sides of the same coin. Certainly, without respect to the rules (guiju 規矩) of acting, successful execution of the beauty of old drama would not be possible. “The wonderfulness of old drama lay in proper writing of scripts, which does not go beyond the rules. [Old drama] absorbed audiences in theater-going solely by lively plots and the artistry of performers... Wise connoisseurs of theater thoroughly comprehend such wisdom.” The commentator regretted, however, that this ideal was receding into the past, as “the Pear Garden falls into decline as its elders wither away; there are no qualified successors to carry on and the opera stage is considerably abandoned!”¹⁷ Loyalty to pure formalism was the key principle to execute the aesthetics of old drama in its most abstract (and therefore beautified) essence. As indicated by the comment above, strictness of the norms was becoming more difficult to maintain in a fast-changing entertainment world, especially facing the challenges from Shanghai-style opera as well as other forms of entertainment. The failure of faithful realization of the aesthetic easily falsified the aestheticization of old drama in the real world of theatrical consumption, degrading contemporary pihuang performance by failing to mimic the standard. Once failing to convey its artistic substance, pihuang, which was widely consumed in the contemporary realm of theater but was constructed as ideologically old, would ultimately lose

¹⁶ Yujun, “Shishei zhi guoyu [To whom should the faults be attributed],” *Shiri xiju* [Ten-days drama], vol. 12 (June 10, 1937).

¹⁷ Ibid.

the value of being labeled as “old” and fade into the shadows in both intellectual and theatrical realms.

Therefore, the imperative mission for ardent lovers of pihuang was not to rescue it from the category of “old,” but to preserve the essences that helped to define the genre as “old drama” and thereby secure its lasting existence in the theatrical realm. In this regard, research on the essence of old drama proved to be a field worth scrutinizing for theatrical researcher-connoisseurs. For instance, Zhang Boju 張伯駒 (1889?-1982), a leading connoisseur of the arts in his generation, provided a telling testimony of his devotion to researching old drama:

I am nothing but old-fashioned (jiupai 舊派) when it comes to drama research. I have no choice but to be old-fashioned for three reasons. First, was the art left by people of the past good or not? Second, can the quality of our scholarship match that of our forefathers? Third, are our artistic creations better than those of the ancients? I cannot solve the three questions mentioned above, so I can only stick to the old ways (shoujiu 守舊).¹⁸

Zhang’s high esteem for the achievements of the past made him claim himself as old-fashioned in the field of drama research. However, his position should not be oversimplified as blind conservatism. As he continues to explain his position to his readers, it becomes clear that “old” means to him adherence to the intrinsic essences of a given artistic form. “Art exists because of its unique characteristics and strengths. Drama, as a kind of art, must depend for its existence upon its characteristics and strengths.” Moreover, Zhang maintained that to justify the lasting existence of drama, its essence should remain unchanged over time and refuse any mixing of

¹⁸ Zhang Boju, “Yishu keyi qiqiang mo [Can Art Be Opportunistic],” *Xin Beiping* [New Beiping], November, 19, 1932.

contemporary and emerging practices. For him, “the existing organizations of drama had already been enriched with characteristics and strengths. There is no space to add new elements to drama, otherwise it will become opportunistic art (qiqiang de yishu 騎牆的藝術).” Taking this one step further, Zhang argued that adherence to existing elements of drama involved not only theatrical consumption and appreciation but also research. “[If we] always research the new [arts] but have done no studies of the arts of our nation... [we] would consider [them] too abstruse to understand and have no confidence in ourselves. The end result is that we would gradually wear down our unique characteristics. This is not unrelated to the rise and fall of our national drama and all kinds of arts.¹⁹ Wrapping his comment in nationalist colors, Zhang reiterated the dichotomy of native/old and foreign/new and argued not only that the essence that composed old drama as “it is” should be upheld in a highly competitive theatrical market, but also that it deserved more scholarly attention to fully uncover its value.

Zhang Boju’s self-justification of his choice of research topic speaks to a theatrical connoisseur-researcher’s reflection upon some of the most pressing issues of the time. While his devotion to pihuang is clearly seen in his career as an amateur singer (and presumably frequent consumption of pihuang performances in Beijing), Zhang realized that existing modes of engagement with “old drama” were no longer sufficient to safeguard the genre against challenges introduced by progressive ideology presented in dramatic form. The interest in old drama did not signal retreat from progressive involvement to a conservative comfort-zone in the theatrical realm. Instead, it was a conscious decision to contend with the changing tide in the entertainment world as well as to engage in pressing issues on the contemporary intellectual front.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Where: Is Pihuang National or Regional?

The compounding of temporality and geography was not only manifested in the global scope but also in the domestic realm—within the unsettled territory that roughly corresponded to the emerging Chinese nation-state. While the Republic took on a new political form, political competition and reorganization among regions that once belonged to the Qing empire ensued. The formation of new political orders had an impact on theatrical discourses. Among the various forms of song-drama which had developed and thrived under the Qing, which were to be identified as regional, and which *one* qualified for the status of the national representative genre of the Chinese nation-state?

As evidenced in Qi Rushan's writings, pihuang had been most frequently taken as the example par excellence for his larger arguments about Chinese national drama (guoju). It also was often the prototype he used to refer to a broader category that tended to encompass all Chinese native theatrical forms. In these textual constructions, the aesthetic characteristics of pihuang, as they were identified, were often generalized to represent the aesthetic essences of an emerging Chinese nation-state. Aesthetic equivalence between pihuang and Chinese national drama, as well as the textual interchangeability between the two, were certainly no coincidence. Recent scholarship has revealed a complicated history of the "nationalization" of pihuang in the formative decades of the 1920s and 1930s. Joshua Goldstein, for instance, reads Qi Rushan's aestheticization of pihuang (and its separation from theatrical realism) as the first step in nationalizing the genre. According to Goldstein, as pihuang came to be confined to represent the Chinese past according to Qi's aesthetic theory, it became an ideal medium to represent national

messages on-stage as well as a nationalistic message in and of itself.²⁰ This construction was further fixed in the 1930s, when Mei Langfang's tour in the United States was packaged and presented as a cultural symbol of Chinese national culture through conscious deployment of "tactical orientalism."²¹ The honorific status of Peking opera as the Chinese national drama was further solidified on Taiwan with state patronage by the Nationalist government after its defeat in the civil war with the Communists. Promoting the "preservation and dissemination of Peking opera in its 'traditional,' pre-Communist form," the Nationalists sought to bolster their ideology as the sole authority to safeguard China's cultural heritage in its continuing competition with the Communists over the legitimacy to rule China.²²

However, the following reading of contemporary discussions regarding the locality (by which I mean cultural conceptualizations of locality regarding a given subject) of pihuang in early twentieth-century China indicates that the characteristics attached to the genre in making it the national drama remained highly contested for most of the time under examination. The regional attributes that identified pihuang, especially those had been deeply embedded in the imperial heritage of the Qing capital and Beijing's urban theatrical culture, remained critical to the claim for the genre to become national. The claims of specific regional attributes of pihuang, and the consequent nationalization of the genre, were further complicated by two political reorientations in the early Republican years: first, the collapse of the Qing in 1911; and second, the nationalist government's move of its capital from Beijing to Nanjing in 1927. These political transformations reshaped the contemporary imagination of Beijing from the center of imperial

²⁰ Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, pp. 176-78.

²¹ Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, pp. 265, 270-71.

²² Nancy Guy, *Peking Opera and Politics in Taiwan* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), pp. 4-5.

politics to a cultural metropolis of the new republic. As already indicated by recent scholarship, various urban projects were launched in Republican Beijing to claim and maintain its legitimacy nationwide on cultural fronts after the city ceased to be the capital. With an abundance of imperial relics from the Qing around the city, Beijing, then renamed as Beiping 北平, was reshaped as a “modern showcase of Chinese tradition” that “defined and represented an authentic past of the Chinese nation-state.”²³ This section shows that because theater remained central to urban entertainment and cultural life in Republican Beijing, drama played a crucial role in the remaking of the city’s cultural legacy to claim wider legitimacy within a national context. As one of the most popular performance styles in the city of the time, pihuang became a locus of nationalizing the local culture of Republican Beijing. The identification of its cultural locality also became a heated issue that concerned theatrical critics and connoisseur-researchers.

Moreover, reading the legitimation of Beijing style (jingpai 京派) pihuang together with the rise of the alternative Shanghai style (haipai 海派), this section illustrates the ways in which a renewed cultural-geographical imagination of the Chinese nation-state was projected upon contemporary politics of the early Republic through the case of nationalizing pihuang. As the Chinese nation-state had never been a fixed entity but rather an evolving conception contingent upon contemporary needs and circumstances, identification of the regional and national attributes of pihuang as a distinct genre went hand in hand with the conceptualization of the new political entity. By rethinking the alleged opposition of the regional and the national, this section explores how pihuang was first recognized as the representational musical style of Beijing and then the national drama of Republican China. I suggest that it was through this dual conceptualization

²³ Dong, *Republican Beijing*, pp. 89, 100-101.

that the characteristics of pihuang were identified within the local context of Republican Beijing and further became represented in the wider category of Chinese drama.

I argue that the making of pihuang as the Chinese national drama involved two levels of conceptual constructions of the national and regional in the transnational context of modern times: the first concerned the recognition of a nation-state in a world of modern nations; the second regarded the contrast between a specific locality within the nation-state (which for the purposes of the current discussion is Beijing/Beiping) and Republican China. On the first level, local specificities such as customs and practices were assumed to be nationally unique and mobilized for achieving the universal qualifications for becoming a nation-state, namely, historical continuities, cultural uniqueness, and a progressive history that pointed toward the future. The arts became a key topic in such construction, for, on the one hand, they could be taken as immediate, material reflections of distinct characteristics of a given locality, and, on the other, they served as a medium to represent the constructed national spirit.

In the case of Chinese national drama, the close connection between identification of national attributes and art is clearly seen in the National Drama Movement (guoju yundong 國劇運動) that aimed to raise attention to producing and promoting a national drama for the Chinese nation-state. Promoted by the Crescent Moon Society (xinyue pai 新月派)—a literary society initiated by leading New Cultural figures such as Hu Shi and Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 (1897-1931) in 1923—the movement called for nationalization of theatrical art. In their mission statement for the movement, first published in 1927 as the preface of the edited volume titled *National Drama Movement*, young playwrights and drama reformers of the Society attempted to define the term

guoju and to provide rationales for their definition:

It is all because of the simultaneous procession of the two characteristics, generality and specifics, that art becomes art and drama becomes drama. However, no matter how much they try to accommodate each other, when a Chinese, a Japanese, and a Korean stand together, any person with discerning eyes can tell their different nationalities...This is not because we assume there are boundaries of nations and provinces; it is truly because each place has its own distinct historical background and customs. [We] cannot force them to be the same, and [we] should not. Such are art and drama... in regard to the drama for Chinese people, it basically should be a Chinese drama that [derives its content from] Chinese materials and be performed by Chinese people for Chinese audiences. We name such drama “national drama.”²⁴

The “specifics” (gexing 個性) that marked particular groups of people were assumed to be natural and fixed, and, by extension, national boundaries were conceived as stable and given. Accordingly, art produced by and for people of a given nationality was definite and exclusive. Such an assumption allowed the term guoju, the national drama of China, to be thoroughly defined in ethnic terms, as a kind of drama that was absolutely “Chinese” in terms of performers, audiences, and content. In terms of the form of the national drama, although the young authors had a preference for spoken drama as the ideal candidate, they equally admired the “pure essence of art” of older forms of Chinese theater.²⁵ What concerned them the most in their mission was to conceptualize a theatrical genre that represented the national and assign it to Chinese audiences, that is, their imagined citizens.

The need to construct a national drama for the nation-state was very particular to modern

²⁴ Yu Shangyuan ed., *Guoju yundong* [National Drama Movement], (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1992), p. 1.

²⁵ Yu ed., *Guoju yundong*, p. 6.

times; however, the legacy of national drama, viewed in retrospect, had changed over time and was accordingly conceived as historical. According to such a view, promoters of the National Drama Movement saw a succession of dominating genres to be almost seamlessly paired up with dynastic eras: “Yuanben 院本 in the Jin, zaju 雜劇 in the Yuan, and chuanqi 傳奇 in the Ming and the Qing could probably be said to be the national drama; we could also probably identify Kun drama, pihuang, and qinqiang 秦腔 as national drama for certain periods of time, respectively.”²⁶ Despite their spirited discussion on the many facets of potential national drama of China, the authors of the edited volume *National Drama Movement* did produce theatrical productions to materialize their imagination of Chinese national drama.²⁷ Nevertheless, when the discussion on viable candidates for the national drama turned its focus to the present age, the choices were complicated by the tension between continued development of native Chinese theater and the introduction of new forms of theater. As one newspaper commentator forcibly argued:

Obviously, only spoken drama and pihuang qualify for competition over the status of the national drama in China nowadays. Other genres such as Kun opera, ... Cantonese opera, and Sichuanese opera either are so in decline as to recede into the past, or are confined to certain areas because of the local dialects [used in these genres]...There is no hope for these genres to win the status of the national drama [of China].²⁸

Between the two genres that were suggested as qualifying for the title of guoju, pihuang was the

²⁶ Yu ed., *Guoju yundong*, p. 2.

²⁷ Contributors of this volume include Xu Zhimo, Xiong Foxi 熊佛西 (1900-1965), and Wen Yiduo 聞一多 (1899-1946), among others.

²⁸ Shashi Ren, “Pihuang keyi chengwei guoju ma [Can pihuang become the national drama],” *Shiri xiju*, vol. 15 (July 11, 1937).

most popular genre in the entertainment world of the day, while spoken drama was recognized by intellectuals as the most progressive form of theater. The question posed here was to follow either the vitality approved by business reality or the aspiration of progress when deciding which ought to be national drama. As an “overseas import,” the commentator suggested, spoken drama, with its prolonged conversations on serious issues in human life, could not satisfy Chinese audiences’ leisure needs. In contrast, pihuang represented the perfect medium to convey new ideas with singing and dancing with which native audiences were already familiar and which they would be glad to enjoy. Moreover, pihuang deserved the status of national drama since, as an “uncultivated art of the common people,” it possessed “characteristics that [dramas of] other nations do not have.”²⁹ As the same commentator mentioned in another essay, it was because of the resilient vitality derived from society that pihuang outlived the more refined Kun opera and remained undefeated in its competition with new forms of entertainments such as spoken drama and cinema.³⁰ Asserting the “wild characteristics” of pihuang to be distinct to the Chinese nation-state, pihuang, it was opined, was the best genre to be the national drama since it possessed national uniqueness and met the needs of reforming (and therefore building) the emerging nation-state.

It is worth noting that the promotion of pihuang as national drama, as expressed in the commentary above, did not necessary imply equivalence between pihuang and Peking opera. In the following discussion, I understand pihuang as a performance system with distinct theatrical features without particular emphasis upon the locales where these features had developed. The

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Shashi Ren, “Tingde renjia shuo pihuang shi yesheng de yishu [I learned that pihuang is a wild art],” *Shiri xiju*, vol. 12 (June 10, 1937).

non-local nature of pihuang is embedded in the term as an abbreviation of xipi and erhuang, both tunes which could be traced to have originated in present day Hubei province.³¹ Peking opera was a designation with specific reference to the local tunes that dominated theaters in Beijing at the turn of the twentieth century. The rest of this section aims to show that the constructed equivalence between pihuang and Peking opera, namely identifying a performance system with localized tunes, involved characterizing the genre with awareness and deployment of the recent history of Republican Beijing. At this second level of the national/regional construction, pihuang was embraced by its patrons in Beijing as a lively symbol the city's cultural glory inherited from imperial times. The claim of cultural supremacy at the national level was especially critical and useful to the city's claim to importance as an urban center after the locus of national politics had shifted to the new capital of Nanjing in 1927. Nationalizing pihuang, especially in the 1930s, meant uplifting the status of the genre from a representational musical form particular to Beijing to a national form. It was an outlet for Beijing theatergoers to assert cultural legitimacy as a counterweight to political transformations in modern times. This level of nationalizing pihuang could also be viewed as a domestic continuation of the conceptual construction of the nation-state discussed earlier in this section: embodying the national culture via the specifics of an urban theater.

The most obvious reasons to argue for pihuang to become the national drama was political-geographical, based on consideration of the fact that Beijing had been the imperial capital for hundreds of years. However, this history should not be simplified as if Peking opera had been “radiating outward from Beijing [and] managed to represent the nation by simple

³¹ *Zhongguo jingju shi*, vol. 1, pp. 45-46, 57-58.

accumulation of territory” as some drama historians see it. Such geographical arguments on behalf of pihuang have been criticized by Goldstein for being little more than an “invented tradition,” while underestimating the influence of “state power, commercial interests and the efforts of self-conscious reformers.”³² My readings of comments from the time on the relations between pihuang and Republican Beijing further show that contemporary writers were fairly aware that shifting political powers, as well as the fast-changing urban entertainment market, impacted the development of pihuang. For them, the equivalence between pihuang, Peking opera, and the national drama was not something taken for granted, but a construction that triggered debates and required continued cultural investments.

A visitor’s first impression of performance in Beijing might be overwhelmingly of pihuang. As Qi Rushan explained the origin of pingju 平劇 (the drama of Beiping 北平) in nostalgic reconstruction in the 1960s, his recollection of the days of the early Republic nicely revealed why it was so easy to take pihuang as synonymous with theater in Beijing given its absolute popularity in the urban theatrical scene:

The name pingju first appeared after the Republic [was established]. When students who had studied abroad returned to China in the early years of the Republic, they did not know what pihuang was... They saw all playhouses in Beijing were performing pihuang when they arrived in [the city]. Therefore, they recognized [pihuang] as the melody of Beijing and called it jingxi 京戲 (the opera of Beijing). When the [central] government moved to the south and renamed Beijing as Beiping, it was no longer proper to call [pihuang] as jingxi, and it was accordingly renamed as pingju. This is the origin of the

³² Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, pp. 177-78.

term, pingju.³³

Qi remembers that even pihuang was a neologism that only appeared in the late Qing and did not represent the dominate musical style in Beijing.³⁴ Although it might be an exaggeration to say that “all playhouses in Beijing were performing pihuang,” Qi’s account still nicely shows how in early Republican period, contemporaries grasped pihuang as the only dominate genre in the theaters of Beijing. Pihuang was so prevalent in Beijing that it was named after the city, Peking opera. A local identity therefore attached to the genre through its naming; moreover, by changing the geographical suffix of the former capital from jing 京 (capital) to ping 平 (peace), this identity survived the political transformation that deprived the city of its importance as a political center in 1927. The association between the genre and the city was so strong as to persist in the nostalgic reconstruction of Republican Beijing in the 1960s. Under Qi’s pen, this association also echoes the insistence of the Nationalists (then in retreat on Taiwan because of their defeat in the civil war with the Communists on the Chinese mainland) on naming Nanjing as the only official capital of the Republic. It supported the Nationalists’ contention of political and cultural legitimacy to rule China as whole, despite the fact that the guo 國 had been lost.

Entangled with later political history, Qi’s recollection still vividly illustrates how a theatrical genre (pihuang) came to be identified with a local speciality (pingju). Contemporaneous comments on the popularity of pihuang in Republican Beijing suggests that that Qi’s recollection to certain degree captures the reality of the golden days of Beijing theater:

Of the so-called jiuju, according to my personal opinion, there are generally three kinds:

³³ Qi Rushan, *Guoju mantan* [Musings on national drama] (Taipei: Qi Rushan xiansheng yizhu bianyin wei yuan hui, 1964,) pp. 171-72.

³⁴ Qi, *Guoju mantan*, p. 172.

jingxi, Kun opera, and pingxi 評戲. Certainly jingxi is the most important genre among the three. Specifically, jingxi in Beiping has become the source of jingxi performed in other parts of the nation... This is also due to historical reasons. Since the Qing, jingxi had developed into a hobby of the general populace because of the fondness and promotion of it by the nobles. Now, no one loves jingxi as much as do the people in Beiping... because of its extreme advantages, Jingxi...has already become popular nationwide. Recently, it has also attracted the attention of westerners, who considered [jingxi] as the characteristic genre of Chinese theater.³⁵

This short comment demonstrates a series of equivalencies between theatrical genre, locality, and history. Read together with Qi's recollection, we can see that pihuang was implicitly identified as the opera of Beijing (jingxi) given its increasingly dominant popularity in the urban theatrical scene. It is also presented here as a genre that had emerged and could only have developed in Beijing given the distinct imperial heritage of the city. Extending the significance from citywide to national, the author argued, it was also the genre that was national in the eyes of both China and the World because of its ability to attract western attention. Taking jingxi as the example, the commentator argued for the vitality of Beijing: "Although it seems everything in Beiping, the cultural city of the East, has been in decline since the national capital moved south, [the city's] cultural enterprise (wenhua shiye 文化事業) does not shrink or suffer from recession."³⁶ These arguments implied that the national importance of the genre stood both for the nation and the city. This is also to say, if pihuang was to be the national drama, its style must be localized in Beijing.

³⁵ Jun, "Beiping xingjiu du zhi dongxiang [Current trend of new and old drama in Beiping]," *Xiju zhoubao* [Drama weekly], vol. 1 no. 2 (October 17, 1936).

³⁶ Ibid.

Although the aforementioned argument made a case for an equivalence between pihuang and the opera of Beijing, jingxi alone might still not be a sufficient term to tie the theatrical genre with a specific locality when referring to the most popular performance forms in Beijing of the day. After all, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, pihuang had become well received all over China, with local variations developing in places other than Beijing, while in Beijing there were melodic genres other than pihuang that flourished. Jingchao pai 京朝派, “the style of the imperial capital,” was then applied to promote the specific urban style of Beijing pihuang:

Certainly, in a place such as Beiping, even those who do not engage in amateur singing know drama (dongxi 懂戲), not to mention those amateur singers (piaoyu 票友). At the least, [everyone] knows how to hit the beats. When a Beiping native visits another province and sings a few lines of an opera, the local people will recognize it as “the melody of the capital” (jingqiang 京腔)! Although “Beijing” has been renamed as “Beiping,” appellations such as jingqiang daxi (京腔大戲, the grand theater of Beijing) and jingchao pai remain the same. Not only do they remain unchanged, jingchao pai is also recognized as the most authentic in terms of national drama.³⁷

Such pride in Beijing’s opera theater could be observed as early as in the 1910s. In 1919, one commentator boldly claimed that “Beijing had been the capital of China with a flourishing dance and song scene”; it is “absolutely proper to represent Chinese drama via the opera of Beijing.”³⁸

Considering the fact that Beijing was serving as the capital of the Beiyang Government (de facto

³⁷ Chun An, “Jianchao pai guoju de weiji [Crisis of Beijing style national drama],” *Beiping chenbao*, January, 10, 1935.

³⁸ Zhang Houzai, “Zuijin zhongguo zhi xiju guan [Recent view on drama in China],” *Gongyan bao* [The public opinion], January, 17, 1919.

rules of Northern China from 1912-1928), the claim was not far-fetched and bypassed the reality of fragmented domestic politics. With the Nationalists' victory in the Northern Expedition and the unification of China in 1927, the pressure to defend Beijing-style grew. As the above quotation shows, the definition of jingchao pai appeared to be inclusive: it was supposed to contain all melodies sung by any Beijing residents. However, what the author argued for was actually the opposite. By stressing the advanced capability for theatrical appreciation of Beijing residents in general, the right to define Beijing style was turned into the monopoly of the city dwellers. Moreover, as jingchao pai was advertised to be the orthodox version of national drama, Beijing residents, accordingly, were assigned the role of arbiters of the national art. For the commentator, this was the identity that would survive the recent political turnover. Whether or not the city was named as Beijing or Beiping, its residents maintained their cultural capital in the realm of theater.

It is worth noting that in the comment above the popular performance of Beijing was viewed as constituting a "style" (pai 派) rather than an independent "genre" in and of itself. The identification of style not only indicates that there existed more than one theatrical mode of pihuang, but also poses a question as to what the styles were that counter-posed against each other. In other words, what was the counterpart of the Beijing style in the conception of the Chinese theatrical realm? One comment by an ardent supporter of jingpai 京派 (Beijing style) reveals a glimpse of the answer:

When seeing the term jingpai, readers of Drama monthly must think not changing the term into pingpai is running against the time. Although pingpai is a novel term, there is the possibility for jingpai to independently exist; it does not necessarily have to attach to

the old noun “Beijing” to draw attention. Let us take a look at haipai for example. It originates as a proper noun to refer to Shanghai-style drama—does it not stand in opposition to jingpai—the proper noun which originally refers to the Beijing-style drama? Since haipai can be used as a general adjective, why should jingpai not evolve into a general adjective for extensive use... Moreover, jing also means “capital.” Everything in the capital is sufficiently exemplary of the nation. Therefore, jingpai is the adjective to describe the most beautiful and perfect [things]...No matter what, [the drama] in Beijing was the best of the best in terms of drama in the past. Surely, it is no exaggeration to choose it to be the leader of China’s opera stage and label it as jingpai.³⁹

The bold stance promoting jingpai to be synonymous with “the best” was made with explicit reference to its counterpart, haipai, in two respects. First, the term jingpai could be used in a generalized and descriptive way, much like the use of haipai, since both terms had gone beyond their original designation of one single locality to describe certain singular aesthetic characteristics. Second, Beijing’s identity as the capital, and so its supremacy over local alternatives (specifically the Shanghai style), persisted, with the only difference being its shifting ground from the political to the cultural realm. The disentanglement of culture from politics made the renaming of jingpai into pingpai meaningless—since whether or not Beijing possessed political significance would have no effect on the exemplary essence of the Beijing-style theater.

The tension between jingpai and haipai in the theatrical realm was not simply a rivalry between the theatrical styles of two major urban centers. It was also more than a network of urban centers connected by colonial technology as suggested by recent scholarship. What I see from the arguments of earnest proponents of jingpai is their attempt to project a cultural imagination centered around Beijing upon the new polity, a nation-state of which Beijing was no

³⁹ Xu Xiaoding, “Jingpai xinxi han haipai xinxi de fenxi [Analysis on new productions of jingpai and haipai operas],” *Xiju yuekan* [Drama monthly], vol. 1, no. 3 (May, 1931).

longer the political center. It reveals an attempt to redeem Beijing from its loss of national political significance by preserving the city's heritage as the imperial capital through promotion of its popular theater, consisting most notably of pihuang, to the status of national norm. For keen theater lovers in Beijing, nothing was better than the theater to exemplify the city's enduring historical significance and therefore superiority. Despite the close ties between imperial patronage and pihuang, the thriving popular theater of Beijing was a lively testimony to lasting imperial glory since it was a cultural genre that had been developing since late imperial times. Theater was a more effective reminder of this legacy than imperial relics, which had died together with former dynasty. This point was further strengthened by the perception that the residents of Beijing, even random residents, were all true experts in operatic consumption and taste. The devoted engagement of city dwellers in theatrical appreciation made Beijing unique as the cultural capital; and such uniqueness granted its residents footing as cultural guardians of national drama in the new political configuration. In short, genre and history together came into play in the promotion of pihuang as the national drama.

However, the construction of the regional and the national was never complete. First of all, in the realm of theater, it was a relatively modern approach to conceive of regional and national tunes as meaningful in contrast with each other, and the boundary between the two concepts remained fluid. As Qi Rushan recalled an early conceptualization of "regional drama" in the 1960s:

There was no such genre of regional drama (difangxi 地方戲) prior to the Republic. Back then this kind of drama was named minor drama (xiaoxi 小戲). Minor drama was defined in opposition to major drama (daxi 大戲), which referred to those genres that had gained

popularity over the whole country. For instance, kunyi (崑弋), bangzi (梆子), and pihuang were major dramas...⁴⁰

Qi clearly points out that the regional/national dichotomy was a new development after the Republic was established. Prior to that the terms minor and major drama had been used, which were defined by the relative degree of their popularity. In Qi's categorization of major/minor dramas, pihuang was listed as one of the major dramas that had won nationwide reception, just as enthusiastic promoters of jingpai had suggested in their commentaries. However, considering there existed other genres that might be equally popular, national popularity alone was not sufficient to single out pihuang as the only candidate for Chinese national drama. It required other discursive efforts to argue for why pihuang was superior to other popular genres of the time.

Secondly, representing a genre as either regional or national was insufficient to encapsulating all of its specifics. This is why the argument promoting the locally representative pihuang as the national drama was challenged by dissenting views, which contended that the genre should simply be named pihuang:

Both “jingju” and “pingju” denote the genre after the name of a place... “ping 平” is especially nonsensical. [Since the character] ping refers to Beiping, does this not mean that Beiping came into being earlier than “pingju”?... “Jing” is a bit better than ping... However, as times changed, the idea of “jing” became less tenable, not to mention its implication of feudalism... “National” drama is [a] good [idea]; it is better than “jing” and “ping.” However, it is rather too general. Dramas from all provinces and cities within the

⁴⁰ Qi, *Guoju mantan*, p. 173.

begonia-leaf-shaped Chinese territory are national drama that would stun foreigners.⁴¹ Since what was regional remained a shifting idea (from Beijing to Beiping) and the national was too inclusive to capture the specifics, the best way to grasp the essence of a genre was simply to understand it as a melodic system. As the commentator concludes, “the difference of dramas from diverse places firstly lie in their melodies, since we should preserve a drama with the melodic features of “pi” 皮 and “huang” 簧, why should we not name it “pihuang?”⁴² The resort to melody in defining genre could be read as a fightback against another political battle that China had just undergone: the Japanese army had occupied Beijing four days before the commentary was published. Due to the ominous reality that the capital of China—be it the political “Beijing” or the cultural “Beiping”—had fallen to under colonial occupation, it became less tenable to honor the genre through its connection with the city. With a call for returning focus to the artistic characteristics of pihuang, this suggestion refutes the construction promoting the regional tune(s) of Beijing as the national genre. Melodic definition continued to recur in the discussion of national drama as the scope of the national shifted. Recognizing the limitation of the equation, “pihuang = Chinese national drama” after 1949, Qi clarified that “national drama means all drama developed in the nation... For me the term includes kunyi, bangzi, and pihuang... If I am to talk about pihuang, I could only use the term pihuang because there is no [other] appropriate terminology.”⁴³ Written after the Nationalists retreat to Taiwan, Qi redefined the content of national drama to sustain imaginary theatrical diversity that was hardly native to

⁴¹ Muiyi, “Pihuang zhengming zhi wo jian [My personal opinion of the rectification of the name of pihuang],” *Shiri xiju*, vol. 15 (July 11, 1937.)

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Qi, *Guoju mantan*, p. 173.

the island. Ironically, as Qi's definition of "national" expanded from "nationally representative" to everything that was produced within the nation, his rationale for choosing pihuang to be the national drama also became less grounded.

What: Is Pihuang Spoken Drama, Sung Opera, or Something Else?

When temporal or political-geographical characterizations fell short in describing pihuang, melodic definition came to the aid. Indeed, the "What" question was a persistent one in characterizing China's native theatrical forms. This section asks the broad question: "What is pihuang?" in terms of its aesthetic characteristics within the context of the introduction of spoken drama and western opera to China in the early twentieth century. It examines how contemporary audiences grasped the aesthetic characteristics of pihuang within the framework of spoken drama/opera. It is concerned especially with Qi Rushan's arguments in which he championed an independent aesthetic identity for pihuang with regard to the spoken drama/sung opera dichotomy. These arguments reflected an attempt to carve out an autonomous space for pihuang (and the Chinese theater it represented) within the transnational context of genre-identification.

Both spoken drama (huaju 話劇) and opera (geju 歌劇) were neologisms introduced into China at the turn of the twentieth century with reference to theatrical developments in the West. The binary of spoken drama/opera centered around the existence of theatrical musicality: spoken drama denoted a category of dramas that featured speech and no music, while opera denoted the opposite. When introduced to China, tension between the original formation of the binary and its native adaption ended. Multiple translations of the Chinese term, ju 劇—which nowadays is typically translated as "drama" (in huaju 話劇, spoken drama) and as "opera" (in geju 歌劇, song

drama)—suggest that the original Chinese term specifies neither musical nor non-musical dimensions. The aesthetic characteristics were actually open to interpretation in a translational/transnational context. Modern translation of jingju as Peking “opera” reflects a history of native researchers exploring the characteristics of the genre. The nature of the musicality of Peking opera was not taken for granted by contemporary theater critics. Instead, as an issue for debate, it was with direct reference to the spoken drama/opera framework that a musical dimension distinct to China’s native theatrical forms came to be the most significant identifying characteristic of Peking opera in the writing of Qi Rushan. This came to be emphasized in his and other aesthetic formulations of the genre. I shall examine how Qi’s efforts to carve out a distinct aesthetic identity for Peking opera beyond the spoken drama/opera binary thereby opened up possibilities for the genre to become an independent epistemological category of the emerging humanistic research of drama in modern times.

Spoken drama appeared in China as an alternative theatrical form in response to dissatisfaction with native theatrical forms. Although some early experiments in spoken drama had appeared onstage beginning at the turn of the twentieth century, it was not until the New Culture Period (1915-24) that the call for spoken drama making use of vernacular Chinese language became a heated topic of discussion among the Chinese intelligentsia.⁴⁴ Championing a total abandonment of existing theatrical forms in favor of a shift to spoken drama, these intellectuals considered the latter capable of transmitting their progressive ideas to audiences as “everyday reality” without mediation by song and music. They also placed spoken drama at the pinnacle of an evolutionary teleology of drama history; for them, it was a fulfillment of ideal

⁴⁴ Ge Yihong ed., *Zhongguo huaju tongshi* [General history of spoken drama in China] (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1997), pp. 35-38.

theatrical realism that was first realized in the West.⁴⁵

Although opera had not been a focal point of intellectual debate on drama, it was perceived by Chinese theatrical critics as the opposite of spoken drama in terms of musicality.⁴⁶ Simply considering their distinct aesthetic characteristics, the relation between opera and spoken drama did not necessarily have to be a hierarchical one. In his discussion of opera and non-opera (fei geju 非歌劇), theater scholar Song Chunfang even suggested that opera recently had become more dominant in Europe and America, and that “vernacular drama can not develop independently but relies on opera as its prop, and China is no exception [in this regard].”⁴⁷ For Song, however, spoken drama still retained a certain moral supremacy:

The influence of opera on society is far less than vernacular drama (baihua ju 白話劇).

Opera merely entertains the ears and eyes and uplifts the spirit. On the contrary, the impact of vernacular drama on society goes far beyond that of opera.⁴⁸

Progressive value was attached to spoken drama because of the impact it might have upon society. For the sake of social reform, Song echoed the New Culture intellectuals’ call for theatrical realism. Viewed within the intellectual context of early twentieth-century China, the contrast between spoken drama and opera not only involved different aesthetics but was entangled with implications of progress.

The differentiation of opera from spoken drama brought to China a new framework of the musical and non-musical within which to categorize theatrical genres. It especially stimulated

⁴⁵ Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, pp. 147-50.

⁴⁶ For earlier history of opera in China, see Zhongguo geju shi bianweihui, *Zhongguo geju shi* [A history of opera in China] (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2012), pp. 1-10.

⁴⁷ Song, *Song Chunfang lunju*, pp. 261, 264.

⁴⁸ Song, *Song Chunfang lunju*, pp. 264-65.

Chinese critics to reconsider their native performance types—such as pihuang and Kun opera—from a musical perspective given the significant singing element in these styles. Although few critics would disagree that pihuang is not spoken drama given its stress on music, whether it approximated the category of opera (as defined by western practice) was a question for open debate. The aria structure of performance in Peking opera made it appear similar to an operatic drama with Chinese language and music. A more detailed discussion based on specific plays within the Peking opera repertory sustains such categorization, suggesting that Peking opera was a perfect Chinese example of opera. According to Song Chunfang:

I am doubtful if Chinese drama can totally rely on vernacular form and dismiss all of its other characteristics. Neither Kun opera nor Peking opera of our nation is in vernacular form. Kun opera is operatic: it is similar to poetic drama (shiju 詩劇) but with musical scores. The characteristics of Peking opera are purely that of European opera (geju), which is called operatic in English. Plays such as *The Stele of Li Ling* (Liling bei 李陵碑) and *The Ruse of the Empty City* (Kongcheng ji 空城計)...are serious *opera*; [plays such as] *Meilong Town* (Meilong zhen 梅龍鎮) are similar to *comic opera* (i.e., pure opera with comical elements); [those like] *Taking the Ox out to Pasture* (Xiao Fangniu 小放牛) are quite the same as *operetta*. For hundreds of years Chinese drama has never diverged from its musical element. It is unquestionable that music is the most fundamental characteristic of Chinese drama.⁴⁹

Song wrote in a translational and, therefore, transnational context to argue that Chinese theatrical forms (both Kun and Peking operas) were operatic in nature. The categorization of Peking opera as geju/opera, a term the author retained in English, suggests that the western category of opera

⁴⁹ Song Chunfang, “Xiju gailiang pingyi [Comments on Drama Reform],” *Gongyan bao*, August 18, 1918. Terms in italic are in English in the original text.

was totally adopted as part of the term. By making one-to-one pairings between the plays of Peking opera and sub-genres of western opera, Song aimed to map the repertoire of Peking opera upon that of western opera, thereby reinforcing the impression that Peking opera ought to be classified as opera. Due to its musical features, Peking opera could not be identified as vernacular (i.e., spoken drama).

However, the dance component and recitation style of pihuang also confused audiences as to whether it really was a native version of western opera. Two decades after Song's analogy, one contemporary comment on pihuang, although brief, captures the perplexing features of pihuang when compared with western opera:

I do not understand Peking opera, but we can discern a lack of commonality between [Peking opera] and spoken drama after comparing it with the latter. This lack of commonality makes Peking opera differ from [spoken] drama, since it has music; but it is also not opera, since it involves not only music and singing... Peking opera has its own specific style. Therefore, there are people who disdain it as merely formless, suggesting it is unlike any known theatrical form.⁵⁰

Music and singing alone were not sufficient elements to identify pihuang as opera, although the writer here did not specify what other elements distinguished it as an independent theatrical form. Since its singularity could not be fully appreciated within the spoken drama/opera framework, it should not be made to conform. As the commentator concluded later in his commentary, "Since [Peking opera] obviously is a Chinese drama, why should one forcibly unify it with other [kinds of drama]?"⁵¹ Such a question calls for making an independent aesthetic

⁵⁰ Zhao Yue, "Jingju mianmian guan [A multifaceted discussion on Peking Opera]," *Beiping chenbao*, October, 10, 1935.

⁵¹ Ibid.

identity of pihuang, a project that would be far too big to be laid out in one newspaper essay. It also shows the continuing and extensive influence of the drama debate and the New Culture Moment: more than one decade after the debate took place, an unknown commentator of a local newspaper in Beijing—presumably outside the intellectual circle and a keen partisan of pihuang—still felt obligated to examine pihuang against the dichotomy of opera/spoken drama.

The marking of an independent aesthetic of pihuang separate from both spoken and operatic drama awaited Qi Rushan's project of the genre. For Qi, if one takes a closer look at the actual executions of theatrical productions, the discrepancies between Peking opera and its western counterpart emerged from both musical and non-musical aspects. These discrepancies, Qi would argue, distinguished Chinese drama as a distinct genre in its own right within the transnational framework of performance genres. His performance-oriented point of view opened up new possibilities for examining both musical and non-musical aspects of Peking opera. It also identified the singularities of the genre from both aspects. Interestingly, despite heavy deployment of music in pihuang, Qi argues that its musical dimension was not a distinctive characteristic of the genre in his reflection on Mei Lanfang's visit to the U.S.:

Theater scholars in China have mostly focused on the skills and melodies of singing. However, these aspects are not the strong points of [our] national drama. With regard to singing, each nation has its own skill of singing; each race has its own melody of singing. Surely, we do not have to force [these skills and melodies] to be the same, neither should we evaluate which kind is better or worse... However, the principle of vocalization is generally the same despite the melodies being different. Therefore, singing in Chinese drama is not too different from that in foreign drama. Then, what is the major discrepancy [between Chinese and foreign dramas]? To conclude in a short sentence, it lies in various

kinds of theatrical organization and various kinds of movement.⁵²

Criticizing the narrow interest of contemporary theatrical critics in the vocal elements of Chinese drama, Qi Rushan boldly suggested that singing was not its most distinguishing feature. If one were to consider its musical dimension alone, Chinese drama could be easily categorized as opera, since according to Qi, the art of singing was basically similar across national and so-called racial boundaries. The downplaying of singing avoids the conflation between pihuang and opera—which was important since the purpose of Mei’s visit to the U.S. was “to gain a footing for Chinese drama in the world.”⁵³ To secure such footing, Chinese drama needed to be comparable to an existing category of song drama but unique in its own right. Qi endeavored to show that Chinese drama ought to be regarded as a distinct theatrical form once its music was examined together with its “theatrical organization and movement.”

What were the movement and theatrical organization features that set Chinese drama apart from other genres? How were they incorporated into the musical dimension of pihuang? Based on his observation of pihuang performance, Qi Rushan argued that the link between music and performance in Chinese opera was much closer than that in western opera:

Indeed, there is no music applied in western spoken drama, while music usually accompanies the actors’ movement in opera even though the actors’ footwork does not match the beat of the music. However, in Chinese drama, there is no movement without musical accompaniment from actors’ entrances and exits from the stage. [The choreography on stage] has to match the music. This is because [Chinese] drama

⁵² Qi Rushan, *Mei Lanfang you Mei ji* [Mei Lanfang’s travel to the United States] (Taipei: Qi Rushan xiansheng yizhu bianyin weiyuanhui, 1964), vol. 2, pp. 30-31.

⁵³ Qi, *Mei Lanfang you Mei ji*, vol. 1, p. 5.

developed from singing and dancing.⁵⁴

Qi points out that what distinguished Chinese drama from western opera was its emphasis on precise synchronization between on-stage movement and musical accompaniment. In other words, music was not merely background sound but a guide to the acting throughout the performance in Chinese theater. It was not an isolated component but part of an integrated theatrical presentation. Because of its close correspondence with on-stage movement, music was more than operatic in Chinese drama. This characteristic was unique to Chinese drama, Qi argued, since he suggested it was a holdover from the development of “song-and-dance” (gewu 歌舞) since ancient times.

It is worth noting that Qi Rushan invested “song” *and* “dance”—or gewu—with meanings that characterized the singularity of Peking drama as an independent genre. For instance, Qi pointed out that it was “singing” that distinguished the conversational and monologic components of Peking opera from those in western drama:

Although poems and recitative [in Chinese drama] are without musical notes, they are indeed tonal. The only difference is that the melodic variations [of poems and recitative] are simpler than [those of] songs. [Poems and recitative] are different forms of songs.

From this [we can say that they are distinct from] dialogue in western drama.⁵⁵

By understanding poems and recitative as alternative forms of songs in theatrical performance, Qi extended the definition of singing in Chinese drama to include almost all vocalization on stage, even that without musical accompaniment. This bold contention about its vocal quality differentiated the unaccompanied component (bai 白) in Chinese drama from the spoken element

⁵⁴ Qi Rushan, *Zhongguo ju zhi zuzhi* [Organization of Chinese drama] (Reprint. Taipei: Qi Rushan xiansheng yizhu bianyin weiyuanhui, 1964), pp. 36-37.

⁵⁵ Qi, *Zhongguo ju zhi zuzhi*, p. 19.

of western drama, suggesting that the former actually contained a musical dimension unique to Chinese theater. Pihuang, or Chinese drama more generally, was not the spoken drama of the West, not because it was operatic by western definition, but because it was musical in an indigenous way.

Qi Rushan similarly argued for the distinctiveness of dance in Chinese drama with his concept of gewu. For instance, he pointed out that dance in Peking opera should not be understood as sheer movement but as guided by the musical as well as lyrical meanings of the singing:

The dramas of the East and the West have either dance or song elements only, while in Chinese drama song and dance components are performed at the same time. Moreover, while western dance considers only beats, Chinese dance emphasizes that poses have to match with the meanings of lyrics in addition to beats. The choreography of dancing also has to match with the tunes [of singing]. This is why [dance in Chinese drama] is more difficult than western dance.⁵⁶

Here again, Qi highlighted the inseparable correlation among onstage movement, music, and lyrical meaning in his notion of the distinctiveness of Chinese theater. Regarded as one facet of a larger stage presentation rather than choreography isolated from plot and music, dance in Peking opera was expressive movement closely tied to other components of the performance.

Accordingly, this characteristic of dance singled out the uniqueness of Peking opera within the global context in comparison with the dramas of Japan and the West.

Qi Rushan's notion of gewu suggested that "song" and "dance" acquired specific meanings, which only held true in Chinese theater. In turn, he considered song and dance

⁵⁶ Qi, *Zhongguo ju zhi zuzhi*, p. 27.

together to construct the essence of Peking opera. As he pointed out in his first comprehensive publication on Peking opera, *The Organization of Chinese Drama*: “from the time the actors appear on-stage, all movements are dance and all vocal expressions are song.”⁵⁷ Published in 1928, this was an early version of Qi’s most well-known aesthetic characterization of Peking opera: “there is no sound that is not song; no movement that is not dance” (wu sheng bu ge, wu dong bu wu 無聲不歌, 無動不舞). Although his later formulation has come to be regarded as one of the most authoritative definitions of Peking opera since the second half of the twentieth century, it is worth noting that the early formulation of this characterization was Qi’s direct response to contemporary debates surrounding identifying pihuang within the spoken drama/ opera framework in the first half of the twentieth century. By emphasizing gewu as the most defining feature of pihuang (taken to be the epitome of Chinese drama), Qi Rushan crafted an independent identity for the genre rather than categorize it under the rubric of “opera.” For Qi, given the integration of musical and non-musical elements within Peking opera encapsulated by the notion of gewu, Peking opera was not spoken drama, but it was also more than opera. This invested singularity of Peking opera, furthermore, projected an alternative framework within which native theatrical forms might be fully appreciated. The binary framework of spoken versus sung was reshaped by Qi to a triangular structure of spoken drama/opera/something else, in which the “something else” category allowed Chinese theater critics to carve out a space for aesthetic distinctiveness. It was within this framework that Peking opera was granted aesthetic autonomy in its own right and that Qi Rushan and his fellow theatrical connoisseur-researchers justified their scholarly project on the genre.

⁵⁷ Qi, *Zhongguo ju zhi zuzhi*, p. 19.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the genre-making of Peking opera in three overlapping but not identical categories: temporal, geographical-political, and aesthetic. It shows that identifications of pihuang with each category intertwined with one and another within the larger transnational context of early twentieth-century China. Aesthetic characterizations of pihuang corresponded to the ideological debate over the superiority of new (spoken) and old (operatic) forms of theater, which was a much-heated issue during the New Culture era. It also invited re-examination of the status of pihuang, as a popular musical style in Republican Beijing, against the backdrop of the emerging Chinese nation-state. The complicated discussions centering around identification and characterization of pihuang provided connoisseur-researchers of the genre the possibility to carve out an independent space for scholarly engagement in the genre, thereby initiating the early phrase of modern research on Chinese drama. As the discussion on genre-making of pihuang continued from 1910s to 1930s, the emergence of Chinese drama research developed in tandem with the quest to identify China's native theatrical forms.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ In this memoir, Qi recalled that he began to study drama in 1914. See Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 79.

Chapter 2:

Qi Rushan's Collecting Activities in Early Twentieth-Century Beijing

Introduction

The fall of the Qing dynasty was a great time for ambitious collectors. Early in the twentieth-century in China, the collapse of the old imperial system induced uncertainty, while at the same time opening up access to materials that had been previously off-limits to the public. For eager collectors, living at such a time created opportunity and excitement. According to Qi Rushan's recollection of his early collecting of theatrical materials, this was his experience in early Republican Beijing:

My friend Mr. Zhao worked as a senior staff member at the Baizhifang paper mill in the Nanxia wa 南下窪 neighborhood [of Beijing]. He came to me and took a roll of old paper from his sleeve, asking me if I might want this stuff. I became wild with joy upon seeing that [roll of old paper] [since it was written with] official transactions about theater at the Neiwufu 內務府 (Imperial Household Bureau) ... I called a cab right away and went to the [paper mill] with him. I hurriedly picked up [these documents] when seeing the workers throwing them into the vat. But how many could I pick up by myself? I asked [Mr. Zhao] for some people to help me with this, for which I would certainly reward their help later. As a result we gathered quite a lot. However, compared with what had been destroyed, [what we salvaged] was only one or two percent of the lot. Nevertheless, this was really sheer luck (wanxing 萬幸).¹

Beijing, the one-time capital of the Qing, had many resources to offer modern collectors,

¹ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 159.

although oftentimes in unexpected ways. In the case of Qi's account, documents about performance at the Qing court—which were once veiled from view by imperial institutions and regulations—became available for outside eyes as recycled paper accidentally purchased by a paper mill. Qi Rushan understood his success in collecting the rare imperial records as the result of “sheer luck.” However, the resources of Republican Beijing were only open to collectors with a keen sense of their curatorial value and the quick wit to make prompt decisions when the opportunities for acquisition arose. Rather than accepting his explanation as one of simple good fortune, I am interested in asking, what was the historical contingency of such luck? More generally, tracing Qi Rushan's collecting activities in Republican Beijing, I ask how a collector's adventures reveal the early developments of modern humanistic research.

This chapter examines the historical context and significance of the “sheer luck” that theatrical material collectors such as Qi Rushan enjoyed in the urban setting of Republican Beijing. It begins with an analysis of the motivations that drove Qi Rushan to venture into the urban institutions of theatrical consumption to collect research materials on Chinese drama. Qi took an approach to his study of Chinese drama that I term “performance-oriented,” which rested upon acquiring both artifacts of and knowledge about the actual execution of onstage performance. His interest in behind-the-scenes knowledge pushed Qi to explore a wider basis of research materials. Moving beyond the scope of literati accounts of theatrical connoisseurship, there were many materials—official documents of court performances, random notes from performing venues, scripts, costumes, as well as the experiences of actors—that became of interest to the collector-researcher. I argue that it was his methodological orientation toward performance that tied the emerging study of Chinese drama closely with the local conditions of

the place in which the research activities took place. In other words, the site of the research mattered to both methodology and outcome. This chapter shows that although Qi's performance-oriented approach responded to a universal call for knowledge production, the success of his endeavor depended on the local conditions of the site where the "field research" was conducted.

The move from textual to extra-textual sources in the study of Chinese drama would not have been possible without an environment abundant with material evidence and lived experiences of the given subject matter. In this regard, there was no city other than Republican Beijing that was a better resource for fulfilling the aspirations of theatrical connoisseur-researchers of pihuang. As an avid supporter of pihuang, the Manchu ruling house had established imperial institutions such as the Shengping shu 昇平署 to regulate court performances of the genre. In the eyes of interested theatrical collectors and researchers, official documents and materials about performances left by imperial institutions were precious resources with which to explore the formation of pihuang under the promotion of the imperial state. They tested their fortune as collectors in Beijing's thriving, well-established cultural marketplaces such as Liulichang 琉璃廠, where materials drawn from the imperial court were circulated, appraised, and collected.

Qi Rushan's collecting activities were parallel with contemporary intellectual interest in and transnational competition for acquiring Chinese materials for emerging modern humanistic disciplines. In the modern era of imperialism and colonialism, knowledge production and control over research materials can be read as signs of power domination. Anyone attempting to claim authoritative understanding about Chinese civilization would not miss the opportunity to acquire materials in the political vacuum left by the Qing. In this transnational competition, collectors

native to their own city did not fall behind.

Motivation: Seeking a Theory (lilun 理論) of Chinese Drama

Both interest in collecting and fondness for opera theater had been integral aspects of the cultural life of late imperial Chinese elites and were not new to those who received a classical education such as Qi and his contemporaries.² What marked Qi's engagement with the theatrical realm as new was the way in which he approached the theater with the keen insight and purpose of a collector. I ask what drove him away from earlier textual practices of theatrical connoisseurship to examine Chinese drama from an alternative, non-textual perspective. Taking Qi's collecting endeavor as a case study, this section also examines the historical moment in early twentieth-century China when a solid basis of research material was considered critical to produce scholarship deemed "scientific" and "modern." By examining the discourse on research methodology of theatrical connoisseur-researchers, I illustrate that the concern with "modern" methods of humanistic research was shared across the boundary between independent scholars (who had no affiliation with research institutions or universities) such as Qi and his intellectual counterparts associated with progressive politics such as the New Culture Movement (1915-24).

Scholarly interest in Chinese drama in modern times did not start with Qi Rushan. In 1913, the same year that Qi recalled commencing research on Chinese drama, Wang Guowei, the prolific scholar of Chinese drama and literature, published his *A History of Song and Yuan Drama*.³ Sustained by a transnational scholarly network in Shanghai, Beijing, and Kyoto, Wang

² Qi received a classical education in childhood for the civil examination, see *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 26.

³ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 79.

composed a “modern formation of the classical canon” to address “some of the most pressing issues of the day.”⁴ On the one hand, by insisting on Han Chinese contribution to the maturation of Chinese drama under Mongol rule over China, Wang proposed a “cultural solution to the contemporary threat of foreign occupation.”⁵ On the other hand, by deploying the western notion of “tragedy” as an aesthetic criterion, Wang discovered a native tradition of tragedy from Song-Yuan drama, thereby placing China on an “equal footing” in the realm of world literature.⁶ However, with his emphasis on drama as literary texts, Wang examined mostly defunct scripts that were no longer performed onstage. As Wang honored Yuan drama as the highest achievement of Chinese dramatic literature, he limited the timeframe of his research to the Song and Yuan dynasties. In terms of intellectual engagement, Wang Guowei had no interest in the performability of drama, not to mention the contemporary theater that was dominated by pihuang.

The newness of pioneering works in the study of Chinese drama, rather than awaiting recognition by later generations of drama scholars, was championed within these works themselves. For instance, Wang Guowei clearly attempted to mark his scholarship as reflective of a new epoch in the study of Chinese drama/opera. In the opening of *A History of Song and Yuan Drama*, Wang presented himself as the founding father of the discipline with the statement:

“scholars in this field of study throughout the world begin with me.”⁷ Such a claim, although

⁴ For detailed discussion on this network, see Yuming He, “Wang Guowei and the Beginning of Modern Chinese Drama Studies,” *Late Imperial China* 28:2 (December 2007), pp. 129-56. Patricia Sieber, *Theaters of Desire*, pp. 5, 28.

⁵ Sieber, *Theater of Desire*, p. 6.

⁶ He, “Wang Guowei and the Beginning of Modern Chinese Drama Studies,” pp. 136-37; see also Sieber, *Theaters of Desire*, pp. 15-22.

⁷ Here I follow the translation in Yuming He, “Wang Guowei and the Beginning of Modern Chinese Drama Studies,” *Late Imperial China* 28:2 (December 2007), p. 129.

remaining open to critical examination, was well received by contemporary intellectual circles. As Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 (1898-1958) remarked, “There has been an unprecedented break though in the progress of research on Chinese drama over the past twenty years. *Qulu* 曲錄 (The Record of Songs) and *A History of Song and Yuan Drama* by Mr. Wang Guowei established the foundation of the field.”⁸ “Re-examining” the existing Song and Yuan scripts, the foundation laid by Wang was mainly methodological, meaning a critical view that found no precedent in earlier literary tradition with which to investigate (textual) theatrical products in response to contemporary issues. As literature scholar Sieber aptly observes, the newness of Wang’s research caused it to be read by later scholars as “cultural criticism rather than as a connoisseur’s appreciation of what was in his day a marginal literary form.”⁹

It is challenging to pinpoint the personal motivation that inspired Qi Rushan to launch his project in the first place, especially given the fact that his mission statement was composed in retrospect in the early 1960s, and is thus inevitably contingent upon the political and intellectual climate of that later time. Nevertheless, according to Qi’s reflections upon the early stage of his research activity, the purpose of his project was to uncover “a theory” of Chinese drama. This theory, notably, was not to be invented but rediscovered, since Qi believed it had existed in the past but had gradually been lost in the transmission of knowledge across generations of actors:

And yet, the theory [of Chinese drama] must have been taught [together with acting techniques] during the Ming dynasty and the early Qing, otherwise national drama would not have been transmitted down to the present day in a systemic way. If only acting

⁸ Zheng Zhendou, “Qingdai yandu liyuan shiliao xu [Preface to The Collected Historical Sources on Theater in Qing Beijing],” in Zhang Cixi ed., Zhang Cixi ed., *Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao [The Collected Historical Sources on Theater in Qing Beijing]* (Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe, 1974), p. 11.

⁹ Sieber, *Theaters of Desire*, pp. 21-22.

techniques had been instructed, national drama would have failed to be passed down to the present. During the Tongzhi and Xianfeng reigns, leading actors such as Cheng Changeng 程長庚 (1811-1880) could still talk considerably about [theory]. This proves that the theory of national drama had not been totally lost, and it had existed in the past.¹⁰

Although Qi did not identify a clear definition of what he meant by “theory,” he assumed that such a conceptualization had existed and ensured the transmission of performance knowledge over centuries. He understood it especially as a theory of performance, as an invariable principle underlying the changing performing fashions and personal styles of individual actors. However, since Qi referred to historical transmission of performance knowledge as the evidence for the existence of such “theory,” it is not clear to what degree it means here a highly abstracted, aesthetic formulation, or rather a pragmatic principle of acting and production. In either case, this theory for Qi was supposed to be holistic in that it remained valid for all variations of Chinese drama under the notion of “national drama.” Written in retrospect as part of his memoir, Qi referred to the pursuit of theory as the starting point of his career as a theatrical scholar to make his engagement sound more scientific. After all, if the “theory” that he attempted to rediscover was the rule that performances had been following across time and place, its ahistorical and universal quality did not appear too different from physical laws in the material world.

Interested in uncovering the theory underlying Chinese theater, Qi first looked at literati writings about theatrical connoisseurship from the late imperial period, such as *The Painted Boats of Yangzhou* (Yangzhou huafang lu 揚州畫舫錄) and *A Brief Register of the Orchids of Yan* (Yanlan xiaopu 燕蘭小譜). However, these writings turned out to be unsatisfactory since he

¹⁰ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, pp. 85-86.

found that they mostly addressed anecdotes about actors, prettifying them with flattering words, but saying nothing about drama itself. Other works he found focused either on scripts or music but not on acting.¹¹ Qi considered these writings as having failed to provide sufficient clues to faithfully restore theatrical performance; he thus felt it necessary to go beyond the limitation of these textual sources for the theoretical construction of Chinese drama. Qi's answer to this challenge was to collect the elements that he considered to constitute a comprehensive theory. The reorientation from textual to non-textual sources brought Qi into deeper engagement with the performing world, as he set four principles for gathering theatrical materials: 1) to search in public places such as theaters, 2) to search among prestigious performing families, 3) to search in the Qing palace, and 4) to pay attention to street stalls and markets.¹² It is noteworthy that the "field" in which Qi conducted his collecting activities was not limited to performing venues, but encompassed all spaces where performing practitioners worked and lived and where theatrical products were consumed and circulated. Broadening the scope of research material, Qi was able to collect new facets of performance—such as artifacts, arrangements of stage props, as well as actors' choreography onstage—that had not been placed under critical examination before.

A close examination of Qi's collecting activities suggests that searching for a comprehensive theorization of Chinese drama may have been his ultimate goal, but it was the content of the collection that proved to be more fruitful in terms of reconstructing actual performance practices. As seen in Qi's publications on Chinese drama, the long, detailed entries compiled on the basis of Qi's collection listed knowledge essential to put a real performance

¹¹ More discussion on the textual connection between Qi's project and late imperial theatrical connoisseurship will be provided in chapter 5.

¹² Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 154.

onstage. However, it remained obscure how this practical knowledge would reveal an abstract theory. The gap between what Qi claimed and presented himself as doing (theorizing Chinese drama) and what he actually achieved (collecting and composing the multifaceted elements of performance) is too obvious to be dismissed. Another irony of Qi's self-assignment as a theorist-cum-collector was that he hoped to develop a holistic theorization of Chinese drama through collecting the regional specialities of the urban theater in Republican Beijing. In Qi's scholarly scheme of Chinese drama, the theater of Republican Beijing was envisioned as the national norm, and this assumption underlay his focus on collecting activities in Beijing.

Qi's personal recollection of the motivation for his collector's career could be read as self-promotion, marking his own contribution to the new direction of the field. But he was not alone among his generation in collecting material remnants of theatrical performance. Contemporary sources show that the aspirations of researchers-turned-collectors are clearly seen in study groups of the time, if not in specific individuals. The mission statement of the Learned Society of National Drama (guoju xuehui 國劇學會, founded in 1931) illustrates how a group of like-minded theatrical connoisseur-researchers understood their interest in collecting within the framework of the emerging study of drama:

Our association approaches drama with scholarly attitude and scientific method to engage in systematic sorting and research. [We] hope to exalt the native theatrical knowledge (juxue 劇學) of our country. Whether [the melodies under examination belong to the styles of] Kun, Han 漢, Huang 黃, or Qin 秦, [we] emphasize the intellectual aspect and all-round scholarship in regard to all kinds of drama performed onstage. The first step of our work focuses on data-collection, while considerable effort will also be devoted to [field] investigation. [We] will then sort and categorize [our collection] according to

scientific method. As the patterns begin to emerge, we will engage in compilation and publication of this work.¹³

In terms of its emphasis on collecting and the attention to stage performance, the mission statement of the Learned Society of National Drama, written by Fu Yunzi 傅芸子 (1902-1948), does not read too differently from Qi's retrospective writing. In both, "scientific method" (kexue fangfa 科學方法) was the touchstone to testify to the validity of scholarship and was taken as the first step in launching a research project. Only when research data was grounded in scientific method could the next step of research—categorizing, editing, or further theorizing—become possible. Although upholding the importance of the "scientific method," Fu understood it only as a working definition: it was simply practiced as a kind of research method that began with collecting the research materials. To name some models that pioneered this new direction in the field, he acknowledged actor Mei Lanfang and historian Zhu Xizu 朱希祖 (1879-1944) for their collections of illustrated plates of Ming and Qing face-painting and costume design.¹⁴ Other than these exemplary figures and their accomplishments, no more is mentioned about the way to conduct such a method, or any specific criteria that qualified a research work to be scientific.

The scientific method was not only vital to research in general but especially to the field of drama study. Stress on strict methodology in the mission statement showed that it had been tied closely with the scholarly project on Chinese drama from the very beginning of the enterprise. Organized by Qi Rushan, his fellow theatrical scholars, and some actors, the Learned Society of National Drama (founded in 1931) was an association devoted to revealing the significance of

¹³ Fu Yunzi, "Fa kan ci [Mission Statement]," *Xiju congkan* [Drama series], vol.1 (1933), p. 5.

¹⁴ Ibid.

China's native drama by reshaping interest in it into an epistemological discipline, xue 學, or "ology."¹⁵ Similar to the obscurity of defining the scientific method, here the definition of "xue" was conceived more as "what is not" and "what could be" than "what was." As Fu commented on the current state of drama research, the "attention on variation of tunes and reform of scene-setting concern only performing techniques (shu 術). It has nothing to do with the basics [of drama]."¹⁶ He regretted that "it is very rare to see domestic scholars engaging in research on theatrical organization, textual analysis of the names of theatrical roles, collation of old editions of scripts, collecting of theatrical illustrated plates, and so on."¹⁷ It seemed that Fu considered the fields listed above as better conforming to the standards of real scholarship, fulfilling the idea of "xue." For the members of the learned society, theatrical scholarship and performance technique were viewed differently, and pursuit of the former implied a diversion from an earlier mode of "researching" the theater. Again, collecting was the solution to bring about the jump from "shu" to "xue." Only with a solid basis of research materials could scholars make a move beyond the scope of "mere" techniques.

To be sure, Qi Rushan did not initiate the interest in collecting artifacts in his generation in the 1920s. The fever for collecting among Chinese intellectuals followed the introduction of new disciplines from the West (sometimes via Japan as the middleman) to China since the 1900s. As intellectuals (Lin Shu and Yan Fu, for example) worked on translating foreign literatures on anthropology, sociology, linguistics, and archaeology, these new research fields began to take

¹⁵ Shana Brown notices that the suffix "xue" illustrated the emergence of modern epistemology in modern China, see *Pastimes*, p. 140.

¹⁶ Fu, "Fa kan ci," *Xiju congkan*, vol.1 (1933), p. 5.

¹⁷ Ibid.

root in the Chinese soil. The trend of emerging humanistic and social science research was propelled by the May Fourth movement in 1919, and many disciplines became institutionalized in universities and research institutions in the 1920s.¹⁸ With institutional support (such as in the cases of archaeology and folklore), field work and collecting campaigns were launched on a larger scale. During the second decade of the twentieth century, a “material turn,” broadly defined as turning from the sole emphasis on texts to collecting a diversity of materials for research needs, facilitated the development of modern humanistic research in China. Although there is no direct evidence to show that Qi was aware of developments comparable with his own transformative work, it is safe to say that he shared and expanded the interest in collecting and materiality by introducing it to the nascent field of drama research. What distinguished Qi Rushan and his fellow drama researchers from this intellectual tendency was their relative independence from institutions and the personal networks that were embedded within the “field” in which they conducted their collecting work.

The emergence of modern humanistic research was not simply the result of foreign importation. Tension between new fields and native practices existed, and collision between the two created sparks of innovation for key figures in Chinese intellectual history. As illustrated by Shana Brown, the tradition of antiquarianism, or *jinshi*, had paved the way for modern disciplines such as history and archaeology to develop in China at the turn of the twentieth-century. The interest in the materiality of things led connoisseurs and collectors to view ancient objects as research materials for critical examination. This is especially the case for transitional figures such as Wang Guowei, who, according to Brown, could “access material evidence and

¹⁸ Gregory Eliyu Guldin, *The Saga of Anthropology in China: from Malinowski to Moscow to Mao* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), pp. 25-27.

inscriptions like an antiquarian” to “write theoretically complex and analytical accounts like a modern historian.”¹⁹ Brown contends that it was through Wang Guowei that the once-questionable jinshi tradition was turned into a solid foundation for modern humanistic research.

It is through their efforts to reshape age-old practices into new fields of research that one sees the shared historical significance of Wang Guowei and Qi Rushan as first-generation drama scholars in modern China. In each of their own projects on Chinese drama, their perspectives on Chinese drama also consciously diverged from the mainstream literary tradition that viewed drama as *divertissement*. Instead of seeing drama as an object of connoisseurship, Qi and Wang considered theatrical materials (be they textual or non-textual) to have the potential to fulfill larger research agendas, answering questions about the history of literature and art in China. Their refreshing views on drama were influenced by the ongoing intellectual dialogue about the meaning of Chinese civilization in modern times, and both were devoted to epistemological projects that spoke to a transnational context. As members of the transitional generation, Qi Rushan and Wang Guowei had the same background of being part of the last generation of classically educated Chinese elites. Nevertheless, in spite of these commonalities, Qi’s collecting activities of theatrical materials reveal a closer connection between the transnational nature of the project on Chinese drama and the local conditions under which it was to be accomplished. The emphasis on collecting theatrical materials also meant it might take longer time for Qi Rushan’s research project to come to maturation. Although Qi claimed to have undertaken collecting activities as early as in 1911, his research did not come off the press until the 1920s, a decade later than the publication of Wang Guowei’s *A History of Song and Yuan Drama*. This

¹⁹ Brown, *Pastimes*, p. 140.

time gap does not mean that Qi was a latecomer or a follower of Wang Guowei. It had more to do with personal preferences in research methodology and choices of research materials.

The pursuit of “xue” drove theatrical connoisseur-researchers to step further into the theatrical world, transforming them from audiences in front of the stage to collectors backstage. As scholars chose the site of their collecting activities, the content and outlook of their scholarship were, in turn, shaped by the histories and resources of the research locale.

The Beijing Wonderland: Collecting the Tangible

The search for an epistemology of drama urged theatrical connoisseur-researchers to develop a wider basis of research materials. Their targeted objects of collecting could be divided into two categories, the tangible and the intangible. By “the tangible” I mean all material and written objects, and by “the intangible” I refer to oral transmission and circulation of knowledge and experiences. In addition, the written objects could also be divided into two kinds: 1) records of performances, including posters, advertisements, and outlines (tigang 提綱), in their original forms; and 2) rare reprints of earlier literati writings about theater. The second kind is included here, since, under a researcher’s critical eyes, they could be read as source materials; and given the undervaluation of drama in the literati tradition and the resulting limited circulation of texts devoted to drama commentary, the rarity of these reprints made them desirable objects of collecting. In this section, I focus on collecting of the tangible to discuss how theatrical connoisseur-researchers conducted collecting activities within the unique urban setting of Republican Beijing. Contextualizing their endeavor within the well-established cultural market of Liulichang in the aftermath of the fall of the Qing, this section examines the ways in which a

collector's career was shaped by both political transformation and intellectual orientation in early twentieth-century China.

Since the second half of the nineteenth century, foreign powers had begun to undermine the legitimacy of Qing rule, accelerating its collapse. In 1860, the Second Opium War ended with the destructive plunder of the Summer Palace led by British and French armies. As James Hevia points out, the aftermath of the war ushered in new modes of diplomacy for Qing China, and “Euroamerican relations with China were forever altered.”²⁰ Another noteworthy development that came along with the changing Sino-Euroamerican relationship was the concept and activity of “looting,” a new term especially loaded with the history of British imperial adventures and the pursuit of “prizes of war.” Through the processes of display and auction, acquisitions from looting, namely Qing imperial possessions, were commodified and circulated through the hands of both foreign soldiers and Chinese dealers, moving across boundaries of nation-states.²¹ In the words of art historian Craig Clunas, the invasion in 1860 had a “major effect on the flow of high-quality artifacts” to British collections. It also impacted the development of Asian art history in the west. Not by coincidence, a subdepartment of “Oriental Antiquities” was formed under the Department of Antiquities of the British Museum to study the institution’s Asian collection in the same year.²² Looting is especially related to the discussion of collecting theatrical materials in Beijing, since it was this first imperialist operation that greatly unfastened the imperial hold over royal properties, presaging the release of materials related to court performance for larger

²⁰ James Hevia, *English Lessons: the Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 74.

²¹ Hevia, *English Lessons*, pp. 89-91.

²² Craig Clunas, “Oriental Antiquities/Far Eastern Art,” in Tani Barlow ed., *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 422.

circulation in the following decades. Although Qi Rushan recalled that he commenced collecting activities in Beijing only after the end of the Qing in 1911, the historical trend of dispersing imperial materials for wider circulation had been ongoing for fifty years.

Political transformations in the early twentieth century not only reshaped high politics but also had a profound impact on the material aspects of everyday life in Republican Beijing. The changes reshaped the material conditions in the city, as well as residents' sense of modernity conceptualized under such conditions. Madeleine Yue Dong, deploying the notion of "recycling," investigates how Beijing's residents survived the coming of modernity by recycling "material and symbolic elements from the past." At Tianqiao—the city's center for second-hand, low-priced goods—"objects collected from all over the city, and from many periods in history, were reworked and assembled"; the use values of the past were "transmuted and rediscovered" through recycling.²³ Dong informs her readers that wandering through marketplaces such as Tianqiao was at the same time "adventurous and risky," since it was a marketplace that defied urban planning or commercial regulation. Among the wide array of things for sale, true value could be hard to determine; and sellers with reputations for dishonesty only added to shoppers' senses of insecurity. Under such circumstances, only the "veteran shopper" knew how to discern and bargain for what he wanted.²⁴ Qi Rushan and his fellow theatrical connoisseur-researchers would prove to be savvy buyers within the many markets for old goods within the city.

Dong's discussion of recycling prompts further consideration of the connection between materiality and the concept of modernity. She argues that "recycling" was the genuine solution of

²³ Dong, *Republican Beijing*, pp. 206, 306.

²⁴ Dong, *Republican Beijing*, p. 185.

the shoppers at Tianqiao to cope with the coming of modernity; however, she does not explicate whether or not such action was a conscious response to the predicament of political reorientation and the dumping of recycled materials on the market. Moreover, although the material transactions in Tianqiao offer a telling story of native response to the transnational formation of modernity, they were limited to a specific segment of the social spectrum (namely, the urban poor) and one distinct location (a market specializing in low-end stuff). My discussion expands upon Dong's argument in two ways. First, it moves the focus of examination from one single marketplace to wider areas within the city to explore the possibilities of the way in which urban contexts informed collecting activities. Second, by showing that the exploration of materials was directed by the clear agendas of the collectors, it brings out the subjectivity of historical figures as they actively participated in a specific historical moment. As mentioned above, it was because of their aspiration to produce "modern" scholarship on Chinese drama that theatrical connoisseur-researchers sought deeper engagement with various kinds of urban institutions and markets. Through the case study of collecting activities, I wish to reveal a tighter connection between materiality and modernity.

In the one-time imperial capital, changes in domestic politics had the most immediate effect upon the availability of a specific kind of research material: documents concerning theatrical performances at the Qing court. Under Manchu rule, court performances had played various roles in Qing high politics, ranging from private entertainment for the royal family to the display of China's diplomatic power.²⁵ The tie between imperial performances and the urban theater of

²⁵ For court occasions and corresponding theatrical performances, see Ye Xiaoqing, *Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas: Drama and the Qing Imperial Court* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2012), chapter 2.

Beijing grew closer during the last decades of Qing rule, since by then Empress Dowager Cixi (de facto ruler 1861-1908) was an especially devoted patron of the most popular performance style of the time, namely pihuang. Early drama researchers considered imperial institutions key to writing a history of Chinese drama (especially if they took pihuang as the representative genre), and they missed no opportunity to collect related sources when they became available. Their attention was mostly drawn to the Shengping shu 昇平署 (Bureau of Ascendant Peace), the agency that succeeded the Nanfu 南府 (Southern Office) in the Daoguang reign (1820-1850) to take charge of court performance.²⁶ Drama historian Wang Zhizhang 王芷章 (1903-1982) soundly argued for why collecting primary sources from the Shengping shu was a critical mission in the introduction to his monograph on the bureau:

[The Shengping shu] has a history of almost two hundred years. The plays written and performed [under its auspices] were no fewer than thousands... However, people on the outside could barely recount its history, achievement, regulation, and internal circumstances. Even the officially edited accounts, such as *Collected Statutes of the Great Qing* (*Da Qing huidian* 大清會典), *Current Regulations at the Court* (*Gongzhong xianxing zeli* 宮中現行則例), and the *Draft History of the Qing* (*Qingshi gao* 清史稿,) failed to speak about it in detail. Other miscellaneous writings made by officials were full of mistakes and unreliable, not to mention rumor and hearsay. This is why outsiders could not grasp its mystery.²⁷

²⁶ The Nanfu was first established in the early Qianlong reign (1740) to train eunuch actors and to regulate court performances. For the development of court performance, Goldman, *Opera and the City*, chapters 2 and 3 passim. See also Colin Mackerras, *The Rise of the Peking Opera, 1770-1870: Social Aspects of the Theater in Manchu China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 121. For major changes and developments within the Shengping shu, see Wang Zhizhang, *Qing Shengping shu zhi lue* [A Brief History of Shengping Shu in the Qing] (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1937). See also, Ye, *Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas*, pp. 27-34.

²⁷ Wang, *Qing Shengping shu zhi lue*, p. 3.

Through his critique of available materials in regard to court performance, Wang Zhizhang brought up a key issue of research methodology: the criteria for selecting research materials. His definition of primary sources was very strict so that even official publications compiled during Qing times (such as *Collected Statutes of the Great Qing* and *Current Regulations at the Court*) were considered not useful. These publications were already edited at the expense of details, although they may have contained some clues to court performance. To produce a better understanding of the imperial theater of the Qing, Wang argued, drama researchers had to push their search for the most original materials possible. Only “raw materials”—namely all existing records that were produced by and at the Shengping shu—could provide faithful information on its operation and legacy. Wang’s emphasis on detail and reliability also meant that published materials alone were not sufficient research sources; theatrical researchers would have to seek out unedited and unpublished materials.

By the end of the nineteenth century, materials about court performances were not yet largely available to collectors since the Qing control over its imperial quarters, despite having been challenged, was not totally yielded. In the year of 1900, foreign reaction to the Boxer Uprising brought to the Qing court another major setback to its imperial authority.²⁸ Foreign powers marched into the Forbidden City, swept through palatial halls, and sat on the thrones of the Manchu rulers. These activities, disillusioning the mystery of Qing sovereignty, were photographed and widely circulated through the mass printing industry of the time.²⁹ Looting, again, was central to Euroamerican activities. In comparison with the Second Opium War, in

²⁸ Hevia, *English Lessons*, p. 195.

²⁹ For more instances of retaliatory activities of the Euroamerican posers during the aftermath of the Boxer Uprising, see Hevia, *English Lessons*, pp. 197-207.

1900 looting was conducted with a more sophisticated approach and in novel forms, with attention paid to Chinese art, antiquities, and the authenticity of acquired objects.³⁰ As these objects were sold and incorporated into imperialist collections, they also function as “souvenirs” of the dramatic event of multinational invasion in China and as a reminder of imperialist domination.³¹ Although it is difficult to trace the path of specific objects from China to foreign lands, in the words of Hevia, it is difficult “not think about the sack of Beijing in 1900” while seeing Chinese arts and artifacts in the great museums of the one-time imperial powers.³²

The violation of the Forbidden City accelerated a “process of disenchantment” with Qing rulership, which concluded with the downfall of Manchu sovereignty in the 1911 Revolution.³³ For the drama collectors, however, the documents of the Shengping shu did not become accessible to collectors immediately after 1911, because of the lingering imperial presence of the dethroned emperor Puyi 溥儀 (1906-1967) within the Forbidden City. As Qi Rushan recalled, when the last emperor still resided in the enclosed palace, “there was no way to get into the palace to search for these materials.”³⁴ The Shengping shu continued to function after the revolution, exercising its authority only within the inner court but with no control anymore over the commercial theaters in Beijing.³⁵ The major setback to the bureau came in 1913, when Yuan Shikai requisitioned its building for his own guards, and forcibly moved the bureau to Jingshan

³⁰ Hevia, *English Lessons*, pp. 216-17.

³¹ Clunas, “Oriental Antiquities/Far Eastern Art,” in *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, pp. 429-31.

³² Hevia, *English Lessons*, p. 219.

³³ Hevia, *English Lessons*, pp. 269-70.

³⁴ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 158.

³⁵ Ye, *Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas*, p. 42.

景山。As pointed out by Ye Xiaoqing, official records about this disastrous event are clear, despite the fact that palace personnel were evicted in rush and experienced panic and anger.³⁶ She also suspected that many records retained in the bureau might have been lost during the relocation process, since Yuan's order was sent at short notice and the buildings at Jingshan were actually already in ruin.³⁷ Contemporary historians keenly sensed the impact of political changes on their collecting activities. As Wang Zhizhang recalled, the relocation was due to the fact that “[the original location of] Shengping shu was occupied by the recently expanded presidential guard, so that the documents and performing props belonging to the bureau were moved to and stored in various places such as Jingshan 景山 and Beihai 北海.”³⁸ In the eyes of Wang, the relocation was a great opportunity to gain better access to court performance materials. As the bureau was now located outside the palace complex, the outflow of court records and materials became more possible, sold to private collectors such as Qi Rushan.

Despite the lingering imperial presence within the Forbidden City, Qi managed to “gradually get a fair amount of play scripts by constantly looking for eunuchs who had worked for the bureau.”³⁹ He could not obtain theatrical materials from the Qing court in larger quantities, since at the time the eunuchs dared not bring them to market openly.⁴⁰ Since Qi was devoted to studying how performances were actually carried out, he was not satisfied with merely collecting official documents of court performance, which were more concerned with the

³⁶ Ye, *Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas*, pp. 7-8.

³⁷ Ye, *Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas*, pp. 7, 19.

³⁸ Wang, *Qing Shengping shu zhi lue*, p. 3.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

institutional changes and developments of agencies such as the Shengping shu. Instead, Qi was more interested in “fragmentary volumes, pieces of paper, and objects,” which would inform about the transformation (bianqian 變遷) of drama, even if in a piecemeal or random way.⁴¹ Qi managed to access these materials. By making acquaintance with a certain Xiang Wang Laoye 王老爺 (Master Wang of the Costume and Prop Trunks), a eunuch who had been in charge of court performance, Qi learned much about how xixiang 戲箱 (trunks of actor costumes and props) were taken care in the Qing palaces. The eunuch gave Qi some partial lists of costumes.⁴² The collapse of the Qing made it possible for an abundance of theatrical materials to flow out from the imperial court into wider circulation, although possession and outflow of these resources was still held in tension by unsettled, contemporary politics.

For access to larger quantities of court performance materials, collectors would have to wait until Puyi was forced to move out of the Forbidden City in 1924. Only then could historian Zhu Xizu, for one, finally acquire the valuable sources that might enable researchers to “find evidence of the changes in drama over the recent centuries, the rise and fall of famous actors, as well as a general idea of daily life at the imperial court, of ceremonies of greeting, conferring honorable titles, marriages and funerals.”⁴³ Zhu recalled how he acquired materials from the Shengping shu:

On December tenth of the thirteenth year of the Republic [1924], at the Huiji bookstore on Xuanwumenwai Boulevard in Beijing, I purchased one thousand and several hundred

⁴¹ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 157.

⁴² Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 159.

⁴³ Zhu Xizu, “Zhengli Shengping shu dang’an ji [Notes on the Collection of Documents of the Shengping shu],” *Yanjing xuebao* [Yanjing Journal of Chinese Studies], vol. 10 (December, 1931).

volumes of documents and handwritten copies of play scripts from the Shengping shu. At that time, the dethroned emperor of the Qing had just moved out from the palace. All palace buildings and auxiliary compounds were under the management of the Republican government. Eunuchs from imperial bureaus left [the palace] one after another. Those who left were strictly checked, so nothing was lost [in the palace]; only the Shengping shu was located outside of the palace complex, therefore the eunuchs from this bureau could privately sell documents and trivial items on drama to small bookstores.⁴⁴

Drama was one of many emerging fields that attracted researchers to examine materials from the Qing court in a new, critical perspective in the name of modern scholarship. In terms of discerning scholarly value from the miscellaneous routines of the Manchu court, the savvy of theatrical collectors were comparable to that of Luo Zhenyu 羅振玉 (1866-1940), who, with the insight of a modern historian, had first identified the files of the Grand Secretariats of the Ming and Qing (Ming Qing neige daiku dang 明清內閣大庫檔) in piles of waste paper.⁴⁵ Official documents, unlike objects showing a direct link to the Qing court (such as imperial regalia and the emperors' personal art collections), might be considered of lesser value by ambitious buyers searching for imperial vestiges in the outflow onto the urban market of Qing royal possessions. Only devoted researchers could appreciate the scholarly worth of scraps of paper. In regard to collecting research materials, the early generation of modern historians and drama researchers in China fought on different fronts in the same battle.

The circulation of materials about court performance outside the Qing imperial

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Shana Brown, "Archives at the Margins: Luo Zhenyu's Qing Documents and Nationalism in Republican China," in Tze-ki Hon and Robert Culp eds., *The Politics of Historical Production in Late Qing and Republican China* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 249-270.

institutions leads to questions about the nature of the cultural market of Republican Beijing and the ways in which it sustained a collector's activities. Before moving on to answer these questions, it is noteworthy that as long-term Beijing residents themselves, the theatrical connoisseurs conducted their collecting activities in an urban environment with which they felt very intimate. For instance, reading Qi Rushan's recollections of his collecting career in Republican Beijing leaves the impression that he was guiding his readers to walk through the streets and neighborhoods where he once lived and worked. Even before they began to collect theatrical materials for research purposes, they were already insiders of Beijing's cultural life, which provided city dwellers with a wide variety of cultural shops, ranging from small street stalls to the well-established bookstore neighborhood Liulichang. Their familiarity with the city equipped them with a "roadmap" for searching for their desired objects in the most places possible. In other words, the theatrical collector's activity was an enterprise pursued in his own backyard, so to speak, not one conducted in an alien "field" environment. Attention to this intimacy between the researchers and their environment will reveal a more intricate relation between modern scholarship and the local conditions under which it was produced.

As a shrewd Beijing resident, Qi Rushan did not begin his search for theatrical materials at the most well-known Liulichang but at markets and small street stalls, which Qi emphasized as "very important places to search for materials." He developed this strategy because theatrical materials had not been available at larger bookstore when he began his collecting activities:

Before the tenth year of the Republic [1921], formal bookstores had not yet paid attention to what I was interested in buying. They would not accept [these things] even if they saw them presented. It was during the second decade of the Republic that the small bookstores inside the Shunzhi 順治 gate and those in the Dongan 東安 market began to

purchase [these items]. However, large bookstores in Liulichang and at the Fulong 福隆 Temple still refused [them]. It was only in the third decade of the Republic that large bookstores started to purchase [them]. Therefore, I was forced to look for vendors on the streets to collect these materials back then.⁴⁶

Qi's chronology of his collector's career in Republican Beijing illustrates the shifting interest in theatrical materials in the city's cultural market from two sides. First, there was a change in space: theatrical materials were first found at random street stalls, and only later in the more renowned districts for cultural markets such as Liulichang. Within this spatial transformation we can see a clear hierarchy of sellers: the bookstores of Liulichang, prominent since the third quarter of the eighteenth century, occupied the top; well-to-do but smaller-scale bookstores were situated in the middle; other even smaller shops and stalls across the city were located at the low end of the market hierarchy. And within this hierarchy there was a second, temporal change. Theatrical materials were initially only of interest to smaller vendors, but over time they gradually drew the attention of major bookstores. For bookstores in Liulichang, the main target consumers were bibliophiles eager to build up their collections of rare books (*shanben* 善本). To satisfy their educated customers' demands, book dealers in Liulichang were trained in bibliographical knowledge, which was learned by "browsing [different] editions, listening to insiders about the contents of books, and humbly consulting their customers."⁴⁷ Given this tradition, the acquisition of theatrical materials by Liulichang bookstores represented a very new direction from their well-established business practice. These changes in Beijing's cultural

⁴⁶ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 162.

⁴⁷ Sun Dianqi, ed., *Liulichang xiaozhi* [Minor records of Liulichang] (Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1982), p. 196.

market indicate that in the first thirty years of the Republic, the scholarly interest in theater was raised from the margins of the literati tradition to the center of cultural consumption. This historical trend, then, can be traced out by a geographic survey of wider areas of the city across a longer period of time.

Qi Rushan's observation about the shifting interests in theatrical materials within urban resale shops fits the larger picture of transition in Beijing's cultural market, which was characterized by the outflow of documents from imperial collections and the growing, transnational interest in materials for researching "Chinese civilization" broadly defined. The sudden abundance of materials released from the palace was especially noted in Liulichang. The market had been a major spot for the circulation of rare and secondhand books since the high Qing and had become a vantage point from which one could witness the rise and fall of the imperial polity. As one book shopper recalled of his visit to Liulichang at the turn of the twentieth century: "It was just after the unrest of the Gengzi year (1900). Princely households and prestigious families were getting rid of [their collected books] on a large scale... My eyes could not blink [in front of the myriad of books]."⁴⁸ In fact, as a fine arts market, Liulichang—called "Curiosity Street" by some British officers—had been an outlet for items from the palaces since 1860.⁴⁹ The abundance of materials on the market was closely tied to China's interaction with imperialist powers. As seen in the case of materials from the Shengping shu, the imperial control over the flow of books and things onto the market only became looser after the fall of the Qing in 1911. However, despite political and commercial uncertainty, the well-established

⁴⁸ Sun, *Liulichang xiaozhi*, p. 13.

⁴⁹ Hevia, *English Lessons*, p. 94.

cultural market in Beijing survived political fluctuations and facilitated the circulation of material things.

The driving force orienting the movement of things on the cultural market was not only domestic but also transnational. Coinciding with political turbulence, foreign interest in Chinese books was also strongly sensed in Liulichang. “Ever since the year of Xinhai (1911)... overseas scholars eagerly promoted Oriental culture. This interest was shared from universities to individual [scholars]. The need for [Chinese books] was unlimited. The local (Beijing) market could not satisfy the [demand] so seekers of books went in all directions [to look for more materials].”⁵⁰ The author did not go further to explain the concurrence of domestic political changes with the growing interest in “Oriental culture.” We might speculate that with the downfall of the Qing, regulation of foreign presence in the capital was loosened, and foreign desire for Chinese materials was more directly felt in the local market. In Liulichang, overseas buyers were eye-catching. They appeared as a dominating force on the market, leaving contemporary observers with little question about their purchasing power. As another commentator of Liulichang lamented, “The great elegance (daya 大雅) has declined these days, and there are few antique books in the book stores of Haiwang Village. How has it come to pass that those visitors with blue eyes and yellow whiskers sweep away all the Yuan and Ming editions?”⁵¹

If the 1911 Revolution was mostly a domestic incident, its impact on the circulation of texts was transnational. In the name of producing a new kind of Sinological knowledge, Chinese

⁵⁰ Sun, *Liulichang xiaozhi*, p. 13.

⁵¹ Sun, *Liulichang xiaozhi*, p. 76.

collectors were in direct competition with colonial powers over texts from the Chinese past. The issue at stake was that only with full command of research materials (and the knowledge production that ensued) could one assert authority over a given civilization. In the case of Republican Beijing, this transnational challenge was felt in the most local conditions, namely everyday transactions in its cultural markets.

Transnational competition over acquiring materials for potential Sinological research enlarged the scope of desired texts circulating in Liulichang. It was in this context that the interest in theatrical texts developed in Beijing's cultural market. When recalling the career of Japanese book collector Tanaka Teitaro 田中慶太郎 (1880-1951), seasoned book dealer Sun Yaoqing 孫耀卿 (1894-1958) noticed the divergence between native and foreign preferences for genres of Chinese books. "At the time [of the late Qing], Chinese scholars mostly enjoyed reading publications that belong to jibu 集部 (literature)." In contrast, Tanaka was especially interested in purchasing local gazetteers, and his acquisition of *The Encyclopedia of the Yongle Regime* (Yongle dadian 永樂大典) from the Ming seemed to be especially impressive to Sun.⁵² Foreign interest included theatrical texts as well, as Sun recalled, "In addition, old editions of novels and dramatic scripts were also mostly bought by buyers [other than Chinese clients]." These foreign buyers took the lead in building up a wider collection of Chinese texts, since "the Commercial Press of China and other libraries purchased local gazetteers, novels, and dramatic scripts after [them]."⁵³

In comparison with these native cultural institutions, individual Chinese intellectuals did

⁵² Sun, *Liulichang xiaozhi*, p. 371.

⁵³ Ibid.

not wait so long to catch up with the vogue for collecting theatrical texts. Their new orientation was keenly captured by seasoned book dealers in Liulichang. As recalled by Liu Fu, the leading scholar of folksong research:

The sensitivity of book dealers in Beijing is sharper than any animal in the world! Ever since then (1925), the price of [materials] on *suqu* 俗曲 (folk songs) soared day by day.

What had been considered as scrap and attracted no one's attention has now become precious in blue-colored cloth bundles. Certainly, for us who were resolute in collecting [theatrical materials], this [situation] brought us considerable difficulty.⁵⁴

Intellectual interest in collecting theatrical texts continued into the 1930s. One market observer remarked, "books of novels and drama were quite cheap in the early years of the Republic. Around the twentieth year of the Republic, their price surged because by then Hu Shi was eagerly selecting and purchasing [these materials]."⁵⁵ Intellectual interest, in other words, both domestic and foreign, impacted the local market as manifested by the change in price for such items. Book dealers at Liulichang quickly responded to the need for new materials by looking for broader sources of supply. Their footprint went beyond Beijing, as "many of [the book dealers] went to Shanxi, for that province 'used to be the place where novels and dramas were stored.'"⁵⁶

Beijing's local cultural market, as we have seen, was an urban institution most sensitive to political and intellectual changes on a larger scale. However, bookstores at Liulichang were not passive witnesses of changes. Functioning as publishing houses, they were institutions with

⁵⁴ Liu Fu, "Zhongguo suju zongmu gaoxu [Preface to the manuscript of a comprehensive catalogue of Chinese folksongs]," in Liu Fu, *Bannong chawen er ji* [The second volume of miscellaneous writing by Liu Bannong] (Shanghai: Liangyou tushu gongsi, 1935), p. 294.

⁵⁵ Sun, *Liulichang xiaozhi*, p. 14.

⁵⁶ Sun, *Liulichang xiaozhi*, p. 15.

their own agency. The publication of *The Collected Historical Sources on Theater in Qing Beijing* (*Qingdai yandu liyuan shiliao* 清代燕都梨園史料彙編, hereafter *Collected Historical Sources*), in particular, shows how bookstores cooperated with theatrical collectors and researchers to actively participate in shaping the fashion of collecting and reappraising theatrical texts. With this cooperative project, the circle of “circulating—collecting--(re)publishing—circulating” of theatrical texts was completed in one single locale, namely the district of bookstores and antique shops in Republican Beijing. Through this example it becomes clear that existing institutions (Liulichang) and practices (literati appreciation of rare books) worked in concert to pave a material foundation for modern humanistic research.

Many of the bookstores in Liulichang had a history as publishing houses that can be traced back to the mid-Qing, when they had begun to republish earlier texts.⁵⁷ Down to the early Republican period, one observer of the cultural market noticed that there was a burst of publishing activities around the 1930s, recalling that “around the second decade of the Republic, many of the bookstores at Liulichang published books. For instance, Suiyazhai 邃雅齋 published *The Collected Historical Sources on Theater in Qing Beijing*. From that time on, other bookstores competed with each other in publishing more titles to attract [customers].”⁵⁸ After this publication by Suiyazhai in 1934, the sequel to the collection was published by another bookstore at Liulichang, Songyunge 松筠閣, in 1937.⁵⁹ The two bookstores were run by experienced book dealers trained in in-depth bibliographical knowledge and keen savvy for rare

⁵⁷ Sun, *Liulichang xiaozhi*, p. 157.

⁵⁸ Sun, *Liulichang xiaozhi*, p. 51.

⁵⁹ Sun, *Liulichang xiaozhi*, pp. 175-76, 183-85.

books and editions.⁶⁰ Suiyazhai's reprint of theatrical texts marked the beginning of a peak in publishing activities at Liulichang, which took place roughly contemporaneously with the rise in the price of theatrical texts spurred by Hu Shi's promotion of collecting such texts. There might not be clear causality to explain this coincidence; however, it is certain that the interest in theatrical texts was exemplified on the same market both by the desire to collect and to reproduce the texts to be collected.

The established practice of bookstores-cum-publishers in Liulichang enabled Zhang Cixi 張次溪 (1909-1968) to launch the project to reprint his personal collection of Qing literati writings about theater under the title, *Collected Historical Sources*. Contemporary commentators highly praised this publication as a breakthrough in the emerging field of modern studies of Chinese drama, commenting both on transnational competition and nationalistic sentiment. They suggested that the publication provided a new source base upon which researchers of Chinese drama could develop advanced scholarship that might balance the current picture dominated by Japanese scholarship, namely, Aoki Masaru's (青木正兒, 1887-1964) *A history of Chinese Drama in Modern Times* (*Shina kinsei gikyokushi* 支那近世戲曲史). For instance, the renowned actor Cheng Yanqiu's 程硯秋 (1904-1958) comment on Aoki's work was blatantly nationalistic. "Aoki Masaru is a foreigner. Certainly, his devotion to research is worthy of our appreciation, since he, as a foreigner, accomplished a monograph on Chinese drama. However, [his work] cannot explicate the depth of Chinese drama since his life experience is too different from [ours] and what he saw and heard has been too narrow."⁶¹ In contrast, in regard to Zhang's new

⁶⁰ Sun, *Liulichang xiaozhi*, pp. 113, 144.

⁶¹ Cheng Yanqiu, "Xu [Preface]," in Zhang Cixi ed., *Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao*, pp. 28-31.

compilation, Cheng hoped that “those who have consulted this book... can quickly edit a series on the history of drama in modern China so that Mr. Zhang’s hard work of collecting [these materials] will not have been in vain.”⁶² Speaking in similar tone, Wang Zhizhang’s comment on Aoki’s work was even more critical, saying that “people who have not conducted in-depth research on the drama of our country must have considered it as a wonderful work at first glance. However, many mistakes can be found in that work if [the readers] engage in actual investigation [of Chinese drama].”⁶³ With the translation of Aoki’s work into Chinese in 1930, it became the benchmark against which to measure a more “native,” and, by implication, more accurate, scholarship of Chinese drama.

Nationalist reception of Aoki’s work among Chinese specialists revealed intensified competition for authority over interpreting Chinese civilization in the field of drama research. To better assess the transnational background of this competition that arose amidst a sense of crisis for Chinese readers, it is worth examining the historical context and significance of Aoki’s work. The title of the book, *Shina kinsei gikyokushi*, smacked of growing Japanese imperialism in China as well as greater attempts by Japanese sinologists to (re)write a history of the East (tōyō 東洋) with Japan as the new center. The choice of word for China in the title was not exceptional to Aoki alone, but rather reflected a generation of Japanese scholars who aimed to reconfigure the history of greater East Asia in accordance with contemporary politics after the Meiji Restoration in 1868. As shown by Stefan Tanaka, the creation of the categories of “Shina” and “tōyō” allowed Japanese Sinologists to separate Japan from “the alien continent,” and “objectify

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Wang Zhizhang, “Qingdai yandu liyuan xhiliao xu [[Preface to The Collected Historical Sources on Theater in Qing Beijing],” in Zhang Cixi ed., *Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao*, p. 37.

the geographical entity of China and establish it as belonging to Japan's past."⁶⁴ In this Japanese historiographical project, changing the denomination to "Shina" from "Chugoku" (literally meaning "middle kingdom") indicated that China, in the modern world, no longer possessed the centrality and superiority in Asia that she once enjoyed. This reorientation served to justify the self-assigned role of Japan to be the leader in Asia. For contemporary Japanese readers, Aoki's work, one devoted to a history of the drama of "Shina," certainly wrote about a civilization whose achievements were relegated to the past and which was troubled by its relative backwardness in modern times. Despite these negative implications, which might be read as in contradiction with Aoki's personal appreciation for Chinese drama, within the larger linguistic and political contexts in the 1930s, the pessimistic connotations about Chinese civilization and its future projected through Aoki's choice of title were clear.

China's so-called backwardness and struggle to become modern was even better signified by the periodization of the work, kinsei 近世. The term indicates a close intellectual tie between Aoki and the Kyoto school of historiography, whose founder, Sinologist Naito Konan (内藤湖南, 1866-1934), was most well-known for his periodization of Chinese history. Naito divided Chinese history into three periods: joko (上古, antiquity), chuko (中古 medieval), and kinsei. Roughly comparable to the concept of "modern" in western languages, kinsei also functions as a temporal marker of modernity, which is identified by separation of the present time from an irrational, pre-scientific medieval past, and progressive momentum toward the future. However, as a Japanese neologism, kinsei had its own connotations within the context of East Asia. For

⁶⁴ Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 19.

China historians such as Naito, the issue at stake was when to pinpoint the beginning of kinsei in China. Naito's historiography of Chinese kinsei was not value-free, since, as a pedagogical tool, periodization usually has a "'message to convey,' usually with its last stage."⁶⁵ As Joshua Fogel points out, when Naito pondered the beginning of China's "modernity," he was asking retrospectively when the "political, social, economic, and cultural forms" of the Qing first took place.⁶⁶ Fogel also argues that Naito's "periodization of 'modernity' in China bespoke an additional didactic intention," which began with the attempt to predict the future of Chinese politics (especially after the 1911 Revolution) from long-term transformations within Chinese society and culture.⁶⁷

The influence of kinsei on Japanese conceptualization of Chinese history was clearly seen in Aoki's conscious choice of the title of his book. Aoki explained that although he originally thought to entitle the book, *Ming Qing xiqu shi* (a history of Ming and Qing drama), he decided to use the term kinsei since it would make his work more accessible to Japanese readers.⁶⁸ Despite wide usage of kinsei among Japanese Sinologists, the definition of the term was open for debate. As a drama scholar, Aoki disagreed with Naito's opinion that the kinsei period of China began in the Song and Yuan dynasties.⁶⁹ As he explained in the preface of *Shina kinsei gikyokushi*:

The reason why I called [the time period examined in my book] *kinsei* was because

⁶⁵ Joshua Fogel, *Politics and Sinology: the Case of Naito Konan* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984), p. 206.

⁶⁶ Fogel, *Politics and Sinology*, p. 207.

⁶⁷ Fogel, *Politics and Sinology*, pp. 168-69.

⁶⁸ Wang Jilu, trans., Aoki Masaru, *Zhongguo jinshi xiqu shi* [A history of Chinese drama in modern times] (Reprint. Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1965), p. 1.

⁶⁹ For Naito's characterizations of the Tang-Song transition, see Fogel, *Politics and Sinology*, pp. 170-82.

drama before the Tang was negligible. It began to gradually develop in the Song, blossoming in Yuan, and became even more flourishing in the Ming and Qing. There was obviously a difference [by which to] separate Yuan and Ming into distinct periods [in drama history]: namely, in the Yuan dynasty, northern melody, *zaju* 雜劇, was the most thriving, whereas since Ming times southern melody, *chuanqi* 傳奇, achieved the greatest popularity. Moreover, when Mr. Wang [Guowei] edited his history of drama, he marked off drama before the Song as ancient, therefore to be distinguished from the drama of the Yuan.⁷⁰

Aoki proposed his periodization of Chinese drama as follows: “I would like to consider the Yuan period as the medieval era (中世) of the drama history [of China], while in the Ming it became the modern era (kinsei).”⁷¹ This proposal has two points worth discussing. First, it demonstrates that the kinsei terminology was generally accepted among Japanese Sinologists as the periodization necessary for tracing and writing about temporal changes of a given subject (drama in this case). Second, and also more intriguingly, Aoki was arguing for a periodization that he suggested was internal to the evolution of drama in China. He therefore put the divide between the medieval and modern periods of Chinese drama history between the Yuan and Ming, given the different dominating genres of each period. In this regard, Aoki pointed out that his periodization followed much in line with that of Wang Guowei, indicating that *Shina kinsei gikyokushi* was simply a continuation of Wang’s pioneering research on Song and Yuan drama.

In a way, Aoki arranged scholarship on Chinese drama within a temporal order: Wang Guowei’s work on Song and Yuan drama focused on drama of a more distant past (i.e. ancient

⁷⁰ Wang Jilu trans., Aoki, *Zhongguo jinshi xiqu shi*, p. 1.

⁷¹ Ibid.

and medieval), whereas his own work on the drama of the Ming and Qing was devoted to a more recent past (modern). The different focuses on time period of Wang and Aoki were surely due to their distinct personal aesthetics. As Aoki recalled his first encounter with Wang Guowei in Kyoto, in 1912, it seemed to him that Wang was totally disinterested in the performative aspect of drama: “However, Mr. Wang was devoted only to reading qu 曲 literature. He had no interest in watching drama [performance] and no zest for music.”⁷²

This impression was confirmed when Aoki visited Wang in Beijing more than ten years later (in 1925). During his visit Aoki again mentioned to Wang Guowei his plan to study the drama of the Ming and Qing. However, according to Aoki, Wang Guowei responded in a rather cold tone, contending, “there is nothing to discuss about [drama] after Ming times. The qu of Yuan times is living literature (huo wenxue 活文學); whereas the qu of Ming and Qing times is dead literature (si wenxue 死文學).”⁷³ Aoki could only partially agreed with Wang’s view on Ming and Qing drama. He admitted that if one were to consider only the qu genre, theatrical works in the Ming and Qing did not surpass their predecessors in the Yuan. However, when examining the historical changes of Chinese drama as a whole, for Aoki, the theatrical works of the Ming and Qing did not necessarily indicate degeneracy from the achievement of Yuan qu.⁷⁴

In fact, Aoki’s interest in Chinese drama was considerably oriented toward contemporary performance. He reversed Wang Guowei’s stance about living versus deceased literatures,

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Wang Qing, trans., Aoki Masaru, “Zhutou muxue [Bamboo heads and wood splinters],” in Guangming ribao chubanshe ed., *Liangge riben hanxuejia de Zhongguo jixing* [Travel notes of two Japanese Sinologists] (Beijing: Guangming ribao chubanshe, 1999), p. 138.

contending, “Nowadays, Yuan qu has already disappeared from the entertainment world, while the *qu* of the Ming and Qing are still popular. Therefore, Yuan drama is dead, while the drama of the Ming and Qing is alive.”⁷⁵ Aoki’s self-defense of his research interest had an impact upon the methodology of drama research in China. His focus on drama of the most recent past made the control over research materials a more pressing issue. Keen insight and supreme ability at discovering new research materials were critical to producing good scholarship. This was one reason why Aoki highly praised Wang’s *Song Yuan xiqu shi*, since he felt that the work was so complete that it would not be possible to revise or append any new research to it “without unearthing unknown, rare research materials.” Aoki, portraying himself as a modest follower of Wang Guowei’s scholarship, remarked that his own study on Ming and Qing drama was merely to work on the remnants (of research topics and materials) dismissed by Wang.⁷⁶

Nevertheless, with regard to utilizing rare materials to study the history of recent drama, Aoki was a leader in the field. Even before theatrical connoisseurship texts were reprinted in *Collected Historical Sources on Theater in Qing Beijing*, he had referred to some of the same texts in writing *Shina kinsei gikyokushi*. Specifically, in the chapters on the emergence of huabu 花部 genres and theatrical life in the Qing, he derived historical information from connoisseurship texts such as *A Brief Register of the Orchids of Yan, Assorted Notes Toward a Dream of Splendors Past* (*Menghua suobu* 夢華瑣簿), and *A Record of Tear Stains from the Golden Stage* (*Jintai canlei ji* 金臺殘淚記), among others.⁷⁷ In these chapters, connoisseur texts

⁷⁵ Wang Jilu trans., Aoki, *Zhongguo jinshi xiqu shi*, p. 1.

⁷⁶ Wang Qing, trans., Masaru Aoki “Zhutou muxue [Bamboo head and wooden bits],” in *Liangge riben hanxuejia de Zhongguo jixing*, p. 138.

⁷⁷ Wang Jilu, trans., Aoki, *Zhongguo jinshi xiqu shi*, chapters 13 and 15.

provided Aoki first-hand observations and accounts of live performance. Further research is required on the circulation of texts between China and Japan in the 1920s (or earlier) that would have allowed Aoki access to these texts. Nevertheless, the gap between the publication of Aoki's work in Chinese translation in 1930 and the printing of *Collected Historical Sources* (published in two series in 1934 and 1937) explains some of the Chinese drama researchers' nationalist response to Aoki's work. Through critical commentary on Aoki's scholarship, the preface writers expressed their anxiety about Chinese scholars' slowness to gain full command of research materials. To them, the publication of the *Collected Historical Sources* was a boost to the field of drama research in China. It would be an even greater delight, they opined, to see research based on such rare primary materials, conducted by native scholars, come to fruition.

Only with a sound basis of research materials could scholars conduct the "actual investigation" that Wang Zhizhang advocated. To open up such possibility was the reason why Zheng Zhenduo acknowledged Zhang's publishing project thus:

The two hundred plus years of the history of performance in the Qing seems clearer for us to understand. However, research materials in this regard have not been highly accessible. The commonly seen ones have been only a few such as *Miscellaneous Notes from the Earthly Capital* (*Yanlan xiaopu*, *Jingcheng zalu* 京塵雜錄), and *Heroes of the Theatrical World* (*Jubu qunying* 菊部群英). *The Collected Historical Sources on Theater in Qing Beijing* compiled by Mr. Zhang Cixi publishes all thirty-eight titles that have been painstakingly collected by him. Truly, this is a cause for great delight. [Now] researchers of the history of theatrical performance will have the joy of having free rein with this.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Zheng Zhenduo, "Qingdai yandu liyuan shiliao xu," in Zhang Cixi ed., Zhang Cixi ed., *Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao*, pp. 12-13.

Zhang's publication not only exemplified the new stress on research materials but also illustrated the changing conceptualization of literati connoisseurship of theater. As historian Gu Jiegang 顧頔剛 (1893-1980) pointed out in his preface to the collection, earlier literati writings suffered from the stigma of mere *divertissement* because they were “hampered by the [then] prevalent view” to look down upon texts of theatrical connoisseurship.” Instead, he reminded his readers that the value of these texts depended on “the insight of users of these materials.”⁷⁹ Equipped with a new vision of modern humanistic research, readers of Qing literati texts would be able to produce scholarship that not only diverged from the traditional view of drama, but also might win the transnational competition over researching Chinese culture.

What Gu Jiegang meant by “the insight of users of these materials (i.e., Qing connoisseurship texts)” was a historical product of two factors in early twentieth-century China. The first was the lapse of time between when the connoisseurship texts were produced and their later appraisal. Late imperial bibliophiles did collect drama materials, although most of what they collected was play scripts (especially rare editions) and treatises on drama prosody. *Huapu*, as texts of immediate connoisseurship produced from fan interaction with performers in commercial theaters, had not been considered worth collecting (and reprinting for larger circulation) before. When Zhang Cixi undertook the publishing project of *Collected Historical Sources*, enough time had passed that connoisseurship texts—laughed off as rubbish some fifty to a hundred years earlier—were now considered historical and thus of value. However, the growing attention on connoisseurship texts was not a simple result of the passage of time; it was also due to expanding curiosity about Chinese theater. What engaged scholars of Zhang's

⁷⁹ Gu Jiegang, “Preface,” in Zhang Cixi, *Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao*, p. 8.

generation with Chinese drama was not only the scripts being performed, but also the human interactions (as reflected in such texts) in the theatrical space. It was this inquiry about all aspects of China's theatrical experience that led researchers to reevaluate the significance of Qing connoisseurship texts, and to make them valuable research materials within their scholarship.

Despite new views on collecting and the meanings of collected materials, what remained unchanged was the collector's labor and passion. The preface by Wang Zhizhang keenly captures a collector's lasting devotion. Wang begins by pointing out the dual character of drama, "Drama is literature as well as an art," suggesting that the only way to research such a complex formation was to read more books about drama. However, given the rarity of such books, the hard work of collecting became a necessary step for further research:

Seeing this, for seven or eight years now, Cixi has devoted himself to collecting materials day by day. Afraid his own energy might not be sufficient, he asked Mr. Fang Wenxi 方問溪 to help him. Together they left footprints in all major and minor bookstores in Beiping, including even street book vendors. Not one of these places did not know them. Just this alone is sufficient to prove their diligence.⁸⁰

Zhang Cixi's hard work was rewarded. Wang Zhizhang praised Zhang's accomplishment as a book collector comparable to the famous bibliophile Ye Dehui 葉德輝 (1864-1927), suggesting that, were the latter able to return to life, he would envy Zhang's acquisition of the rare imprint of *A Brief Register of the Orchids of Yan*. Another example Wang highlighted to acknowledge Zhang's achievement was his procurement of *Faying miji* 法嬰密笈, which Wang considered extremely difficult to obtain. First published in the Xianfeng era, the text was already hard to

⁸⁰ Wang Zhizhang, "Qingdai yandu liyuan xhiliao xu," in Zhang Cixi, *Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao*, pp. 33-34.

come by at the end of Tongzhi reign, only decades after its first publication. Wang appreciated that Zhang Cixi must have overcome great difficulty to rediscover a copy of the text on the market. All in all, Wang considered *Collected Historical Sources* a valuable publication that provided a full range of texts about theater in Qing Beijing. This resource, Wang contended, would enable drama researchers in China to refute the mistakes in Aoki's work.⁸¹

This section has shown that Qi Rushan and his fellow theatrical researchers captured the opportunity of political transformation in the early twentieth century to benefit their collectors' enterprise in Republican Beijing. Their careers as collectors indicated a close tie between the local setting and the transnational context within which collecting activities were conducted. The long-established cultural market and unique thriving opera scene of Republican Beijing fueled the collecting of theatrical materials, thereby providing a solid basis of research artifacts in the transnational competition for texts and things pertinent to Sinological studies.

Oral Wisdom: Collecting the Intangible

Qi Rushan's performance-oriented approach to drama research made the theater an indispensable site of knowledge production. His engagement with the theater, parallel with the growing interest in folk culture in early twentieth-century China, was one among a wide range of scholarly endeavors that sought for deeper interaction with the field of research. It appeared new against the backdrop of the theatrical connoisseurship tradition from two perspectives. First, it was the first attempt to "systematically" interview and record hands-on knowledge in the theater. Second, those who possessed this information, for the first time, were ostensibly considered as

⁸¹ Ibid.

“professionals” of the performing business by their literati counterparts. To include the widest variety of participants in the process of the production of knowledge, I use theatrical practitioners to refer to all personnel that worked at the theater—including actors, musicians, prop-hands, etc.—as opposed to connoisseur-researchers. The knowledge and experiences of theatrical practitioners, which had been represented and transmitted orally over generations, opened many possibilities for interpretation and utilization of such information. With the involvement of connoisseur-researchers, the practical knowledge of practitioners was transformed into formal knowledge, which was presented as authoritative in the scholarly project on Peking opera. Although the accounts of “field research” left by theatrical connoisseur-researchers are the only source with which to trace the process of transcribing oral knowledge into written form, the discrepancy between the two forms of knowledge remained notable in their written records. This interaction between connoisseur-researchers and theatrical practitioners, while prompting further exploration of research material within the emerging field of Chinese drama research, also made the codification of performative knowledge more challenging.

Qi Rushan was not alone among his intellectual contemporaries to take on the challenges of seeking alternative epistemological frameworks for methodological breakthroughs in modern humanistic research. In the paragraphs to follow, I will first provide a brief review of the folksong movement in the 1920s to contextualize Qi’s endeavor within the larger intellectual trend of reevaluating under-appreciated voices in popular culture. I examine how the intellectual interest in native popular drama grew under the rubric of “folk literature” (su wenxue 俗文學). I will then compare and contrast Qi’s collecting of oral knowledge with such interest.

To begin with, the interest in folk culture was not totally new in early twentieth-century

China. As pointed out by Wang Fan-sen, there had been a tendency, which he terms “discovery of the folk” (pingmin de faxian 平民的發現), in Chinese literary thought that can be traced back as early as the late imperial period. This trend, however, did not develop as a politicized intellectual project until the early twentieth century, when Chinese intellectuals turned to examine the “culture” of the common people for solutions to the “deep-rooted” problems that impeded further political and social reforms.⁸² In this process of pursuing modernity, “localization of national essence in the poetic language of the folk became the guiding principle of the folklore movements in ... ‘latecomers’ to modernity such as Japan and China.”⁸³ However, as a carrier of political and ideological investments, the folk remained a highly contestable category. On the one hand, literary productions of the folk were believed by the intellectuals to best represent the spirit of the nation.⁸⁴ On the other hand, “‘people,’ particularly the peasantry, was a profoundly ambiguous entity, both seductive and dangerous, both the object of longing and regulation.”⁸⁵ Given these suspicions against the folk, “the orchard of the folk culture, though indispensable to the nationalist project,” would not prove fruitful without “the scriptural labor of the intellectual gardeners.”⁸⁶

As Haiyan Lee states, with the “folklore movements that both rectify the heterogeneous

⁸² Wang Fansen, “Liu bannong yu shiyusou de mingjian wenyi zu [Liu bannong and the research group of popular literature and art at the Institute of History and Philology],” in Du Zhengshend and Wang Fansen eds., *Xin Xueshu zhi lu—zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo qishi zhounian jinian wen* [The road to new scholarship: commemoration essays for the seventieth anniversary of the Institute of History and Philology] (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1998), p. 120.

⁸³ Haiyan Lee, “Tears That Crumbled the Great Wall: The Archaeology of Feeling in the May Fourth Folklore Movement,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 64:1 (February 2005), p. 36.

⁸⁴ Chang-Tai Hung, *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folklore Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1985), p. 17.

⁸⁵ Lee, “Tears That Crumbled the Great Wall,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 64.1, p. 59.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

voices in writing and legitimize writing in the name of orality, ... folk culture must by necessity be simultaneously... oral *and* scriptural.”⁸⁷ This duality of folk culture posed a dilemma of collecting to folklorists as well as theatrical collectors such as Qi Rushan. On the one hand, the orality of the unwritten, assumed by the folklorists to reflect the creative spontaneity of the people, opened access to explore the genuineness of native culture. The value of the unwritten lay exactly in the formless transmission of knowledge over generations by those who had learned from experience. On the other hand, despite their devotion to collecting and sorting (zhengli 整理) oral forms, folklorists were fully aware that their transcription from the oral to the written ran the risk of missing the essence of the knowledge they pursued, since “in the process of transcribing, distortions would creep in.”⁸⁸ This way, their laborious collecting and later publications of the collections could, at best, lead to approximate reproductions of the original. The tension between the oral and the written remained too manifest to be reconciled.

Nevertheless, the folklorists’ aspiration to science and modernity made the transcription from oral to written imperative. Their self-assigned responsibility to monopolize such transcription, moreover, provided them much leeway to infuse their own political agendas into the imaginary collective of the “folk.” In an age of intense formation of nation-states, folklore was most profoundly shaped by nationalism in China, as in other corners of the world. Since folklorists prioritized spoken vernacular as the best medium of self-expressing nationalized identity, sentiments and emotions revealed by folk culture would make sense only to a specific audience, namely a “national” community that was formed and bounded by one common

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Hung, *Going to the People*, p. 5.

language. The emphasis on the connection between folklore and the nationalist framework, in turn, led to the proposal by Chinese intellectuals that “closer identification with the ‘low’ culture” would foster the formation of national identity in an era of colonial encroachment.⁸⁹ Following this line of argument, Chinese people played a dual role in the folklorists’ project: they were potential sources of national salvation, but they also had to await intellectual guidance in order to achieve such a goal. The “people” were to be represented but not to give voice for and by themselves. Although folklore culture was assumed to express the innermost sentiment, the represented voice of the collective left no space for individual iterations.

In the Chinese case, (re)discovery of the folk was first encouraged by leading figures of the New Culture Movement such as Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu, whose call for shifting the emphasis on literature to popular and vernacular genres appeared in *New Youth* in 1917. Their appeal soon earned institutional support. At the initiation of the literary scholar Liu Fu 劉復 (1891-1934) and with support from Peking University president Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868-1940), the movement for folksong collecting began in 1918 at Peking University with a bureau (geyao zhengjiju 歌謠徵集局) specifically set up on campus for the purpose. Results of the movement were published regularly in the bureau’s official periodical, *Geyao zhoukan* (歌謠周刊 *Folksong Weekly*) beginning in 1922, with articles by Liu Fu and historian Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893-1980), among others. Many of the authors, furthermore, gained the reputation, human resources, and capital necessary to fuel the emerging folklore research from their

⁸⁹ Hung, *Going to the People*, p. 15-17.

academic positions and affiliations.⁹⁰ Reviewing the field's early history, it is clear that institutionalization was central to the field from the beginning. As the state-sanctioned Confucian value system collapsed with the end of the imperial period, emerging institutional support from Peking University approved scholarly endeavors and intellectual trends during the “early decades of the twentieth century when intellectuals were supremely challenged.”⁹¹ In the founding years of the modern Chinese folklore movement, the connection among leading intellectuals, academic institutions, and publications to disseminate the movement’s influence within the Chinese intellectual realm was critical and tight.

The great majority of the New Culture intellectuals involved in the folklore movement have been identified with the political left. Qi Rushan, in contrast, because of his later move to Taiwan, has been associated with Nationalist political sympathies. And yet, political differences notwithstanding, Qi Rushan shared many methodological similarities with early Chinese folklorists, as both attempted to approach Chinese popular culture from new perspectives. Both emphasized the urgency of collecting given their anxiety that research materials would be otherwise lost if no intervention in the oral tradition and transmission were to take place.⁹² Facing the unprecedented challenge of researching folk culture in an allegedly scientific way, both strove to collect inclusively in order to build the widest possible material foundation for further research. Indeed, no matter where one fell on the political spectrum, the seemingly

⁹⁰ For instance, as one of the founders of Chinese folklore studies, Liu returned from his doctoral study in Paris and became a professor at Peking University in 1925. Gu Jiegang enrolled at Peking University where his curiosity about the relation between popular literature and history arose. Gu’s interest in the folk later materialized as a publication entitled *Wuge jiaji* [The First Collection of Songs from Wu Region]. See Hung, *Going to the People*, pp. 39-40, 47.

⁹¹ Timothy Weston, *The Power of Position: Beijing University, Intellectuals, and Chinese Political Culture, 1898-1929* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 6.

⁹² Hung, *Going to the People*, p. 15-17.

universal appeal of scientific methodology in modern humanistic research became an imperative to reevaluate China's popular culture (which it was claimed had been undervalued by the literati heritage during the late imperial period); it was this imperative that brought Qi and his intellectual counterparts together. Although China's native drama came under severe attack by many New Culture intellectuals, when the discursive framework shifted to (re)-appreciation of "su" (vulgar/popular) culture under the broad category of "folk literature," Chinese opera, often considered one critical expression of "su culture," warranted intellectuals' careful attention rather than total abandonment.

In the eyes of first-generation scholars of popular literature, "folk literature" was a powerful notion that could include almost all literary genres outside the literati mainstream. Zheng Zhengduo best expresses this conceptualization in the opening of his monograph devoted to the history of Chinese folk literature:

What is "folk literature? It encompasses a very wide range. Exactly because the scope of orthodox literature is too narrow, the scope of "folk literature" becomes comprehensive. Nearly all important literary forms other than poetry and prose—such as novels, drama, transformation texts (bianwen 變文), and narrative lyrics (tanci 彈詞)—should belong to the realm of "folk literature."⁹³

To put it briefly, Zheng suggested that folk literature included "all literary forms that have failed to ascend the hall of great elegance," and those "considered not worthy of attention and disdained by learned literati."⁹⁴

Such bold statements shared with Qi Rushan the ambition to rediscover the "vulgar" arts,

⁹³ Zheng Zhenduo, *Zhongguo suwenxue shi* [A history of folk literature in China] (Beijing: Zuoja chubanshe, 1954), p. 1.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

which had been ignored under the literati concept of elegance. Read together with Qi's engagement in drama research, Zheng's definition of folk literature also signified a renewed effort to redefine China's cultural tradition from a wider perspective.

Song drama (xiqu), given its broad definition as an "other" of refined literature, was included by Zheng as one of the five branches of folk literature. He further divided song drama into four subcategories, within which one could trace the origins of pihuang in the subcategory of regional drama, difangxi.⁹⁵ However, the identification of pihuang within the notion of folk literature was ambiguous. The common origin of pihuang and its popularity across the social spectrum made it appear as a perfect artistic production of the folk. And yet, modifications and conventionalization of the genre over the years also developed at the expense of its grassroots origins. Liu Fu explained why pihuang was not examined in the first scholarly work on China's popular songs (suqu 俗曲): "these two kinds of drama (i.e., pihuang and Kun opera) had already attained the formal attributes of stage plays (wutai ju 舞台劇) and no longer belonged to the category of variety shows (zashua 雜耍)."⁹⁶ Comparing folksong and song drama more generally, he also suggested that the former illustrated better the essences of the "folk" than did the latter. For Liu, folksong was more worthy of study because it possessed the "most faithful and concise materials" with which to "examine the civilizations unique to [different] races," since "unlike drama which is art catering to audiences, [folksongs] are sung by good-natured commoners to express their temperament. Therefore, they are free from [any] restraints and

⁹⁵ Zheng, *Zhongguo suwenxue shi*, p. 9.

⁹⁶ Liu Fu, "Zhongguo suqu zongmu gao," in Liu Fu, *Bannong zawen re ji*, p.293.

concerns to please [audiences].”⁹⁷ Song drama, once performed by career actors, would be subject to market preference and easily fall into the trap of rigid conventions. On the contrary, folksong, since it had always been transmitted through commoners, would stay true to its nature and retain the essence of everyday life.

Despite their shared interest in researching Chinese song drama, one critical difference stood out between scholars of popular literature and Qi Rushan. Unlike the former, who viewed drama as a form of literature, Qi Rushan launched his research project with his performance-oriented approach in mind. It is these two distinct takes on drama that differentiated Qi Rushan’s collecting of oral knowledge of theater from that of contemporary intellectual trends. As the title of Zheng’s monograph—*The History of Chinese Folk Literature*—indicates, scholars of popular literature mostly viewed drama in textual form with a history that was traceable through written records. These records, other than a few zaju scripts with identifiable playwrights, left their authorship challenging to determine. The anonymity of theatrical texts allowed scholars to treat drama as a nameless and collective production that seamlessly fit into the intellectuals’ conceptualization of the “folk.” If the agency of the “people” was muted in folklore research, similarly the voices of participants in Chinese theater were silenced under the notion of folk literature. However, with Qi Rushan’s performative approach to drama, a different picture surfaced. Given his curiosity about actual productions, theatrical practitioners’ voices were not merely optional but a necessity to be collected. It was only through their retelling of personal experiences in the theater that researchers from outside could glimpse the actual working of the form. This demand highlighted the individualities of theatrical practitioners, putting them in

⁹⁷ Liu Fu, “Xu” in Gu Jiegang, *Wuge jiaji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 2010), p. 22.

sharp contrast to the faceless “people” who produced folk culture in collectivity. It also made available better documentation of interactions between researchers and theatrical professionals. Such records present a more nuanced understanding of the tensions between different knowledge traditions (oral and textual) as well as identity-claims (of modern humanities researchers and career artists). Although it is arguable that the practitioners’ voices may have been edited by the connoisseur-researchers in print, they nevertheless enjoyed a greater possibility of marking their distinct artistic individualities.

In addition to their contrasting viewpoints on drama, institutionalization of research activities also separated Qi Rushan’s collecting from the folksong movement. As mentioned, most figures associated with the folksong movement had academic affiliations, which offered them cultural capital, if not substantial financial support. The academic infrastructure also made it possible for the folklorists to systematically publish and circulate their research. On the contrary, Qi Rushan relied mostly on his personal connections with theatrical practitioners to collect oral materials. His relationships with theatrical workers, especially with leading actors of the time, did not appear too different from the age-old association between literati patrons and actors in late imperial times. Although such associations had often been tainted with erotic implications historically, in the Republican period it was now justified as a necessity for modern drama research. This new imperative, nevertheless, did not override the importance of existing theatrical consumption culture to modern drama research; and it was within the full-fledged urban theater of Republican Beijing that Qi Rushan’s access to human sources for theatrical knowledge was nurtured and solidified. Established modes of networking between theatrical patrons and practitioners also allowed Qi Rushan to approach his informants with relative ease

because of the age-old literati-connoisseur superiority. Qi Rushan's position as an independent scholar indicates an angle from which to examine the alternative dynamics of conducting humanistic research without direct institutional involvement or modern academic infrastructure. It shows that customary practices, rather than new institutions, played the critical role in writing the unwritten voices into the modern epistemological knowledge project.

It should be added that there were no clear-cut boundaries dividing intellectuals working within academic institutions and independent scholars such as Qi Rushan; the two groups associated with each other in private capacity rather than through institutional channels. The bridging across institutional fault lines was especially intriguing since it helps to explain the contradiction between the intellectuals' open opposition to native song drama in public forums and their private interest in the same subject. It was mandatory for New Culture intellectuals to make open criticism against native song drama if they were to make their political agenda of reforming/revolutionizing Chinese culture explicit; and yet, the cultural upbringing they received from an early age drew them to appreciation of native arts. Such a discrepancy explains why, even though intellectuals' engagement with studies on Peking opera was largely seen in their personal patronage, they, as leaders of opinion, never openly incorporated such interest into their reformative schemes. Their attitudes toward Chinese song drama could alter over time with contemporary political and intellectual trends, too. For instance, Liu Fu confessed in his preface to *Song Books of Mei Lanfang* (Mei Lanfang gequ pu 梅蘭芳歌曲譜) that his attitude toward China's native song drama had changed over time to become more positive:

I can admit without any pressure, ten years ago I published articles in *New Youth* arguing against old drama. Back then, my reason for opposition was that, given the dominating

position of old drama in the Chinese theatrical world, new-style spoken drama would definitely have no opportunity to come to the fore if old drama went without attack... Nowadays, new-style spoken drama has come of age. We do not have to take an aggressive attitude against old drama; instead, we very much hope it prospers.⁹⁸

Liu's reflection on his changing views toward "old" drama over a decade illustrates that the intellectuals' preference for theatrical genres could be relative and fluid, and neither old nor new drama held lasting dominance. Reviewing the current state of drama research, Liu praised Qi Rushan's transformative role in the field, acclaiming that "now with aid from Mr. Qi Rushan and his literary craft, we finally have a savior at this level."⁹⁹ The hidden message of this compliment is that although Liu Fu did not step deeply into studying song drama on his own, his personal ties with Qi Rushan's project on Peking opera were close. Liu Fu's younger brother, composer and musician Liu Tianhua 劉天華 (1895-1932), worked closely with Qi Rushan on the notation of Mei Lanfang's repertoire in *Song Books of Mei Lanfang*. As part of the publishing project to accompany Mei's tour in the United States, the work was acclaimed by educationalist Li Shizeng 李石曾 (1881-1973) as a perfect combination of "music scores [notated] by Mr. Liu (Tianhua), songs [performed] by Mr. Mei, and "pieces [composed] by Mr. Qi."¹⁰⁰ In spite of writing as a public intellectual in the name of "we" (我們), Liu Fu's sponsorship of Qi's project reveals personal and even familial connections that tied together historical figures working within different organizational mechanisms (i.e., institutional versus individual) in the form of

⁹⁸ Liu Fu, "Mei Lanfang gequ pu xu [Preface to the song book of Mei Lanfang]," in Liu Fu, *Bannong zawen re ji*, p. 187.

⁹⁹ Liu Fu, "Mei Lanfang gequ pu xu," in *Bannong zawen re ji*, p. 193.

¹⁰⁰ Li Shizeng, "Preface," in Mei Lanfang and Liu Tianhua, eds., *Mei Lanfang gequ pu* (Shijiazhuang Shi: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000), p. 21.

literary patronage.

Another telling example is that of Gu Jiegang, who drew intellectual inspiration for historical research from his personal interest in theater-going. Writing about his early days in Beijing, Gu recalled that the most important idea he learned from theatrical appreciation was the rule of changes observed from popular culture. With regard to a series of possible changes made on the same literary prototype through transitions in the form of historical accounts to fictional writings and drama, Gu observed:

We cannot know the original appearance of a given story; we can only know how receptions of a story diverged in the imaginations of later generations. I assume that playwrights adjusted historical facts to their imagination to fulfill emotional need...The only accomplishment of my theater-going for two years is what I have discovered about the characters in and scopes of these stories. I know even though a fable may be utter nonsense, even nonsense has its own logical rules.¹⁰¹

Gu's personal interest in theatrical appreciation pushed him to further question the historicity of ancient Chinese historiography. The direct impact of drama consumption on Gu's volumes devoted to this direction, *Gushibian* 古史辨 (Doubting Antiquity), remain unclear. Nevertheless, Gu was indeed interested in shifting his private interest in drama into more serious, scholarly engagement. He showed his support for drama research through literary patronage of Zhang Cixi's publishing project on Qing literati writings on theatrical connoisseurship. For Gu, this sponsorship could kill two birds with one stone: it expressed his fondness of drama, while at same time, it clothed such affection with the look of modern scholarship, since the words of late imperial literati were to be evaluated as research materials for renewed intellectual interest in

¹⁰¹ Gu Chao, *Gu Jiegang nianpu* [A chronicle of Mr. Gu Jiegang's life] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehuixue chubanshe, 1993), p. 36.

popular culture.

Unlike Qi Rushan, whose research interest was mostly related to Peking opera, curiosity about drama only constituted one of many aspects of the versatile intellectual careers of Liu Fu and Gu Jiegang. Neither Liu nor Gu invested their full energy into collecting theatrical materials. Qi's extensive collecting activities in the theatrical realm began with his frustration with printed materials about drama, although his search for alternative, oral knowledge did not seem to be very promising at the outset:

I could not do my research from books. Therefore, I returned to ask those who had been working in theater. I assumed that they must know [since] they had been performing for so many years. However, my inquiries to were even more disappointing. To put it directly, none of them could answer my questions—all shrugged their shoulders in response. Some were very modest and said that they did not know; some pretended to know and gave random responses; others blushed in embarrassment and considered themselves incompetent.¹⁰²

The task to render performing knowledge into words was a new challenge posed by Qi Rushan to theatrical practitioners, who were trained to perform rather than to respond to questions about their craft. Persistent emphasis on oral transmission and bodily experience in the training of actors defied Qi's assumption that acting means knowing (the principles of performance) so there would be easy transmission of knowledge from inside practitioners to outside researchers. This setback, as Qi tells it, made him appear more as an outsider (*weihang* 外行) to the performance business; he had overlooked the gap between acting pedagogy and his own approach to knowledge. Qi's description of his baffled informants carried the age-old literati bias that viewed

¹⁰² Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 85.

performers as inferior to connoisseur-researchers.

Despite early frustration, Qi Rushan recalled how he gradually found a way to best derive the information he desired from conversations with theatrical practitioners:

I came to know many of these people through personal relationships. They provided me with the supreme opportunity to research national drama. I virtually could not do any research without knowing these people. Regardless of where and when, I asked anyone I met. Many people came to talk with me backstage when I went to a performance... I also frequently visited prestigious actors at their homes. [When I visited them] I always brought my notebooks and pencils... Although I've gained much by asking them [questions], I learned more by just listening to them talking and chatting since they often unintentionally said important things. They probably would not have been able to explain so well if they had encountered [direct] queries.¹⁰³

In addition to close and extensive interactions, what mattered for the acquisition of information was the format in which inquiries were conducted. Qi realized that he could not obtain answers to his questions in a formal “question-and-answer” format; instead, information that was worthy of collecting came out at unexpected moments during casual chats. The anecdotal, even incidental, utterances of theatrical practitioners refused any design of the researchers to gather practical information and transform it into formalized knowledge. For Qi, any tactic to investigate the working knowledge of theatrical practitioners had to be counterintuitive since they had learned it in a naturalized way, either through the actor training system or by working long-term in the theatrical realm. The challenge left to researchers, then, was how to produce systematized knowledge from the lengthy and random conversations with theatrical practitioners without the help of a set framework designed by an outsider to the field. There was no simple

¹⁰³ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, pp. 87-88.

transmission of knowledge between practitioners and researchers, whereas the threshold for the latter to enter the epistemological world of the former was rather high.

Although Qi Rushan appreciated the opportunity to gain first-hand exposure to performance, he had strong reservations about the applicability of such information for research.

In his memoir, he reminded his fellow scholars that more sources were needed:

I hope people who research national drama will not take a few words from one or two actors as definite rules. In fact, most of their words are not reliable. This was true for eminent actors let alone actors nowadays. [Researchers] must look for outside verification and then seek evidence.¹⁰⁴

Indeed, even though oral accounts were precious research material, nonetheless, Qi maintained that they should not be treated as the sole and the most faithful sources to study Chinese drama. In addition to scholarly punctiliousness, two factors may also explain Qi's reservations. First, Qi shared with earlier generations of theatrical connoisseurs a sense of literati superiority. This, in part, justified his self-designation as the final arbiter of information collected for research purposes. This sense of authority was reinforced by Qi's encounter with the "inability" of theatrical practitioners who "failed" to directly respond to his inquiries. Accordingly, individual recollections might be true personally to theatrical workers at the experiential level, but they required work from drama researchers to transform them into a generalized "theory" of Chinese drama that might carry universal truth. Ironically, in the process of knowledge production, external involvement was considered indispensable to calibrate the career performers' understanding of their own practice.

As it was part of a self-portrait crafted in his later years, Qi Rushan's recollection of his

¹⁰⁴ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 94.

methodology and experiences of capturing oral transmission about performance knowledge might be read as an advertisement to manifest the novelty of his research approach. In fact, however, Qi was not a lone explorer in this direction. This new emphasis on intangible transmission of performance knowledge was well noted by Qi's contemporaries. In his preface to Qi's *Organization of Chinese Drama*, drama commentator Feng Shuluan (馮叔鸞, 1883-1940) recommended four methods of drama research to those hoping to establish themselves as scholars of drama. Three of the four methods echoed Qi's interest in the "intangible" nature of knowledge production:

There are four methods to work with if [one] desires to engage in the study [of drama]: reading books, watching and listening to performances, learning to perform (xiqu 習劇), and socializing with veteran theatrical connoisseurs... By "learning to perform," one can learn about insider terminology that could only be known through [career] instruction. By socializing with veteran theatrical connoisseurs, one can extensively trace situations and anecdotes from earlier days for references. [These] are absolutely the correct ways [to conduct research]. [Only when following these methods] can one claim to engage in drama research. This is different from merely studying acting methods and, through an act of transformation, turning oneself into a career performer. Once we grasp the key elements [of Chinese drama], we can produce systematic research.¹⁰⁵

Among the four methods that Feng suggested, the last three required intense immersion in the theatrical realm to acquire information that could not be known through textual records.

Observation of the performing business and conversations with persons in the field were critical to such immersion since it was supposed to be carried out without the aid (or intervention) of

¹⁰⁵ Feng Shuluan, "Xu," in Qi Rushan, *Zhongguo ju zhi zuzhi*, pp. 1-2.

written words. Feng was confident that a methodology focused on these non-textual, intangible materials would bring about a new era of drama research. This “outsider’s way,” Feng suggested, “would be definitely different from the teaching of theatrical insiders (neihang 內行)—who are instructed only in set conventions (chengfa 成法) of singing, speaking, and movement but are given short shrift when it comes to the principles and history [of theater].” This methodology also echoed the intellectual trend of the times, namely, the scientific method, which “is to widely collect research materials and only then subject them to organization.” Grounded on a solid material basis, this approach would enable researchers to “grasp the key elements [of Chinese drama] and produce systematic research.”¹⁰⁶ Since Feng himself was a patron of Qi Rushan’s research, in his opinion, this task would be accomplished by farsighted researchers of drama research, xixue 戲學, such as Qi. For readers who applauded Qi Rushan, his works were examples par excellence of how different kinds of materials (tangible and intangible) could be utilized together under the researcher’s discerning insight to produce a new kind of scholarship.

Qi’s effort to uncover the “intangible” was acknowledged by more than his immediate patrons. Remarking upon “celebrities of national drama” (guoju mingren 國劇名人), one newspaper columnist wrote: “Regretting there were no written references on hand, [Mr. Qi] associated with insiders [to conduct research]. [He] asked whenever [he had questions] and took notes of [his conversations with the insiders] after he asked.”¹⁰⁷ Qi’s investment in collecting sources for drama research, in other words, earned him recognition as an expert on drama (xiqu

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Yan Sheng, “Xianhua Qi Rushan zhi shengping [Casual biographical notes of Qi Rushan],” *Beiping chenbao*, March, 27, 1936.

zhuanjia 戲劇專家). In another newspaper article, the author pointed out that it was highly praiseworthy that “experts specializing in the study of national drama had emerged.” Taking Qi Rushan as an example, “experts as such expound [the essence of] national drama from a scholarly point of view.” Even more noteworthy, the author suggested, was the establishment of the Exhibition Hall of National Drama (guoju chenlie guan 國劇陳列館), made possible by Qi Rushan and his fellow researchers.¹⁰⁸ The Exhibition Hall, and a research library, were both institutions affiliated with the Learned Society of National Drama. The former was devoted to collecting artifacts and written objects of the theatrical realm, whereas the latter preserved scripts of a wide array of theatrical genres, as well as historical and contemporary publications on drama.¹⁰⁹ The holdings of these institutions were the fruitful results of the collecting activities of theatrical materials during the first thirty years of the twentieth century.

This section examines the historical contexts and activities of Qi Rushan’s approach to collect “intangible” research materials about theater in Republican Beijing. What remained largely unheard from the “outsider” accounts of connoisseur-researchers, were voices of the informants. In the written world, theatrical practitioners, although not totally silenced, were usually presented to be dependent upon their connoisseur-researcher counterparts to record,

¹⁰⁸ Zhang Zhi, “Zi tou fawang tan guoju [Walking right into the trap to talk about national drama],” *Beiping chenbao*, January, 24, 1935.

¹⁰⁹ For contemporary introductions of the Exhibition Hall and the Library, see Wu Sheng, “Beiping guoju chenlieguan gaiguan [An overview of the Exhibition Hall of the Beiping Learned Society of National Drama],” *Beiping chenbao*, September, 1, 1936, and Wu Sheng, “Beiping guoju tushuguan gaiguan [An overview of the Library of the Beiping Learned Society of National Drama],” *Beiping chenbao*, October, 8, 1936. For a detailed catalogues of the collections, see Qi Rushan ed., *Beiping guoju xuehui chenlieguan mulu* [Catalogue of the exhibition hall of the Learned Society of National Drama in Beiping] (Beijing: Beiping guoju xuehui, 1935), and Fu Xihua ed., *Guoju xuehui tushuguan mulu* [Catalogue of the library of the Learned Society of National Drama] (Beijing: Beiping guoju xuehui, 1935).

preserve, and transmit theatrical knowledge.¹¹⁰ In the process of knowledge-making about China's native drama, would theatrical practitioners be considered, by themselves or modern drama researchers, to have their own agency as possessors of knowledge? How did the identity-claims of actors as professionals develop side by side with the transforming identity of theatrical connoisseur into modern researcher? These questions, involving the relation between identity-claims and knowledge production, will be addressed in Chapter Four.

Conclusion

This chapter begins with an investigation of Qi Rushan's motivation for launching a collecting career as part of his drama research. Situating Qi's endeavor within the urban, local setting of Republican Beijing, as well as the transnational context of competition over research materials for Sinology, this chapter discusses Qi's collecting of both tangible and intangible sources on Chinese drama. It complicates the history of collecting and its relation to the emergence of modern humanistic research by rethinking the historical picture delimited by two fault lines. The first line is political. It shows that despite the political divisions that separated Qi Rushan and his New Culture intellectual counterparts, Qi's own drama research responded to the call for a solid material foundation for emerging humanistic research in early twentieth-century China. The second fault line is temporal. In my discussion of the growing circulation of theatrical materials in the early Republican period, I show that the abundance of materials that emerged after the fall of the Manchu regime had begun in the mid-nineteenth century with intensifying imperialist

¹¹⁰ For instance, see prefaces to Qi's works by leading actors such as Wang Yaoqing (1881-1954) and Mei Lanfang, in Qi Rushan, *Guoju shengduan pu* [Register of choreography of national drama] (Taipei: Qi Rushan xiangsheng yizhu bianyin weiyuanhui, 1964), pp. 2-5.

encroachment against the Qing state. The material manifestations of this long-term political transformation laid the groundwork for the burst of interest in collecting in 1920s and 1930s.

As part of the literati tradition, collecting was not new to Chinese intellectuals. In the early twentieth century, however, this indigenous practice was given new significance within a transnational context of emerging Sinology across the globe. As exemplified by the collector career of Qi Rushan, Chinese theatrical collectors solidified materials for a purpose that was distinct from that of their literati predecessors. Collecting had become an indispensable component of the production of knowledge.

Chapter 3:

Legendary Beauties Revived Onstage

Introduction

“If [I] am defeated by [our rival troupe], not only will [I] be looked down upon by our troupe... everyone in the theatrical circle will gossip about [my failure].”¹ The thriving theatrical realm of Republican Beijing was a site of intense competition—for audiences, financial return, and fame. Even Mei Lanfang, one of the most accomplished dan actors of his generation, worried about his success on the entertainment market in his early career. Mei’s concerns were not unfounded. The Beijing entertainment market in the 1910s and 1920s was a booming one governed by old and new elements. On the one hand, customary practices of the performance business continued to be the guiding principles of troupe operation and performance management. On the other hand, the emergence of “Shanghai-style” opera challenged established theatrical aesthetics and reshaped the opera-viewing experiences of urban audiences. Both aspects posed challenges to actors to survive the market—and they would cope with the changing market in creative ways.

Mei Lanfang's early cooperation with Qi Rushan was an example of how actors and theatrical connoisseurs/researchers cooperated to succeed on the market. In 1915, the Shanghai dan actor Lin Zhaoqing 林肇卿 visited Beijing and performed the new play, *Bai ru ji* 白乳記 in the Wenming 文明 Theater. The new production drew large audiences and its box office success worried Mei and the troupe with which he performed. Mei realized that he would lose popularity if he did not mount new productions, and he went to Qi Rushan to seek out possible new scripts. Qi, however, refused the idea of duplicating the style of Mei’s rival, contending that “operas

¹ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 109.

from Shanghai” (Shanghai tan de xi 上海灘的戲) such as *Bai ru ji* had gone beyond the scope of old drama and were not suitable for well-behaved role types (guiju jiaose 規矩角色) such as Mei to perform. Instead, Qi proposed to write romantic plays (yan qing xi 言情戲) and mythical plays (shen hua ju 神話劇) for Mei.² Qi and Mei did not wait long for the opportunity to produce a mythical play, since it was Mid-Autumn festival soon after their discussion. The festival held out the opportunity for more business, but also for more intensive competition between troupes. Practitioners in the field were well aware of this. According to Qi, Yu Zhenting 俞振庭 (1879-1939), the troupe leader with whom Mei was cooperating at the time, brought to his attention that “For the Eighth-Month Festival, Wang Yaoqing 王瑤卿 (1881-1954) will be performing “The Heavenly Fragrance Celebrates the Festival” (*Tian xian qing jie* 天香慶節), a festival celebration opera (ying jie xi 應節戲) from the Qing court.”³ The news that Wang would be presenting a court-derived festival opera was certainly a big challenge to others on the market. As the greatest female impersonator prior to the generation of the four famous dan, Wang Yaoqing excelled in both martial and civil roles. He had performed for the Empress Dowager Cixi and cooperated with some of the best actors of the time, such as Tan Xinpei and Yang Xiaolou 楊小樓 (1878-1938). To come up with a strategy to win the competition, Yu suggested, “we should also rehearse a new festival celebration opera.” Yu’s opinion was echoed by Mei Lanfang, who was eager to solidify his reputation. In response to the practitioners’ request, Qi Rushan composed the new play, *The Goddess Chang E Flies to the Moon* (*Chang E ben yue* 嫦娥奔月),

² Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 108.

³ Ibid.

1915, hereafter *Chang E Flies to the Moon*) on the basis of the legend of the Mid-Autumn Festival. It also raised the curtain of the long-term cooperation between Qi Rushan and Mei Lanfang, which introduced Mei's signature aesthetics and Qi Rushan's promotion of song-and-dance in Chinese operatic arts.

This chapter explores theatrical production as a means to producing and delivering theatrical aesthetics and knowledge. It focuses on the two plays that harbingered Mei's signature aesthetics: *Chang E Flies to the Moon* and *The Celestial Lady Scatters Flowers* (*Tiannu sanhua* 天女散花, 1917, hereafter *Celestial Lady*) produced through Mei Lanfang's cooperation with Qi Rushan. It examines the production process of these plays, showing how they were the products of customary practices of the urban theater and responses to capricious market tastes and demands. Within the vibrant entertainment market in early Republican Beijing, Qi Rushan's promotion of song-and-dance, what I call his gewu notion and the key feature that sustained Qi's later theorization of Chinese drama—first appeared as a carefully crafted onstage production strategy to win audiences. This chapter, then, examines the commentaries on these new pihuang plays around the time of their productions and in later periods. In conclusion, I discuss the legacy of these plays, namely how they were recycled for Qi Rushan's theorization of Chinese opera.

The New Role of Dramaturge

Beijing's capricious market encouraged a new mode of theatrical production, which required close cooperation between actors and their learned supporters. Although the contribution of such educated supporters might be exaggerated by Qi Rushan in his recollection to establish his central role in the cooperation, the anecdote at the beginning of this chapter is an example of this

new partnership. The newness is evidenced by both the actor's initiative and the multifaceted capacity of the learned collaborators. As the following discussion will show, Qi Rushan's engagement with theatrical production involved playwriting but also went beyond the scope of a playwright. It was this capacity beyond the textual composition of a script that helped to craft Mei's signature plays onstage.

Mei Lanfang's invitation to Qi to compose (bian 編) a new play indicates a new development in the history of pihuang. In fact, the role of playwright and its close association with performance were something new to pihuang in the early twentieth-century. Unlike the long tradition of literati playwriting of Kun opera and the close connection between intellectual engagement and spoken drama, with few exceptions, the authorship of pihuang plays before the twentieth century was mostly anonymous. During its formative stage, pihuang developed out of a synthesis of diverse local melodies such as Kun, Han 漢, Hui 徽 and bangzi, and so its major plays were adopted from the scripts of these genres.⁴ A few literati playwrights enlarged the repertoire of pihuang scripts in the nineteenth century, but it was not until early twentieth century that new pihuang scripts increased sharply. During the two decades from the 1910s to the 1930s, more than one hundred new scripts were written and performed.⁵ This burst of new plays was a direct result of many new developments in the theatrical realm: the dominating popularity of dan female impersonators (the majority of these plays were written for the dan as the central role), the growing visibility of playwrights, and the closer cooperation between dan performers and playwrights. Unlike earlier generations of pihuang playwrights, the new generation was no

⁴ *Zhongguo jingju shi*, vol. 1, p. 88.

⁵ *Zhongguo jingju shi*, vol. 1, p. 565; vol. 2, pp. 657-63.

longer anonymous. Their names were paired with leading actors in performances, commentary, and news about opera; they also actively engaged with the theatrical realm in diverse capacities: as playwrights, commentators, amateur performers, and opera scholars.

Well-before his cooperation with Mei Lanfang, Qi Rushan had written his own ideas about playwriting during the height of drama reform and civilized drama (wenmingxi 文明戲). Engaging in conversation about using drama as a way to popularize reformist thoughts, Qi argued that heavily loaded messages in drama, despite being intellectually or socially meaningful, could become a drag on theater-going. “[In terms of playwriting], those people with new thinking (xin sixiang 新思想) have got it wrong. Since they have heard that drama in Japan and the West is beneficial to society, the plays they write are like lectures. Listening to these plays is virtually the same as attending class.” Qi doubted the reception of such productions: “other than those who sincerely pursue knowledge, average opera-goers certainly would be somewhat lazy to watch these plays. [As a result], playhouses would have no choice but to close their doors.”⁶ Qi Rushan’s suspicion of the effectiveness of reformist productions sounds sarcastic, but his commercial concern was real. According to Qi, if a playwright was targeting general audiences to maximize the impact of drama on society, he should be cautious about the incorporation of educational content within scripts, since the basic function of theatrical performance for the general public was to entertain.

In the same essay, Qi Rushan explained that the weakness of reformist production lay in its approach to move audiences: “...these plays mostly moved (kanhua 感化) audiences through

⁶ Qi Rushan, “Lun bianxi daode chuyi yu meishu chuyi bingzhong [On the equal importance of moralism and aestheticism in playwriting],” Qi, *Qi Rushan wencun*, p. 320.

words. They do not know how to move them through aesthetics. All such plays are straightforwardly realistic without any thought for artistry.” This, he maintained, was such a turn off that it “posed a great obstacle to drama reform.”⁷ Certainly, this judgment reflected Qi’s harsh criticism of the limitedness of theatrical realism and his emphasis on the aestheticization of drama (as he defined it). For Qi, the aesthetics of drama was the primary precondition to fulfill all other functions of drama. “It [would be alright] were playwrights to add social education on the top of the aesthetics (meishu 美術),” but Qi suggested that, “certain parts of plays still need to be aesthetically rich,” for this would have the effect of “making everyone feel optimistic” and “drawing them in.” This, he argued, was the best method “to promote one’s own ideas [through drama].” After all, Qi Rushan reminded his readers, money talks: “if [the stage] was no different than a Buddhist sermon, who would be willing to pay to listen?”⁸

In Qi Rushan’s early writings on playwriting, “aesthetics” (meishu 美術) and “aestheticization” (meishuhua 美術化) were the key approaches to strike a balance between the pursuit of social reform and financial return. In another essay in 1914, “Playwriting Should be Specific to Audiences of High and Low Cultural Statuses,” Qi further discussed how playwriting, when approaching targeted audiences in the right ways, could best bring the benefits of drama into full play. In the essay, Qi categorized drama audiences into two kinds: middle to lower classes (zhongdeng shehui yixia 中等社會以下) and upper class (shangdeng shehui 上等社會).

He contended, “It is common sense to write different plays for different kinds of audiences.”⁹ For

⁷ Qi, “Lun bianxi daode chuyi yu meishu chuyi bingzhong,” Qi, *Qi Rushan wencun*, p. 319.

⁸ Qi, “Lun bianxi daode chuyi yu meishu chuyi bingzhong,” Qi, *Qi Rushan wencun*, p. 320.

⁹ Qi Rushan, “Lun bianxi shufen gaoxia gezhong [Playwriting Should be Specific to Audiences of High and Low Cultural Statuses],” in *Zayan*. Reprinted in *Qi Rushan wencun*, p. 320.

the former, Qi Rushan suggested that the playwrights beguile them with stories of model behaviors from the past and present, good customs and practices at home and around the world, and a sense of beauty.¹⁰ For the later, given their “very dull spirit due to engaging all day in scholarly work” and their “gravity of mind”, the playwright could excite the audiences’ engagement with music, sensational stories, and plays “full of delights and spectacle.”¹¹ Perhaps not too surprisingly, for Qi Rushan, artistry was the unifying through line for audiences of high and low cultural backgrounds: it introduced new knowledge and social norms in a more palatable way for popular audiences; and it refreshed the numbed, overworked minds of sophisticated audiences. The power of art spanned audiences of different sophistication and sensibility thereby maximizing the effectiveness of drama. Written in 1914, Qi Rushan’s essays on playwriting represent an early stage of his incorporation of aestheticism into theatrical production. During this era of the “experimental stage,” when ideas and genres were collapsed into one another, Qi’s suggestion read as one of many choices for enabling drama to engage with the larger society. At the time, Qi Rushan had just started the undertaking of drama research but had not yet engaged in any playwriting or production activities.¹² Qi argued for the usefulness of the arts in promoting social good rather than the ultimate importance of aesthetics.

Examined against the backdrop of the contemporary entertainment market, Qi Rushan's criticism of the danger of overemphasizing reformist content and his reminder of the alluring power of theater held true. Even in cosmopolitan Shanghai, there was considerable resistance to

¹⁰ Qi Rushan, “Lun bianxi shufen gaoxia gezhong,” Qi, *Qi Rushan wencun*, pp. 321-22.

¹¹ Qi Rushan, “Lun bianxi shufen gaoxia gezhong,” Qi, *Qi Rushan wencun*, pp. 323.

¹² Qi recalled that he first attempted playwriting during the last years of the Qing, in the form of both spoken and old drama. However, these plays were never performed. See Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 99.

new-style opera given the “large concentration of well-known Beijing opera actors as well as well-established sites for opera performance.” “The operas performed in the major venues were drawn from the standard repertory...featured by famous actors.”¹³ Since “traditional” opera still dominated the scene, it was not easy for hybrid drama to claim its own distinct attractiveness without employing “a host of conventions borrowed from Peking opera” such as character designations, acting and staging techniques, and musical accompaniments.¹⁴ In addition to performing styles, the contents of the plays also determined audience reception. As shown by Siyuan Liu, in comparison with productions that were tightly bound to revolutionary messages prior to the 1911 Revolution, it was domestic melodrama that sparked the financial success to make hybrid drama “commercially possible.”¹⁵ Although there was no definite gauge to measure audience preferences for different genres of plays, sensational stories appeared to more easily satisfy the entertainment needs of general audiences.

The objectives for men of letters to engage in theatrical production were then clear: to help theatrical practitioners succeed on the entertainment market and to promulgate their own ideas (whether social, intellectual, or aesthetic) through onstage performance—if they had any. Through cooperation with Mei Lanfang, Qi Rushan gained the opportunity to try out his ideas of theatrical production. As illustrated by their collaboration *Chang E Flies to the Moon*, Qi participated in all aspects of the project. First, he possessed access to human resources, some of them the best on the market of the time, to carry out a production project. Second, he had a full command of the knowledge of the market, including new performing fashions introduced to

¹³ Karl, *Staging the World*, p. 46.

¹⁴ Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, pp. 100-101.

¹⁵ Siyan Liu, *Performing Hybridity in Colonial-Modern China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 71.

Beijing from Shanghai, the audiences' taste (for the new), and customs of local business operation (organizing programs in accordance with the festival calendar). Third, and equally important, was his erudition in the craft of opera, which involved playwriting, choreography, costume design, and stage setting (all of these elements will be discussed in detail in the following section on the actual production of the plays). It is clear that Qi's performance-oriented activities went beyond the scope of a playwright. To borrow from western terminology, his undertaking was more similar to that of a dramaturge: namely, to study and to create all the elements of drama on the stage. This was a new role in early twentieth-century China.

To demonstrate the content and scope of Qi Rushan's theatrical productions, I offer detailed discussion of his involvement in two early plays that manifested Mei's signature aesthetics: *Chang E Flies to the Moon* and *Celestial Lady*. In these productions, Qi carved out a path to introduce newness into pihuang performance—most notably a new aesthetic that presented song-and-dance as an integrated unity onstage.

The Plays

During their eighteen years of cooperation, Qi Rushan participated in production of twenty-six plays for Mei Lanfang.¹⁶ Qi's engagement in these activities were multiple and simultaneous: as playwright, agent, performance instructor, and stage designer. Due to the limitation of historical sources and the complexity of theatrical production, to distinguish Qi Rushan's specific responsibilities in a production would nearly be impossible. Similarly challenging is to exactly reconstruct the production process of Mei's signature plays. The majority of such accounts were

¹⁶ Their collaboration started with *Imprisoned Lovers* (*Lao yu yuan yang* 牢獄鴛鴦) in 1915 and ended with *The Regret of the Eternal Depart of Death* (*Shengsi hen* 生死恨) in 1933.

written after 1949, and these retrospective writings inevitably serve the different political stances of authors on either side of the Taiwan Strait. The Nationalists and the Communists had competed against each other to be the only authentic representative of Chinese culture. While Qi Rushan and Mei Lanfang both claimed credit for their contributions to the making of a new Peking Opera, their accounts can also be read as evidence to legitimize the regimes under which they lived. Recognizing this complexity of competing accounts and the larger political context within which the accounts were produced, the purpose of this section is not to determine the major driving force behind Mei's stellar career. Instead, my interest lies in exploring the possibility of transmitting and popularizing aesthetic ideas through theatrical production, as well as how a variety of production responsibilities might be taken on by one person.

Unlike the emphasis on the actor's agency in immediate post-1949 writings, contemporary reflections on Mei's career attribute his achievement to the help of a "group" of teachers and advisors. Comparing the factors that led to the artistic achievement of the four famous dan actors, one newspaper commentator detailed a list of names in Mei's personal network and their contribution to Mei's career:

(F) Mentors and Friends

Lanfang has more than ten people including Qiao Huilan 喬蕙蘭 (1859-) and Chen Delin 陳德霖 (1862-1930) as his teachers. There are also about ten people, including Li Shikan 李釋堪 (1888-1961), Qi Rushan, and Huang Qiuyue 黃秋岳 (1891-1937) that [help him as] his friends. [These friends] write scripts, act as advisors, work to publicize, and network [on his behalf]. For every finished production, they work collectively, they pool their ideas, with the goal of perfection in terms of the ordering of scenes, costume design, deliberating over the lyrics, and arranging melodies. Lanfang also follows their good

advice to pursue the advancement of his art. [He] would not be successful without the promotion of instructors and beneficial friends or the strategies of famous gentlemen.¹⁷

This passage reflects an age-old theme: actors, conceived as culturally inferior to men of letters, had to rely on the guidance and patronage of the latter to succeed. Other than the different emphasis on artistic agency (on patrons versus on the performers), this account echoes Mei Lanfang's memory of his collaboration with his advisory friends. Mei, recalling the production of *Chang E Flies to the Moon*, writes, "We applied a method of collective playwriting (jiti bianzhi 集體編製) to accomplish this experimental work." Among the group of his "opera-enthusiast friends from outside the performance business," Mei remembered that there were people "who had in-depth understanding about the contents and meaning of the plays; others were good at the music and rhyme;... still others excelled in costume design, the matching of the colors, and the styling of props."¹⁸ Both accounts, contemporary and retrospective, emphasize the collective effort of a group of lettered men that included Qi Rushan without specifying his exact role in the production; they do not speak of Qi as taking the leading role within this circle of supporters (as Qi would have claimed). The process of making Mei's signature plays likely involved intense exchanges within the advisory team and between the group and its artist collaborator, a practice which was also adopted by other leading dan actors and their educated patrons.

Qi Rushan's accounts of his collaboration with Mei largely dismisses the presence of Mei's advisory group. However, my major focus is not on whether Qi solely contributed to Mei's

¹⁷ Su Shaojing, "Xiandai sida mingdan bi bijiao (xia) [A comparison on the four leading dan actors (part B)]," *Banyue xiju* [Drama bi-weekly], vol. 6 (May 1, 1937).

¹⁸ Mei Lanfang and Xu Jichuan, *Wutai shenghuo sishi nian* [My forty years of life on the stage] (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1987), p. 255.

success or served as the leader of the group. For me, Qi occupied a central position in the production process, not on account of how much credit each play owned to him, but because of his continuing efforts (spanning more than two decades) to deliver an aesthetic of Chinese opera through participation in the production process. Given this reason, my discussion focuses on the linkage between the early onstage presentation of this aesthetic and its later theorization.

Accordingly, I emphasize more about his engagements with those elements (choreography, costume, and stage design) that would materialize these concepts onstage rather than the scripts of these productions.

I choose to examine Mei Lanfang's early productions because of their international and domestic legacies. The two plays I examines in this chapter, *Chang E Flies to the Moon* and *Celestial Lady*, contributed to the later internationalization of Chinese drama that Mei represented, as Qi recalled the preparation of Mei's overseas tours, "Since they (the westerners) welcome musicals (gewu ju 歌舞劇), we should proceed in this direction."¹⁹ Second, the historical significance of these plays (to Mei's career and the development of Chinese opera) also gained domestic recognition. Commenting on the careers of the four famous dan, one author agreed that Mei's new production are "considered outstanding since they allow [Mei] to fully express his talents" and listed *Chang E Flies to the Moon* and *Celestial Lady* as the "early musicals that paved the [foundation] for Mei's successful career."²⁰ They prescribed the direction along which Mei would continue to pursue his art. Such views were not isolated. Reviewing the recent history of Peking Opera, theatrical researcher Xu Muyun 徐慕雲 (1900-1974) made

¹⁹ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 113.

²⁰ Su Shaojing, "Xiandai sida mingdan bi bijiao (xia)," *Banyue xiju*, vol. 6 (May 1, 1937).

similar comments on Mei's early plays, acknowledging not only their influence on Mei's career but on fellow female impersonators of the times. For Xu, Mei's traditional costume plays (*gu zhuang ju* 古裝劇) such as *Chang E Flies to the Moon* and *Celestial Lady* opened up a new era in which all later dan actors used Mei-style new plays as a tool for attracting audiences. Mei was encouraged with the success of these new plays to create later productions such as *Mulan Joins the Army* (*Mulan cong jun* 木蘭從軍, 1917) and *Farewell, My Concubine* (*Bawang bie ji* 霸王別姬 1921).²¹

Chang E Flies to the Moon was the first major production in which *pihuang* was blended with innovative singing and dance elements. Despite the disagreement in competing accounts about who initiated the concept for the play, it was a direct product of competition on Beijing's entertainment market and the local custom of festival celebration opera.²² As Mei remembered his meeting with the advisory group to discuss the play, Qi suggested that "the only purpose of making this play is to produce a festival celebration opera, with Chang E as the main character." Qi Rushan quickly took the lead in the production process by volunteering himself to write up the plot outline.²³ However, Qi, himself, acknowledged that when he presented his outline to the group, it was not well-received. Qi recalled that people were dissatisfied: "There were only a few scenes and it was extremely simple... Not only were his (Mei's) friends not satisfied, but the other actors in the troupe also thought it was insufficient. Even [Mei Lanfang] was

²¹ Xu Muyun, *Zhongguo xiju shi* [A history of Chinese drama] (Shanghai: shijie shuju, 1938), p. 347.

²² As Mei Lanfang remembered, during a meeting between Mei and his advisory friends (including Qi Rushan), it was Li Shikan who initially thought Mei's physical beauty would make him a perfect fit for the stage image of the legendary goddess. However, in his memoir, Qi Rushan takes full credit for conceiving the production. See Mei and Xu, *Wutai shenghuo sishi nian*, p. 281; Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 108.

²³ Mei and Xu, *Wutai shenghuo sishi nian*, p. 281.

disappointed.”²⁴ Qi, however, was not troubled by the simple plot. He persuaded his collaborators of its potential for success, explaining, “This [play] is [going to be] what we call a mythical play. It is not supposed to focus on the plot, but depends on the arrangements. I promised that the play would turn out to be a great hit after I arranged all the choreography.” “Thus it was,” Qi continues, “that I thought to design the costumes and make-up in ancient style. I also arranged choreography for every sentence of lyrics, thereby producing a kind of song-and-dance play.”²⁵

Qi Rushan’s approach to composing *Chang E Flies to the Moon* was in fact a direct response to the entertainment market. Written in retrospective, Qi remembered how he explained to his collaborators his reasoning of the production through an analysis of the comparative advantages and disadvantages between Mei’s troupe and its competitors. It began with a comparison of the performing venues of each troupe:

With regard to the performing venue, they had built a new-style stage that included a rotating stage and backdrops.... Jixiang yuan 吉祥園 was not only built in the old-style, but it was not even well made back then; now the theater was dilapidated and stinky; its seats were no match for those of the First Stage (diyī wutái 第一舞臺).²⁶

Mei’s troupe also did not enjoy other advantages. “As for costumes (xingtōu 行頭),” Qi continued, “they spent eight thousand teals of silver to purchase newly made boxes of costumes from Shanghai.”²⁷ Mei’s troupe could not compete with such costumes and accessories. Given all

²⁴ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, 109.

²⁵ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, 109-110.

²⁶ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, 111.

²⁷ Ibid.

of the disadvantages, Qi asked, what elements could possibly help the troupe to win the competition?

Who does your troupe rely upon to gain popularity? You don't need to be reserved or modest to acknowledge that the success of your troupe relies upon Mei Lanfang. Since you all rely on him to attract audiences, we should think how to [make the best use of his advantages]. This is why I wrote the play this way. Others depend upon their newer costumes, but although new, many other troupes have them too. We will specially design an ancient style costume, which has never been seen in any troupe in the past or present. They rely on a multiplicity of stages props; we will solely depend on choreography and show our strength in song-and-dance.²⁸

Qi Rushan's analysis, first of all, reflected the tension between Beijing and Shanghai in the opera world of early twentieth China. While the latter enjoyed theatrical novelty and economic strength, the former relied on talents such as Mei Lanfang to appeal to the market. The discrepancy between Jixiang yuan and the First Stage epitomized the imbalance of economic resources between the two urban centers. Qi Rushan's strategy to win the victory was straightforward: to overcome the disadvantage of economic capital with the advantage of human capital.

However, the raw materials of human resources were not sufficient to triumph: the raw materials needed to be processed. Choreography and costume design were the two methods to create added value out of Mei Lanfang's talent. Qi Rushan believed that, by introducing innovative choreography and costume design to pihuang, he would make a new kind of Chinese musical to best allow Mei Lanfang to bring his unique charm into full play, guiding the actor and his troupe to survive within the entertainment market. *Chang E Flies to the Moon* was an early

²⁸ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, 112.

illustration of this approach. If, as Qi Rushan advertised, a mythical play was the form, choreography and costume design were the core contents of the new pihuang plays. Intriguingly, unlike the historical depth of the gewu tradition of Chinese opera that Qi Rushan would emphasize in his writings in the 1930s, his reasons for integrating song and dance elements into pihuang were immediate and contemporary. Seen in this light, Qi Rushan's performance-centered dramaturgy was a human-centered one that aimed to make the best use of actors' potential. His applications of this approach to theatrical production also took place a decade earlier (in the 1910s) than his engagement with performance-centered research on Chinese opera (published in the late 1920s). Given this sequencing, Qi Rushan's "discovery" of the gewu tradition did not function as a guide to theatrical productions. Instead, this notion was applied after the fact to string his career into a coherent narrative centering on one aesthetic essence of Chinese opera.

In the making of *Chang E Flies to the Moon*, Qi, Mei, and their collaborators attempted new approaches with almost no precedents from the Chinese opera stage. As Mei Lanfang remembered, "In the past, no one had performed plays about Chang E." To create a new stage role that would fit "the audiences' ideal imagination of Chang E," "putting on the costumes from old operas" was not enough.²⁹ Mei and his advisory friends first thought paintings of historical beauties would work as references to help with the visualization of Chang E.³⁰ However, the long skirt in the paintings needed to be adjusted for use in real performance and to better transform Mei's body into a performative female. In the final design, the apparel of Chang E was made as

²⁹ Mei and Xu, *Wutai shenghuo sishi nian*, p. 281.

³⁰ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 109.

an even longer skirt tightened around the body at the waist, thereby balancing the expectations of a slim, female body and a flexible costume for dance performance.³¹

Mei's reflection upon trying new costume designs pointed to the centrality of the choreography in the making of new pihuang plays. As Qi Rushan emphasized in his later writings, "There is no movement that is not dance." The goal of visual designs (costume, make-ups, and hairstyles) for the performers was to support a coherent onstage presentation delivered to the audiences through movement. In designing the dances for Chang E, Qi Rushan first drew upon Kun opera given the synchronicity of dance and lyrics within that genre. However, a direct borrowing of dance from Kun opera to pihuang was not possible due to the distinct musical characteristics of the two genres.³² For Qi Rushan, it took considerable effort not only to study the compatibility of choreography across genres but also to deliver his ideas to Mei Lanfang. Qi recalled that when oral instruction fell short, he would have to demonstrate the movements himself: "I had no other choice than to don a robe with water sleeves (shui xiu 水袖) to work with him (Mei Lanfang)."³³ The intense cooperation between the choreographer and the performer brought about a remarkable outcome. As Mei later described the key dancing scene, "The Dance of the Sickie" (hua lian wu 花镰舞), they successfully achieved the idea of integrating singing and dancing, pairing movement with every line of lyric.³⁴ To assure the best results of all designs and choreography on stage, Mei and his advisory friends erected a "stage" to have a full dress rehearsal before the premiere. Mei remembered that he "walked onto the tiny

³¹ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 110; Mei and Xu, *Wutai shenghuo sishi nian*, p. 282.

³² Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 110.

³³ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 111.

³⁴ Mei and Xu, *Wutai shenghuo sishi nian*, pp. 288-89.

stage and one by one performed all the choreography moves worked out by Mr. Qi and myself for them.”³⁵ Thanks to meticulous effort, *Chang E Flies to the Moon* was a box office hit and the success secured Qi's credit in the Beijing theatrical world.³⁶

The success of *Chang E Flies to the Moon* encouraged Qi Rushan to pursue other experimentations with song-and-dance plays, with characters especially drawn from Chinese mythology. In 1917, he cooperated with Mei Lanfang to present another of Mei's signature plays, *Celestial Lady*. Qi remembered the motivation for producing this play was simple: “...because *Chang E Flies to the Moon* was so well-received, I thought to produce another mythical play.”³⁷ Mei remembered that his inspiration for the play came from elsewhere: a painting of a fairy scattering flowers (San hua tu 散花圖).³⁸ Despite the different incentives recalled later, *Celestial Lady* indeed pushed the mythical play to an extreme, pairing highly complicated choreography with a very simple plot. The whole play developed from one line in the *Vimalakirti Sutra*: “Vimalakirti shows the signs of sickness. The Buddha requests the celestial lady to scatter flowers in order to test if the detachment of the Buddhist followers.”³⁹ The description in the Buddhist sutra was so simple that Qi admitted that he could hardly take any clue from it. However, the elegant and lofty image of a celestial lady made her an ideal character for the new mythical play.

Similar to previous mythical plays and to new pihuang plays more generally,

³⁵ Mei and Xu, *Wutai shenghuo sishi nian*, pp. 283.

³⁶ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, pp. 111-112.

³⁷ Qi Rushan, *Bianju huiyi* [My recollections of playwriting] (Taipei: Tianyi chubanshe, 1978), p. 239.

³⁸ Mei and Xu, *Wutai shenghuo sishi nian*, p. 514.

³⁹ Ibid.

choreography was key in the production of *Celestial Lady*. There were two major dancing scenes in *Celestial Lady*. Scene Four, “The Cloud Path” (yun lu 雲路), depicts the Celestial Lady’s trip from All-Fragrant Kingdom (Zhong xiang guo 眾香國) to the residence of Vimalakirti. The major challenge for the performer in this scene was to project a splendid Buddhist heaven and the divine beauty of the Celestial Lady through precise and powerful control of long silk ribbons. For instance, when singing the line describing the cloudy Sumeru Mountain, the performer had to “toss up the silk ribbon from both sides of the body, making it spin from the bottom to top as a spiral, then turn upside down, and make the ribbon into spirals and waves”⁴⁰ As Mei explained, he and Qi Rushan successfully designed a one-to-one match between lyrics and movements for the scene.⁴¹

“The Cloud Platform” (yun tai 雲台) in Scene Six was another major dancing scene in *Celestial Lady*, portraying the Celestial Lady spreading flowers upon Buddhist followers in Vimalakirti’s residence. It required special stage design to transform “the clamorous and bustling stage into a sublime Buddhist land.”⁴² A “cloud platform” was erected on the stage to allow the Celestial Lady to drop flowers from on high. It also required some additional thought to beautify the movement of “scattering flowers.” Qi Rushan reasoned his choreography thus: “Standing high on the platform, if the Celestial Lady were to simply grab flowers and cast them away, [the performance would be] lost in realism (xie zhen 寫真) and lack aesthetic value.” Therefore,

⁴⁰ Mei and Xu, *Wutai shenghuo sishi nian*, p. 523.

⁴¹ Mei and Xu, *Wutai shenghuo sishi nian*, pp. 521-525.

⁴² Anonymous, “Mei ju zhi mingjia xinpings [New Reviews on Mei’s Drama by Famous Critics],” *Gongyan bao*, May, 17, 1918.

“there would have to be all kinds of dance movements when scattering flowers”⁴³ By arranging the dance with the Celestial Lady’s airy silk ribbon, the choreography here helped to create an impression of a heavenly occurrence, imbuing the movements of scattering flowers with otherworldly beauty. The choreography even had some additional effects. Qi remembered that during the performance, “The crowd was greatly thrilled when the flowers sometimes dropped into the audience.”⁴⁴ As flowers fell around the theater, the boundary of the stage was blurred, the audiences in Beijing theaters were drawn into the carefully crafted creation of a heaven, appreciating “a song that only belonged to heaven.”⁴⁵

The stress on choreography was well noted in contemporary comments on performances of *Celestial Lady*. As one commentator reported, “The distinguishing feature of *The Celestial Lady Scatters Flowers* is that it is a song-and-dance opera. The dancing postures are purely derived from ancient Chinese dance. Integrating the advantages of “*odori* (踊)” of Japan and “dance” from the West, it presents a kind of world song-and-dance (*shijie de gewu* 世界的歌舞).”⁴⁶ This short characterization of *Celestial Lady* indicates several interesting points. First, it implies that the play presented some visual elements recognizable as those of ancient China without textual or other visual explanations. In the eyes of audiences, at the least those who had the literacy to write theatrical commentary, these features were identified for their Chineseness. Second, onsite observation of live performance accorded with Qi Rushan’s ambition to create a

⁴³ Qi, *Bianju huiyi*, reprinted in Qi Rushan zhuanji ziliao, p. 239.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Anonymous, “Mei ju zhi mingjia xinping,” *Gongyan bao*, May, 18, 1918.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

new kind of song-and-dance opera out of pihuang for world audiences. Within a larger rubric of East and West civilizations, this acknowledgement also implied the alleged suitability of dance and its potential to reach audiences beyond national boundaries.

It is clear that *Celestial Lady* incorporated many of the recurring themes in Qi Rushan's writings on Chinese opera—most notably the gewu notion— despite the fact that the theatrical production appeared ten years earlier than his writings on the subject. (Qi Rushan presented his systematical analysis of Chinese opera in *The Organization of Chinese Drama*, first published in 1928.) In addition to the time lag between materialization and theorization of aesthetic ideas, this points to a more intriguing message: performance was a more direct and effective way to deliver aesthetics, and to a wider audience. Reading from the comments about *Celestial Lady*, the core message of Qi Rushan's understanding of Chinese opera—that pihuang was the contemporary materialization of an ancient performance tradition—did not lose much.⁴⁷ Before Qi promoted his aesthetic construction of Chinese opera by writing as a “scholar,” he had already presented its materialization in the Beijing theatrical realm.

More than choreography, commentators also acclaimed the artistic achievement of *Celestial Lady* in all respects. The praise was especially enthusiastic when the commentator compared the play with Shanghai-style pihuang. Half a year after Mei's *Celestial Lady* premiered in Beijing, another production bearing the same title was mounted in Shanghai, featuring the actress Huang Running 黃潤卿 as the Celestial Lady. In defending the Mei version of the play, the keen proponent and critic of Peking opera, Zhang Houzai 張厚載 (1895-1955, penname Liaozi 繆子) argued for its superiority, praising the play as a “collective achievement of

⁴⁷ See Chapter Five for a detailed discussion on Qi's historiozation of the singing-and-dancing in pihuang opera.

numerous literary scholars who spent a half year of hard work to initiate and polish the production.” The production had many merits. First, “its exquisite make-up and charming choreography have been appreciated by audiences.” Second, “[Its] elegant lyrics and the sublime artistic realm have also been praised by men of letters.” Also well-received was “the beauty of the singing.” These merits, all together, bested the Shanghai production, which in Zhang’s view, “was nothing but stage design.” Zhang concluded, “the Shanghai production of *Celestial Lady* was just something to cheat Shanghai audiences.” Interestingly, Zhang Houzai had not watched the Shanghai production to write the comparison. His only source for the Shanghai production was a newspaper advertisement, which had faulted “the Beijing [theaters] for not being good at stage design.”⁴⁸ Rather than viewing Zhang’s comment as an unfounded attack on the Shanghai production, I read it as offering a general characterization of new Beijing-style pihuang production. In the face Shanghai economic strength and style, Beijing theaters had to present all-around theatrical production to compete. Zhang’s criticism of an “unseen” performance in Shanghai shows that he responded to neither the changes on the local (Beijing) market nor to a single play. He wrote to reflect his opinion about different approaches to theatrical production, and the economic foundations and aesthetic ideas these approaches presented.

Zhang Houzai's favorable comment on *Celestial Lady* was not the dominant view on the collaboration between Qi Rushan and Mei Lanfang. Contemporaneous comments and retrospective reviews on Qi’s dramaturgy took issues with new pihuang productions from a variety of aspects. Digging into the dissatisfaction with these productions, the next section examines how Qi’s role as a dramaturge was viewed and his aesthetics examined against the

⁴⁸ Zhang Laozi, “Haishang zhi tiannu sanhua [The production of the “Celestial Lady” in Shanghai],” *Gongyan bao*, April, 4, 1918.

cultural or intellectual trends of the time.

Reflections and Critiques

Although it was evident in the production process that Qi's participation in the making of new pihuang plays went beyond the scope of scriptwriting, in retrospective evaluation of the cooperation between men of letters and leading actors, his role was often reduced to that of the playwright. One commentator acknowledged the contribution of men of letters for enhancing the vitality of pihuang with their new productions: "all of the four leading dan actors and the bearded sheng actors, etc. invite learned men and famous masters to write novel and marvelous plays for them. [Performing these plays], the leading actors vie with each other for glamor and appeal. This is a proof of the progress of the art."⁴⁹ Certainly, Qi Rushan was recognized as one of the "learned men and famous masters" (xueshi mingjia 學士名家) that brought about the success of the four leading dan. His name was often paired with Chen Moxiang 陳墨香 (1884-1942), the seasoned theatrical connoisseur who composed scripts for Xun Huisheng 荀慧生 (1900-1968). These men of letter patrons were characterized as the obverse of mass audiences for pihuang. For instance, one commentator expressed his relief to see that pihuang had withstood the influence of learned playwrights: "we should feel lucky for old drama. Although there are men of letters (wen shi 文士) such as Chen Moxiang and Qi Rushan who arrange splendid and grand new plays, [old drama] has been throughout supported by the masses. It has maintained its identity as a people's

⁴⁹ Ning Shouqian, "Ju de yishu jiazhi [On the artistic values of drama]," *Xinxing bao* [Rising times], November, 19, 1936.

art (minjian zuopin 民間作品).”⁵⁰ The commentator positioned men of letters and the people in opposition, as the two groups contested over who would shape the look of pihuang. For the commentator, rather than saying the involvement of the former saved the genre, it was the later that maintained its lifeline.

Criticism on the impact of men of letters inevitably involved the identification of the genre. As one author wrote about “new plays” (xinju) as being “full of flowery lyrics, elegant songs, deep meaning, and highly polished words,” and as only good to satisfy the entertainment needs of “high officials and nobles and beyond the comprehension of the common people.” The author worries that it would be a dangerous development if “pihuang were to tread the path of downfall of Kun opera without even knowing it.”⁵¹ The “new plays” brought to pihuang some refined and elegant qualities that arguably had not originally belonged to the genre. Although the writers of new plays remain not identified in the comment, the mention of Kun opera points to the assumption that men of letters in playwriting were to be blamed for altering the nature of pihuang as a popular theater and distancing it from general audiences. Titling his essay, “I Have Heard that *Pihuang* Is a Wild Art,” the author took a clear stance on preserving pihuang for the common people.

If, pihuang, as the “old drama,” belonged to the general public, playwriting by men of letters was the reason for waning interest in pihuang among general audiences. Xu Muyun attributed audience alienation from pihuang to the addition of bookish taste in his *A History of Chinese Theater*. “The writing and production of new plays are the result of collaboration

⁵⁰ Rong Dingchang, “Mantan jiuju zhi piping [Casual talks on criticism of old drama],” *Shiri xiju*, vol. 25 (April 30, 1938).

⁵¹ Shashi Ren, “Tingde renjia shuo pihuang shi yesheng de yishu,” *Shiri xiju*, vol. 12. (June 10, 1937).

between leading *dan* actors and tedious lettered men of the time. This ilk is only good at prose and poetry. They do not have a through understanding of the principle and spirit of old drama.” Accordingly, Xu continued, “the lyrics they write are too abstruse, no less so than those of Kun opera, completely lacking the original popular nature of old drama.”⁵²

The attack on new pihuang plays was exclusively textually oriented, centering on the inaccessible lyrics and “difficult” scripts by lettered playwrights. Pushing this line of argument to the extreme, Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936), one of the leading figures of the New Cultural Movement, criticized the way in which Mei Lanfang’s advisors had transformed the actor. “Mei Lanfang is loved by the common people (suren 俗人). This makes him a target for the literati (shidafu 士大夫)... [the literati] have taught him to use language that is not understandable by most of people and [to perform] the coy *Celestial Lady* and the bashful *Daiyu Buries the Flowers* (*Daiyu zanghua* 黛玉葬花, 1916).” Lu avowed that this playwright-centered reorientation distorted the actor’s performative originality: “in the old days, Mei performed [the characters] in opera; nowadays, opera is made for him. All of the newly composed scripts are tailored for the sake of Mei Lanfang—to make him fit the literati’s imagination of the actor.” The outcome of this cooperation, according to Lu Xun, was indeed elegant but it was by no mean popularly appreciated. Rather, Mei’s new pihuang productions were alienated from the general public, since “most of audiences could not understand these productions, refused to watch them, and felt themselves not equal to appreciating them.”⁵³ Written in 1934, Lu Xun used term shidafu to

⁵² Xu Muyun, *Zhongguo xiju shi*, p. 348.

⁵³ Lu Xun, “Lüe lun Mei Lanfang ji qita [A brief discussion on Mei Lanfang and other matters],” in *Jingju cuntan bainian lu*, p. 52.

attack men of letters with a predefined separation between elites and the people. As a renowned intellectual, Lu spoke for the people, suggesting that the *ya* quality of new pihuang productions by men of letters was dull, expressionless, and incomprehensible to the general public. He shared with theatrical commentators criticism of how interference in pihuang production by men of letters would suffocate the vitality of the genre as a popular theater.

Commentaries on playwriting by Republican-era intellectuals reflect two simultaneous developments that shaped the understanding of Chinese opera theater in the early twentieth century: the emerging historical narrative of Chinese opera and increasing attention to folk art (in which pihuang was sometime categorized). In constructing the historical narrative, theatrical genres were arranged in a temporal order in which each era was represented by one dominating theatrical form. For instance, Aoki Masaru, in his *A History of Chinese Drama in Modern Times*, argued that it was the rise of popular taste that brought about the dominance of *pihuang* which had replaced Kun opera.⁵⁴ This historical observation coincided with Republican-era intellectuals' interest in the art of the "people." Such ideas were widely shared by opera commentators and readers in the 1920s and 1930s. Casual commentators in newspapers and periodicals, presumably not all serious theater scholars, wrote in the same vein as their expert counterparts. If the rise of popular taste had been the historical trend and testified to the value of the "people," the effort by men of letters to make pihuang "elegant" ran against the long-term develop of China's theatrical art and needed to be warded against.

None of the aforementioned commentaries on the participation of men of letters in theatrical production appreciated Qi Rushan's capacity beyond that of a playwright; neither did

⁵⁴ Wang Jilu, trans., Aoki Masaru, *Zhongguo jinshi xiqu shi*, pp. 446-47.

they acknowledge a new kind of aesthetic that Qi aimed to deliver through the onstage presentation of an integrated song-and-dance performance. In contrast to Qi's hope to unite audiences of high and low cultural sensitivities through the "aestheticization" of theatrical production, new pihuang plays were taken as evidence of the gap between men of letters and general audiences. Was Qi's attempt at "aestheticization" a failure? Contemporary commentaries did notice the salient feature of dancing. Zhuang Qingyi 庄清逸, an amateur singer and theatrical critic of Manchu descent, acknowledged that "although famous actors started to rehearse new plays beginning with the founding of the Republic... it was not until Mr. Qi Rushan and the famous actor Mei Lanfang [cooperated] to create new plays and incorporate the dancing of Kun opera into pihuang (as seen in *Chang E Flies to the Moon* and *Celestial Lady*), that an unprecedented new era and a great evolutionary period of pihuang started."⁵⁵ Publishing his article in *Drama Series* (Xiju congkan 戲劇叢刊), an opera periodical he co-edited with Qi Rushan, Zhuang's favorable evaluation of the Mei-Qi cooperation is understandable. Nevertheless, Zhuang Qingyi singled out the Kun-infused choreography as the most groundbreaking contribution that Mei Lanfang and Qi Rushan made to opera history.

Qi's choreography, however, did not offset the lack of plot in new pihuang productions, which some critics saw as a problem. Writing to oppose Mei's cross-dressing performance, Zheng Zhenduo pointed out that "a group of learned men of letters that patronize Mei... composed scripts such as *The Legendary Biography of Imperial Concubine Taizhen* (*Taizhen waizhuan* 太真外傳, 1925) and *Celestial Lady*. The lyrics of [these plays] are even more elegant

⁵⁵ Zhuang Qingyi, "Xi zhong jiaose jiu guize [Old principles of roles in opera]," *Xiju zongkan*, no. 3 (December 20, 1932).

than Kun opera...In [these plays], the [playwrights] attached the most elegant and loaded words to the most basic scripts.”⁵⁶ Although Zheng wrote his critique for a clear agenda to eliminate all “inhumane and irrational” elements (such as the cross-dressing *dan* actors) of “old” drama, his view on the weak plots of new pihuang plays was shared by other theatrical critics.⁵⁷ Discussing “the [pihuang] scripts that are totally fictional,” one writer mocked that, “there is no restriction on the plots of this kind of play. [The playwright] can arrange [the plots] any which way they like...Because of this, there is huge number of this kind of play, but they are also the most valueless. For instance, there is almost no plot for *Celestial Lady* and *Chang E Flies to the Moon*.”⁵⁸ Commenting the playwriting of pihuang as the Second Sino-Japanese War loomed, the author urged playwrights to “compose new plays based on historical facts” so as to popularize historical knowledge about the Chinese nation-state and solidify national sentiment. Whether to attack the backwardness of the “old” drama or the lack of historical themes in the pihuang repertoire, Qi’s new pihuang productions were taken as negative examples because of their minimal plots. The carefully crafted, highly elaborate choreography in his mythical plays was considered insufficient to create value in such plays.

Qi Rushan’s performance-based production (focused on choreography and stage and costume design that optimized the effects of onstage performance) did not overcome the prevalent textual-based theatrical criticism. For the commentators, the scripts did not become more accessible with the aid of choreography. Indeed, by the 1930s, Qi’s pihuang productions

⁵⁶ Zheng Zhendou, “Moluo zhong de pihuang ju [Pihuang opera in decline],” in *Jingju cuntan bainian lu*, p. 82.

⁵⁷ Yu Huijing, *Zheng Zhendou xiju lunzhu yu houdong shuping* [A review of the drama criticism and activities of Zheng Zhendou] (Taipei: Xiuwei zixun keji kongsi, 2004), p. 177.

⁵⁸ Jingpu, “Pingju qucai fenxi ji jinghou ying nuli zhi fangxiang [An analysis on the themes of pingju and directions for further efforts],” *Banyue xiju*, vol. 6 (May 1, 1938).

easily fell prey to the criticism of being bookish and were faulted for the decline of Chinese native theatrical art. Although Qi Rushan consciously incorporated choreographically elements of Kun opera into his new productions, he did not intend to produce “elegant” drama as defined by the well-established elegant/vulgar registers of opera. What Qi aimed to deliver through his new pihuang production was a new kind of aesthetics, mei 美, which was distinct from the literati-loaded elegance, ya 雅. The textually-oriented, contemporary commentaries (which did not even directly criticize Qi’s aesthetic) indicate that Qi’s construction of a performative aesthetic had not yet matured as a new theatrical paradigm. Qi Rushan chose to embody his aesthetics in the popular genre pihuang. However, it was precisely because of the genre’s genuine popularity that Qi’s goal of beautifying pihuang so as to appeal to a wider audience became more challenging to achieve.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Qi’s new pihuang productions were sensational hits when they first premiered on the market. The impact of these productions on the entertainment business was well-recognized. However, during the 1930s, market reception of Mei’s signature plays soured:

With regard to *Celestial Lady* and *Daiyu Buries the Flowers*...although these two plays have been fashionable for a while, their popularity did not last long. Lanfang has not grown old yet, however, these two plays no longer appear on the red carpet. This is because the audience psychology does not welcome dull drama.⁵⁹

In his essay titled, “Plays Promote Actors and Actors Transmit Plays,” Xu Muyun suggested that

⁵⁹ Xu Muyun, “Xi chuan ren yu ren chuan xi [Plays promote actors, and actors transmit on plays],” *Shiri xiju*, vol. 1 no. 1 (February 15, 1937).

the craze of Mei's early plays was already history. They had lost their charm because of the dullness that resulted from single emphasis on the dan role. It was not possible to attract audiences over a long period of time by the performance of just one kind of actor and role. To produce the plays that enjoyed long-term popularity, he suggested that all of the four roles (sheng, dan, jing, and chou) should be given equal assignment. This more balanced arrangement would lead to a theatrical production like "a robust peony tree with many flowers and flourishing green leaves." Targeting Mei's early plays, the author condemned the dan-centered theatrical fashion. He warned readers that if the trend were not corrected, "[There] would be decadent sounds all around," and China would have no hope to survive the intensified invasion of the foreign powers.⁶⁰

In the 1930s, the kind of song-and-dance opera that Qi Rushan created through mythical plays also came under attack for not being sufficiently progressive. One theater critic reflected upon Mei's early productions: "As for *Madame Shangyuan*, *Celestial Lady*, and *Chang E Flies to the Moon*...if these kind of plays still dominate the stage, their popularity only illustrates that Chinese literature falls far behind [the literature of the West]. Others have already moved beyond the period of naturalism, while we are still stuck with classicism."⁶¹ The author judged the status of Chinese civilization against a progressive chronology of arts, mostly defined by the literary history of the West. Following this rubric, instead of demonstrating the universal potential of the Chinese song-and-dance tradition and the progressiveness of Chinese theatrical production, Qi's new pihuang productions revealed the backwardness of Chinese theater. The universality that Qi

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Shou He, "Xiju de diandi [Drama bit by bit], *Juxue yuekan*, vol. 2 no. 2 (March 1933).

claimed to reach through his productions did not promise Chinese opera a more advantageous position along the timeline toward modernity.

Intriguingly, It was during the late 1920s and 1930s that Qi Rushan devoted his time to scholarly writings on Chinese opera and busily arranged Mei's tour to the United States, recycling his early productions to realize the "tactical orientalism" that made Mei Lanfang's tour such a success.⁶² In these activities, Mei's early signature plays were taken by Qi Rushan as evidence of the revival of China's dance tradition. In *Organization of Chinese Drama*, Qi regretted the loss of dance in China. However, "in the recent decades, the principle of dance is about to be lost in transmission. With Mei Lanfang's full-hearted promotion, [he] not only has restored the dances of the past hundreds and thousands of year, but also derives [materials] from the *Rites of Zhou* and the *Record of Music*...to design all kinds of postures. [Mei performs these postures] with today's musical accompaniment (jinyue 今樂) [to create] modern dance (xiandai zhi wu 現代之舞). Other actors compete to emulate Mei's dance, and dance [in China] has become popular [again]."⁶³ In *Mei Lanfang's Visit to the United States*, an account of Mei's U.S. tour published in 1933, Qi even remembered that when *Chang E Flies to the Moon* and *Celestial Lady* were first performed, the plays had been warmly welcomed by "domestic and foreign audiences" for their incorporations of ancient dance and "extremely terse and splendid scenes."⁶⁴ The major dancing scene in these plays, "the Dance of the Sickle" in *Chang E Flies to the Moon* and "the Dance of Scattering Flowers" in *Celestial Lady* were selected from among the dancing

⁶² Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, p. 277.

⁶³ Qi Rushan, *Zhongguo ju zhi zuzhi*, pp. 27-28.

⁶⁴ Qi Rushan, *Mei Lanfang youmei ji*, vol. 1, p. 6.

scenes of Mei's signature plays for the U.S. tour program to present essential Chineseness.⁶⁵

In his later career as a theatrical researcher, Qi Rushan recycled and theorized his early theatrical productions. Whether or not Qi's new pihuang plays were still well-received by domestic urban audiences or theatrical commentators in later times, they took on a new life as contemporary evidence of China's performative tradition in Qi's theorization of Chinese opera. It was in Qi's later writings that the choreography in mythical plays—which had been the product of the entertainment market of the time of its production—was explained through Qi's historicized gewu notion.

The analysis of this chapter reverses the assumption of a linear temporal sequence between theatrical knowledge and production order, suggesting that theatrical production is not the materialization (shijian 實踐) of theatrical aesthetics.⁶⁶ Rather, theatrical production was an effective medium for delivering aesthetic ideas. But it was also a fragile medium. The theatrical productions that Qi Rushan worked on were all very closely tied to the body and talent of Mei Lanfang. Qi's later textual articulation of his theory of Chinese opera was an alternative and more fixed medium than the actor's body to ensure the dissemination of aesthetic ideas. Crammed with the fruit of "research," these texts have overridden and reinterpreted the performances that once took the lead.

⁶⁵ Qi, *Mei Lanfang you mei ji*, vo. 1, p. 39.

⁶⁶ For scholarship that sees Qi's theatrical production as the realization of his theatrical aesthetics, see Liang Yan, *Qi Rushan juxue yanjiu* [A study on Qi Rushan's opera research] (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2008), chap. 5.

Chapter 4:

Bodily Learning, Book Learning

Introduction

The success of performance hinges on the bodies of actors—which are movable, changing, and unsettled. Qi Rushan’s new pihuang plays relied much on Mei Lanfang’s rendition to embody and deliver Qi’s aesthetics on stage. Mei’s body was also the center of discussion of these plays. Because of the centrality of actors in performance, performer education became a key issue for opera connoisseurs and or researchers. Transmission of the performance tradition required well-designed performer education to ensure ideal presentation of the aesthetics of Chinese theater on stage. However, in reality, training curriculum and pedagogy reflected the changing ideas of performing knowledge, and the actual practice of performer education reflected the possibilities and limits of preparing the next generation of performers within specific social and cultural contexts. In this chapter, I investigate the content and scope of knowledge of pihuang through performer education in the early decades of the twentieth century, with a focus on the tensions that arose from debates on different pedagogies and the targeted learners.

In learning how to perform, two approaches—one focusing on bodily learning, the other on book learning—attracted the most attention and debate in early twentieth-century China. What I call “bodily learning” is an approach that uses the body as a carrier of knowledge, delivering acting techniques from instructor to student through kinetic demonstration and imitation. As theater scholar Jo Reily points out, this method of teaching “simply requires that the master do and the student imitate.”¹ To acquire the arts of performance, students meticulously

¹ Jo Riley, *Chinese Theater and the Actor in Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 22.

observe the instructor's model presentation and continually practice the techniques they observe. Although "the student is simply expected to copy—as a child—without thinking," the learning process cannot be simplified as rote imitation.² Along with physical training, the instructor passes on to the student silent understanding of the art, at times supplemented with oral instruction. In opera circles, this methodology was (and is) commonly epitomized in the phrase *kouchuan xinshou* 口傳心授 (oral delivery, interior [heart/mind] reception). Clearly, this methodology demands close interaction between teachers and students, and relies on very limited to no textual transmission of knowledge. Over the years, *kouchuan xinshou* has been the working method among theatrical practitioners. However, in early twentieth-century discourses, this method was considered insufficient to deliver theatrical knowledge in the eyes of certain connoisseurs and researchers.

In contrast to the well established practices of "bodily learning," "book learning" was a relatively new approach to performers' education in early twentieth-century China. In a broad sense, book learning meant to know about the theatrical realm through writings on this subject. Readers of this kind might not be seeking specific information about acting or engaging with performance themselves, but might also be interested in general knowledge of the theatrical realm, such as the jargon and customs of the performing business, or the history of Chinese theater. In a narrow sense, book learning meant learning how to perform from reading texts. In practice, book learning could be supplemented with bodily learning. Students could read knowledge from books about what the instructor did not provide through personal instruction, while at the same time working on bodily training to gain the physical strength and flexibility

² Ibid.

demanded for performance excellence.

There were also two kind of learners of operatic performance: insiders (*neihang*) and outsiders (*waihang*). This identification was usually defined by whether or not the person was a career actor. However, I understand this position-making to be determined not only by direct involvement in the performing business, but also by the method of acquisition of theatrical knowledge. As will be discussed, a cultural hierarchy had been constructed by theatrical connoisseurs in the early Republican period in which only outsiders to the performing business were considered valid transmitters of knowledge about drama. From their viewpoint, participation in the acting business did not guarantee possession of knowledge. Being a *waihang* could mean mastering theatrical knowledge while keeping a mindful distance from actors. A *neihang*, on the other hand, might be a fine executor of the art that he or she did not really understand. This sense of superiority among men of letters remained influential within early twentieth-century discourse, in which *waihang* appointed themselves as performance advisors to *neihang*. The differentiation between *neihang* and *waihang* complicated performer education, since it was a matter of debates as to whether *neihang* or *waihang* had the authority to teach.

As *waihang* and *neihang* were differentiated by knowledge possession, position-making was understood not through discrete labels but as points along a spectrum. Along the insider-outsider spectrum, amateur performers (*piaoyou* 票友) occupied an ambiguous spot. Referring to those who perform opera without an economic interest (*shengyi xingzhi* 生意性質), the term *piaoyou* emerged in Qing times and the usage continues today.³ Many *piaoyou* were well-known

³ Qi Rushan, "Piaoyou de lai yuan [The origins of amateur singers]," in *Xijie xiao zhanggu* [Anecdotes from the opera circle] (Taipei: Qi Rushan xiansheng yizhu bianyin weiyuanhui, 1964), p. 193.

for their singing, and some of them even “turned vocational” (xiahai 下海).⁴ Through xiahai, an amateur singer shifted position from outsider to insider within the performing business. This fluidity made the existence of piaoyou controversial, and they incurred criticism from both neihang and waihang. If an amateur performer associated too closely with career actors, he ran the risk of losing the cultural superiority/distance of waihang, or lettered connoisseur. Meanwhile, given the relatively late acquisition of physical training, criticism of the amateur’s physical prowess was acute for those amateur-turned-vocational actors since their art was judged by professional standards. The career of the piaoyou reveals the contention surrounding the criteria for fine artistry and the education that went into such skill.

This chapter is about the identities and bodies of people—some well-known and some unknown—in the theatrical realm. The well-known figures, such as Qi Rushan and Chen Moxiang, engaged in almost all opera-related activities other than vocational performance. Their opinions about opera were disseminated in drama periodicals, newspaper columns, or as monograph, and their aesthetic cultivation was presented in theatrical productions through their cooperation with some of the best actors of the time. Many other theatrical commentators discussed in this chapter shared a similar platform of mass media with Qi and Chen, but as the editors or contributors to opera periodicals, they are mostly known for their performance commentary rather than other forms of engagement. The majority of the people I discuss in this chapter are nameless: keban 科班 (training troupe) students and failing amateur-turned-vocational actors. Their experiences can only be represented or reflected by those who had the

⁴ For example, in Qi Rushan’s *Qingdai pihuang mingjiao jianshu* [Brief biographies of famous pihuang actors in the Qing dynasty], there is separated category of amateur-turned-vocational actors to acknowledge the achievement of amateurs. See Qi Rushan, *Qingdai pihuang mingjiao jianshu* [Brief biographies of famous pihuang actors in the Qing](Taipei: Qi Rushan xiansheng yizhu bianyin weiyuanhui, 1964), p. 2.

access to publish and produce. Nevertheless, as this chapter will show, the nameless majority occupied a central place in the heated discussion on actor and amateur education.

In the following section, I begin with debates on performer education for career actors, the *keban*, and proposals to reform the *status quo*. I then turn to the debates around the learning of *piaoyou* to explore the intricate links between identity-making, the body, and acquisition of theatrical knowledge within a larger social and cultural context. In addition to the writings of key figures (such as Qi Rushan and Chen Moxiang), I also bring in various materials from the print media to capture the ongoing discussion centering on these topics. Although there was no single publication devoted to performance education, professional training and amateur singing were common topics in periodicals and newspaper columns on drama. I read local newspapers from Beijing, such as *Gongyan bao* 公言報 and *Beiping chenbao* 北平晨報, as well as opera periodicals. These periodicals—including as *Drama Weekly* (*Xiju zhoubao* 戲劇週報), *Ten Days Drama* (*Shiri xiju* 十日戲劇), and *Drama Biweekly* (*Banyue xiju* 半月戲劇)—were devoted to the reinvigoration and reform of native opera (*xiqu*).⁵ Some of the contributors wrote for these periodicals under pen names and it is difficult to locate their true identities. However, the identifiable authors indicate a certain network of active men of letters in the theatrical realm. Take *Ten Days Drama*, for example. One of its editors, Zheng Guoyi 鄭過宜(1901-?), participated in the editing or writing of almost ten drama periodicals over his career.⁶ When editing *Ten Days Drama*, he invited his “old friends whom he chats with day and night” to be

⁵ For instance, the mission statement for *Ten Days Drama* is “to preserve the existing art of national drama and advance the level of education of audiences,” see Zhongguo xiqu zhi bianji weiyuanhui, *Zhongguo xiqu zhi Shanghai juan* [All-China drama gazetteer—Shanghai volume](Beijing: Zhongguo ISBN zhongxin, 1994), p. 755.

⁶ Zhongguo xiqu zhi banji weiyuanhui, *Zhongguo xiqu zhi Shanghai juan*, pp. 908-9.

special contributors to the periodical, and the list includes some of the most versatile theatrical commentators of the time, including Feng Shuluan (dates unknown), Liu Xigong 劉谿公 (dates unknown), and Xu Muyun—all active theatrical connoisseurs based in Shanghai.⁷ With their personal network as well as associations and publications thereby established, these like-minded connoisseurs enjoyed access to dictate the taste of theatrical commentary by writing and choosing who else (including the nameless contributors) would be invited to write. By so doing, they voiced their concerns about old drama, and performance education was one among the many topics of their interest.

Reforming Education for Career Actors

In the performing world, career actors deliver theatrical knowledge to two distinct groups: on-stage, they demonstrate their art to wide audiences of Chinese opera; off-stage, they instruct future theatrical practitioners with their own understanding and experiences of performance techniques. As both major receivers and carriers of theatrical knowledge, career actors became the focal point of discussion and reform of performers' education in early twentieth-century China. Current discussion on the training of career actors usually considers this topic from the perspective of practitioners' experiences, analyzing the pedagogy and curriculum for career actors without contextualizing it with other viewpoints (e.g., those of theatrical connoisseurs or commentators) or the larger social context. It also views the working principles of career actors'

⁷ Zheng Guoyi, "Bianyi xiaoyan [Minor notes from the editor]," *Shiri xiju*, vol. 1 no. 1 (February 15, 1937). Zheng worked for Liu Xigong in the editing of *Drama Monthly* (*Xiju yuekan* 戲劇月刊) in Shanghai, see *Zhongguo xiqu zhi Shanghai juan*, p. 908. For a short biography of Liu Xigong, see *Zhongguo xiqu zhi Shanghai juan*, p. 871-72; for Xu Muyun, see *Zhongguo xiqu zhi bianji weiyuanhui, Zhongguo xiqu zhi Beijing juan* (Beijing: Zhongguo ISBN zhongxin, 1994) p. 1221.

education, such as kou chuan xin shou and si gong wu fa 四功五法 (the four trainings and the five methods), as unchanged over generations of professionals.⁸ Nevertheless, a closer look at the multiple opinions about career actor training in early twentieth century indicates that despite its prevalence among practitioners, the existing training system and methods had been under constant pressure to be adjusted. Through an examination of these contesting views, the scope and content of training for career actors also becomes clear.

Among all training institutions, I center my discussion on keban 科班 (training troupes) for two reasons. First, keban were the major training organizations during the time under examination given the decline of other institutions such as si yu 私寓 (private accommodation). Second, recently discovered historical material sheds new light on this institution. I focus on Qi Rushan's "On the Reform of Regular Professional Training" (keban gailiang chuyi 科班改良芻議, hereafter, "On Reform"), the only existing monograph-length writing on keban education in the early twentieth century. In this unpublished work, Qi Rushan, as a self-assigned advisor to career actors, wrote to promote his ideal of actors' training among a new generation of actors; he argues that the keban was the best institution through which to reform the training of career actors. I read Qi's work together with two historical sources on Fuliancheng 富連成, the long-running training troupe in the early twentieth century: "A Comprehensive History of the Training Troup Xi(fu)liancheng" (Xi [fu] liancheng keban de shimo (喜(富)連成科班的始末) and *The Thirty-Year History of Fuliancheng (Fuliancheng sanshi nian shi 富連成三十年史)*. Founded in

⁸ For instance, see Zhang Yuhua, *Xiqu zhi biaoyan gongfa: yi Kun Jing biaoyan yishu wei fanchou* [The principles of Chinese opera performance: a discussion focusing on Kun opera and Peking opera] (Taipei: Guojia chubanshe, 2010), p. 131-222.

Beijing in 1904, Fuliancheng was one of the most long-standing and influential training troupes from late Qing to early Republican times. As an independent keban (i.e., it had no affiliation with opera troupes, xiban), it prepared roughly seven hundred career actors and theatrical specialists, including some of the most representative artists of the time over its thirty-year history.⁹ Reading Qi Rushan's manuscript alongside the historical accounts of Fuliancheng, I analyze Qi's proposal for educational reform of career actors in light of the practices of the actor training system at the time. Current English scholarship has taken keban as a historical training institution shaping the larger background of the opera scene at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁰ In this section, I will focus on the institution itself to examine how it came to be central to the discussion of knowledge transmission.

In the late Qing and early Republican periods, students of opera had choices as to how they could receive training. They could choose private tutoring or the collective teaching of the keban. According to Qi Rushan, private teaching was divided into two types: sixue 私學 (private learning) and siyu 私寓 (private accommodation, also known as sifang 私房). According to Qi, sixue referred to individual instruction at the student's own home by either the student's elders or outside instructors of children from performing families, chosen if their parents considered the collective method of training too harsh. Ordinary families could also opt for home instruction if they did not have the chance to send their children to keban. However, Qi added that children of performing families would still do better than other children with home instruction since their

⁹ Mei Lanfang and Xu Jichuan, *Wutai shenghuo sishi nian*, p. 59-62.

¹⁰ For instance, see Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, pp. 32-38. Goldstein addresses general features of keban training (physical hardship, strict discipline, and collective residence of the students) but does not discuss how keban informed the outlook of performing practice and education.

elders were capable instructors themselves.¹¹

The second kind of private teaching was *siyu*. Standing in contrast to *gongyu* 公寓 (literally meaning shared accommodation for actors in a troupe), *siyu* originally meant private housing managed by leading actors for their own residential convenience. As well-to-do actors also engaged in tutoring at their own accommodations, the term *siyu* became a byword for private tutoring.¹² Renowned actors instructed a few students at home to pass on their skills. If the master considered the private tutoring a profitable business, he could also hire instructors to teach more students. This “expanded” private tutoring, however, appeared more like a small-scale *keban*. Students, usually at the age of six or seven, were contracted by their parents to the master for seven years. During the term of private tutoring, students lived in the master’s household with all expenses covered by the master. At the turn of the twentieth century, *siyu* prepared some of the best actors of the time, such as Cheng Yanqiu and Xun Huisheng 荀慧生 (1900-1968).¹³ Mei Lanfang also began his training with private tutoring before he joined the Fuliancheng *keban*.¹⁴

Despite its list of accomplished pupils, however, *siyu* became a controversial institution in the Republican period because of its alleged association with prostitution. Ever since the Qing, some male students of *siyu* played double roles: on-stage, they were charming boy actresses specializing in female *dan* roles; off-stage, they worked as male courtesans providing intimate

¹¹ Qi Rushan, “Keban gailiang chuyi” [On the reform of regular professional training] (Manuscript. Taipei: National Central Library), p. 44.

¹² Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” p. 45.

¹³ Zhang Faying, *Zhongguo xiban shi* [History of opera troupes in China] (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2003), pp. 316-19.

¹⁴ Zhang Faying, *Zhongguo xiban shi*, p. 322. Mei and Xu, *Wutai shenghuo sishi nian*, p. 57.

entertainment for rich patrons. In this secondary role, dan actors were also called xianggong 相公 and the pleasure quarters clients visited for their services were known as tangzi 堂子.¹⁵ The cross-dressing allure of boy actresses had been a great source of literary commentary for late Ming and Qing theatrical connoisseurs.¹⁶ Alongside the tide of social reform and modernization at the turn of the early twentieth century, however, private assignation with boy actresses, then viewed as morally degenerate, became less fashionable among elite patrons. In 1912, the siyu practice was finally banned by the new Republican government in the name of human rights and social equality.¹⁷ However, the historical significance of siyu should not just be viewed from the perspective of actors and sex work. Theater researcher Zhou Zhifu 周志輔 (1896-1994) argued that terms such as xianggong and sifang first appeared in Qing Beijing as neutral terms introduced by performers from southern China without sexual implications.¹⁸ Looking back on its history, Qi Rushan also acknowledged siyu as a major training institution that produced most of the leading actors (hao jiao 好角) dominating the stage during first decades of the twentieth century.¹⁹

In contrast to individual teaching and small-scale private tutoring, keban training was collective. In the nineteenth century, rather than operating as independent training schools, keban

¹⁵ Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, pp. 38-39.

¹⁶ For instance, see Sophie Volpp, *Worldly Stage: Theatricality in Seventeenth-Century China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), chapter 5.

¹⁷ Wu Cuncun, “Ershi shiji chu guanyu siyu, changyou bingtī yu zhongguo xingshi de xihua [On siyu, courtesan-actors, and westernization of the history of sex in China],” *Zhongguo wenhua* [Chinese culture] (2008: 2), pp. 98-111.

¹⁸ Zhou Zhifu, *Zhen liu da wen* [Answers to questions about Chinese song drama] (Hong Kong: Zhou Zhifu, 1955), p. 46.

¹⁹ Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” p. 46.

commonly were associated with commercial acting troupes, *xiban* 戲班. To distinguish *xiban* and *keban*, Qi Rushan explained that the former were formed of career actors who had already finished their training, whereas the latter referred to a group of children learning how to perform.²⁰ The combination of *keban* and *xiban*, an arrangement described by the phrase “each troupe carries a training school,” was one that brought learning and practice together in a single organization. It minimized the economic risk of running an independent *keban*. As Goldstein has observed, running an independent *keban* was a risky business. Although the headmaster might get enough start-up funds and even a subsidy from the imperial household, the long-term cost of boarding and training for the students often proved to be too heavy a financial burden.²¹ In the combined organization, each individual worked in two capacities. The career actors also served as instructors, preparing new talent for the troupe while supporting the whole group with their earnings from performances. The youths, as future career actors, could also contribute to the troupe’s finances by performing as their art gradually advanced over the years of training. This economic efficiency would help to secure the survival of the performing organization against financial uncertainty.

Based on exchanges with theatrical practitioners in the field, in “On Reform” Qi Rushan gave detailed accounts of student life and training at *keban*. Qi drew information from “what was said in opera circles” (*xi jie ren shuo* 戲界人說) for customs and practices in *keban*. He also learned about the *keban* training curriculum by interviewing famous graduates from the Sanqing 三慶 training school, including *dan* actor Chen Deling 陳德霖 (1862-1930) and *hualian* 花臉

²⁰ Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” p. 1.

²¹ Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, p. 32.

actor Qian Jinfu 錢金福 (1862-1937). Considering the keban of the Sanqing Troupe as having had the best pedagogy since the early Guangxu period (1871-1908) and as representative of the general curriculum of keban up to the Republican era, Qi reviewed the elements of basic coursework (jiben gongke 基本功課) at a keban from the students' entrance to graduation.²²

The student training and life in keban was difficult, with long-term physical hardships and the corresponding emotional consequences.²³ In keban, as in the case of private tutoring, students began their seven years of training at an early age. As the leading jing actor Hou Xirui 侯喜瑞 (1892-1983) remembered his days in Fuliancheng, these “seven years in a big prison” was of daily repetition of monotonous training.²⁴ Upon entering keban, incoming students would be assigned to specialized roles (fenke 分科) on the basis of their individual facial and vocal characteristics. The students would then begin their physical and vocal training to reshape their bodies into “receptive material, physically and mentally,” for advanced instruction in their specialty plays.²⁵ Also known as a “basic repertoire” (jiben xi 基本戲), these plays incorporated central skills for specific roles, which the students were expected to master.

After briefly reviewing the training curriculum of keban, Qi compares it with other training institutions, namely private tutoring and amateur learning, to argue why keban was the best method for preparing career actors. To begin with, Qi acknowledges the advantages of private tutoring. Private tutoring, which was devoted to training for leading roles (zheng jiao 正

²² Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” p. 1.

²³ Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, p. 37.

²⁴ Hou Xirui, *Xuexi he yanxi* [On Learning and Performing Drama] (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1961) p. 5.

²⁵ Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, p. 38.

角), was relatively selective, admitting only children with great potential. Consequently, pupils of private tutors “learned faster and their art was more refined”; they were also more likely to become famous later in their careers.²⁶ In contrast, keban aimed to train for all the roles that made up a whole troupe. As keban recruited students in larger numbers and with greater diversity, they could not be as discriminating about the talent of incoming students.²⁷ Private tutoring prepared future star actors, while keban equipped its students with the basic skills that could earn them a living in the theatrical realm.

According to Qi Rushan, the elitism of private tutoring lay also in the exposure it provided to book learning:

Pupils of private tutoring could socialize with men of letters (wenren 文人). Before graduation (man ke 滿科), students of keban were not allowed to talk with outsiders, let alone to have any contact [with the outside world]. At siyu, [pupils] could have extensive interactions with men of letters. Their speech and deportment were more cultured having been steeped in literati manners.... With advice and instruction from men of letters, [the pupils] could better understand the origins of plays and the meanings of lyrics. They would not make mistakes in singing and speaking; they are also more exacting about enunciation. ²⁸

The influence of elite connoisseurs on siyu pupils was both implicit and explicit. On the one hand, the pupils were immersed within high culture, thereby enhancing their competitiveness for elite patronage in the theatrical market. On the other hand, they learned from conversation with such men specific knowledge about performances—which their masters, who grew up with the

²⁶ Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” p. 46.

²⁷ Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” p. 45.

²⁸ Ibid.

same limited cultural upbringing as the pupils, probably were not qualified to offer. The association of actors-in-training with cultured men was not a designed curriculum but part of the larger theatrical culture that had developed in late imperial times. It was a way to sustain the survival of opera practitioners within the society at large.

Since private tutoring was proven to be successful, then what was the comparative advantage of keban in reforming the training of career actors? First, there were some practical reasons to prefer keban. As private tutoring was banned at the beginning of the Republican era, any attempt to use it to reform training for career actors would be less possible. Second, Qi argues that keban was a more efficient institution given the authoritative power of its headmaster, shezhang 社長:

Without a single authority, it would be difficult to launch [reform]. Students of keban get together everyday and absolutely comply with orders. If the headmaster thinks [an idea] is feasible, it can be worked out without any obstacles. ²⁹

As a self-assigned advisor to the opera circle, Qi imagined that if he could persuade a headmaster of his reform project, it would be smoothly carried out throughout the keban. However, did the headmaster actually enjoy the absolute authority that Qi suggested, and what exactly were his responsibilities to the troupe? As seen from the case of the Fuliancheng keban, in regard to the headmaster's work, "every affair [of the keban] is under the charge of the headmaster." However, this did not mean absolute authority for the headmaster, since "if there are important issues...it is customary to assemble investors and all staff members to discuss them at the worship gathering at the end of the year." At the meeting, "all participants have the right to speak out." If the issue

²⁹ Qi, "Keban gailiang chuyi," p. 1.

could not wait until the end-of-year meeting, “the headmaster talks it over with the investor (ban chu 班主, also known as dongjia 東家) at anytime.”³⁰ In other words, in a large, well-established *keban* such as Fuliancheng, in which “organizational principles follow mostly established guidelines,” key affairs were decided by consensus between the headmaster and its chief investors, if not the whole administrative body. In other words, should changes in the training program be deemed significant to the whole troupe, they would have to wait for discussion with other members in the group, instead of being decided by the headmaster alone.

If administrative efficiency of *keban* for reforming training was rarely more than an assumption, under Qi Rushan's pen, the benefit of collective learning at *keban* was structural and concrete. Among the many advantages of *keban* training listed by Qi Rushan, his emphasis on group teaching and learning is noteworthy. For instance, Qi suggests:

Learning alone, [one] could at most employ one or two instructors. Although the instructors may be good, at best they excel in their own specialty. All they teach [to the students] are their strong points. At *keban*, more than one instructor is hired for each stage role (hang 行). There are some specializing in civil (wen 文) plays, while others teach martial plays. Although most of the students learn from one instructor, it is convenient for them to audit [others' teaching]. Accordingly, their learning would not be narrowed down into one style.³¹

Qi argues that the “group teaching” of *keban* “brings great benefit to the students when they perform [on stage].” Instead of aiming to become the heir of the art of one master, Qi hopes the students might gain exposure to as great a variety of roles and styles as possible during their

³⁰ Tang Botao, *Fuliancheng sanshi nian shi* [A history of the thirty years of Fuliancheng] (Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe, 1974), p. 100.

³¹ Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” p. 51.

training at keban. The learning process was implicit: in addition to taking individual classes with the instructors, they could learn a wide variety of performing skills by observing instructors other than their own within the collectivity of the keban.

Emphasis on observation through collective learning, and the consequent ability to synthesize and create new performing styles, is also clearly seen from Qi's argument. Again, Qi begins his argument with the disadvantage of learning alone, suggesting that in so doing, "it is not easy to observe and emulate other roles." At first glance, this contention ran against the custom of career actors, since "strictly speaking, the boundary among the roles of sheng , dan , jing , and chou is definite to the learners in the opera circle." However, this boundary was preliminary. "Observing more to know more" was critical to the future success of keban students. After all, if a career actor "relies only on what he is supposed to learn [about his specialized role]... it will not be easy to make advances and discoveries." To make his point even stronger, Qi contended that even for leading actors who began their training with "private tutoring or amateur performing," they would need to rehearse with a troupe for years to become great actors." This was because "only within the collectivity of a troupe (quanban 全班), could one observe [performances] at anytime and anywhere."³²

The key term of Qi Rushan's argument is guanmo 觀摩, to observe and emulate others. The major advantage of keban in comparison with other training institutions was that it provided the best opportunities to guanmo. Qi's idea of "observation" was extensive and flexible. It could be practiced through watching the teaching of instructors as well as student rehearsals during one's spare time. Qi's pedagogy emphasized the imperceptible influence of the keban

³² Qi, "Keban gailiang chuyi," p. 52.

environment, where the students “unwittingly” (wuyi zhong 無意中) absorbed elements essential to their own artistic creativity in their future careers. It also recognized the effectiveness of *guanmo*, as Qi pointed out that “one would remember more from [what one observed] than from the plays one was supposed to learn.”³³

Learning through observation was not a new pedagogy proposed by Qi; instead, it echoed the longstanding practice in the field. Take, for example, the exhortatory words of Fuliancheng instructor Ye Chunshan 葉春善 (1875-1935) to students who were assigned to play spear carriers (pao longtao 跑龍套):

You cannot just stand to the side and watch the action. You must when standing to the side carefully study the singing, speaking, acting, acrobatics, as well as the movement and postures of the leading and supporting roles.³⁴

By so doing, Ye continued, “[you would then learn] all of the plays. When there come opportunities for you to perform, you will not be daunted by any of the [plays].”³⁵ Critical in Ye’s words was trust in *guanmo* as an effective way of learning. As an instructor in the field, his realistic rationale for learning from observation diverged from Qi Rushan. Because of the high student-instructor ratio in Fuliancheng, not every student could receive individual instruction in a specific play or role.³⁶ Learning from observation was a way to maximize educational resources for all students in a *keban*, preparing them ahead of time for any opportunity to perform. It

³³ Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” p. 53.

³⁴ Ye Longzhang, “Xi (fu) liancheng keban de shimo” [A comprehensive history of the training troupe Fu(xi)liancheng], in Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Beijing shi weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiu yanjiu weihuanhui ed., *Jingju tanwang lu* [Reminiscent materials on Peking opera, volume three] (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1985), p. 60.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Tang, *Fuliancheng sanshi nian shi*, p. 100-16.

stressed comprehensiveness rather than depth. On the contrary, Qi's pedagogy aims to build the students' profound understanding of the art. Within the environment and training Qi describes, students of keban would not become limited artisans knowing only how to copy and repeat what they had learned from their own instructors. Rather, they would grow into performers with an awareness of certain underlying principles that were applicable to all roles and plays. This stress on grasping the universality of theatrical knowledge echoes Qi's intellectual pursuit of an overarching "theory" of Chinese performing arts. Although the scope and content of the "theory" remained vague even in Qi Rushan's own conceptualization, for the opera circle it meant a common foundation that allowed the actors the liberty to borrow and mix skills of different roles and from different plays for their own artistic creation.

Other major reasons for Qi Rushan to encourage guanmo in actors' training through keban were practical. For children who were not gifted enough to be career actors, working as stage managers (guanshi ren 管事人) might be their second best option.³⁷ Stage managers played an all-inclusive role in a troupe. According to the definition in *A Glossary of the Pear Garden* (*Liyuan hua* 梨園話)—written by theatrical connoisseur Fang Wenxi to define common terminology employed by theatrical insiders—the stage manager is “thoroughly responsible for all matters backstage.” He “has the full knowledge of role-assignments, duration of performance, and dynastic backgrounds of all plays.” The stage manager paired actors and plays, as he knows well “which play needs what actors, as well as how actors would pair with one another for the best outcome when they performed together.” At times, he performs as understudy for actors of

³⁷ Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” p. 59.

any role type on stage.³⁸ In short, the stage manager managed the big picture in principle and carried out in detail the whole production. Qi Rushan supposed that the comprehensive knowledge required for this position could be gained by extensive observations of all activities at a keban. And only keban, with its collectivity, could provide students the necessary knowledge and skills for employment in the commercial opera realm.

Qi Rushan's reasons for promoting keban training were structural and pedagogical. It was the collective style of keban that provided the abundance of resources for training. However, as far as the content of training was concerned, the keban was an imperfect institution in urgent need of reform in the eyes of some contemporary commentators. Around twenty years after Fuliancheng's establishment, one newspaper commentator took the keban as an example to remark upon the decline of old drama. "Taking the decades-old history of the Fuliancheng *keban*, for instance, its teaching materials and pedagogy are inferior to that of earlier times!" Referring to "the opinions of many people," the commentator criticizes: "now looking at the performance of Fuliancheng, it is full of novelty but has no real skills."³⁹

Regret for the declining quality might be epidemic in theatrical discourse in the early twentieth century, especially for opera lovers who were concerned about the relegation of *pihuang* into the realm of the old.⁴⁰ However, such worries might not have been totally unfounded. In "On Reform," Qi Rushan detailed the that degeneration in quality of keban teaching over generations troubled him the most. Qi indicated that, in the past keban teaching

³⁸ A stage manager with insufficient knowledge could cause trouble for the troupe. For instance, "If the duration of play is arranged unevenly and the show finishes too late, [the troupe] will be fined by the police. If the dynastic setting of the play is incorrect, [the actors will be] booed by audiences." Fang Wenxi, *Liyuan hua* [A glossary of the Pear Garden] (Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe), pp. 142-144.

³⁹ Yanyan, "Jiuxi? Maxi! [Old drama? Circus!]," *Dayi bao* [Great Justices Times], 8 April 1938.

⁴⁰ See Chapter One for discussion.

had been more particular about singing and stage dialogue, and it had provided detailed explanations of the meanings of postures. On the contrary, instructors in Qi's days were not equally attentive to precision.⁴¹ A similar loss of particularity in instruction could also be noticed in the training of the musical accompaniment (*chang mian* 場面), since many melodies (*pai zi* 牌子) had been lost over time.⁴² Among the many reasons for the growing laxity in teaching, the shift in popular preference from Kun opera to pihuang was singled out as the major cause. “Ever since the Republican era, vulgar people only welcome pihuang, whereas Kun opera and bangzi attract almost no audiences.” The decline in popularity was especially acute for Kun opera, since it had become nothing but “a relic for a coterie of men of letters.”⁴³ Qi observed that earlier generations of actors started their training with Kun opera, which painstakingly stressed the integration of singing and choreography. Even if they performed mostly pihuang later in their careers, they could still execute the principles of Kun opera. Later generations, who had begun their training after pihuang had become the dominant genre, were unable to achieve full theatrical presentation.⁴⁴ The quick remedy for the decline of keban teaching was to add a few Kun opera plays to the curriculum, while the solution for thoroughly reforming keban training would be a long-term project.

Under the heading “Matters that Should be Reformed,” Qi Rushan listed two kinds of reform proposals for the keban. The first kind aimed to expand students’ knowledge of

⁴¹ Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” pp. 65-68.

⁴² Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” pp. 65-67.

⁴³ Qi Rushan, *Jingju zhi bianqian* [The transformation of Peking opera] (Taipei: Qi Rushan xiansheng yizhu bianyin weiyuanhui, 1964), p. 26.

⁴⁴ Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” pp. 65-67. See, also, the recollections of Mei Lanfang, in Mei and Xu, *Wutai shenghuo sishi nian*, p. 28.

performance, while the second encouraged cooperation between keban and other specialists (composers, playwrights, and drama scholars) to create new theatrical productions. For the purpose of examining the connection between the making of theatrical knowledge and actual actor training, the discussion here focuses on the first kind of reforms. I further divide this theatrical knowledge into two categories. The first category involves knowledge that is immediate to performance, for instance, explanations of the meanings of lyrics, singing, and dancing. The second category concerns a comprehensive, intellectual understanding of the theatrical arts, including history, past actors, textual records, and genres of Chinese drama, as well as the current state of drama in western countries—all aspects of an education that Qi considered necessary to nurture versatile career actors.

Ironically, although Qi argued for keban as the most suitable institution to reform actor training, he was doubtful about the qualification of current keban instructors to carry out his proposals. Speaking about teaching the “principles of script construction,” Qi regretted that “for hundreds of years, instructors of drama had not be able to explain. Since they themselves are thoroughly ignorant [about the topic], they have no basis on which to lecture about it.”⁴⁵ Such mistrust of career practitioners as transmitters of theatrical knowledge was common among lettered commentators on opera at the time. Addressing the “conservativeness” of career actors, one newspaper critic, “their intelligence is limited. For them, it is already challenging to memorize the little bit that their teachers had taught them. They know nothing about the essence of drama, the art of theater, or the meaning of scripts.”⁴⁶ Supposedly, when practitioners with

⁴⁵ Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” p. 77.

⁴⁶ Xiang, “Tan linggong de baoshou [On the conservativeness of actors],” *Beiping chenbao*, 19 December 1935.

such limited learning became instructors for the next generation of career actors, they would not be able to pass down any of the understanding of drama that Qi expected keban students to receive. It should be remembered that these comments on the shortcomings of actors were sometimes exaggerated and did not necessarily reflect the reality of keban. As Hou Xirui remembers his days in Fuliancheng, he always began learning a new play from its historical setting and the personality of the characters.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, in the eyes of a self-fashioned advisor such as Qi Rushan, the vicious cycle of limited knowledge transmission over generations of actors would continue unabated without outside intervention.

In Qi Rushan's eyes, most career actors in China "had technique but no knowledge."⁴⁸ "Knowledge," be it of choreography, musicology, or dramaturgy, was the stuff out of which actors might shape their performing techniques for particular roles. Unlike general disdain toward the performing community, Qi did not attribute the actors' lack of "knowledge" to plain ignorance. He understood the cause as a separation of the world of learning (*xuejie* 學界) from the world of acting (*xijie* 戲界), two fields distinguished from one another by their degree of command over the written word. Speaking about the loss of musicological principles in transmission, Qi noticed, "artists and scholars are separated into two worlds. Those who know the music do not write books; those who know how to write books do not know music."⁴⁹ The actors' limited literacy posed serious obstacles to learn and to teaching performance. As the keen proponent and critic of Peking opera, Zhang Houzai, pointed out, "the insiders [to the performing

⁴⁷ Hou, *Xuexi he yanxi*, p. 3.

⁴⁸ Qi, "Keban gailiang chuyi," p. 78.

⁴⁹ Qi, "Keban gailiang chuyi," p. 81.

business] are illiterate.” Therefore, “although actors have the experience of skill, they do not have the aspiration to [produce] scholarship.”⁵⁰ In the eyes of the commentator, since actors do not write, they are incapable of preserving the knowledge that earlier generations of practitioners might have known. On the contrary, although scholars are lacking in practical know-how, their control over written words enables them to dig into textual references to uncover the principles of theatrical art. Nevertheless, the gap between scholars and actors was not unbridgeable. With cooperation and aid from men of learning, Qi Rushan argued that theatrical practitioners would acquire at least a certain degree of knowledge (zhishi 知識), if not the erudition (xuewen 學問) of a drama scholar.⁵¹ In so doing, keban instructors, as practitioners themselves, could bring the teaching of technique and knowledge together in the training of future actors.

Qi Rushan’s tone in this passage of his reform proposal sounds like that of a scholarly advisor. His own writings on Chinese opera fit the kind of “detailed research” that he advocated keban instructors acquire from scholars to enhance their teaching effectiveness. For instance, along with anecdotes about theatrical life in Beijing in his *The Transformation of Peking Opera* (*Jingju zhi bianqian* 京劇之變遷), he offers information about the historical backgrounds of plays, as well as comments on changes in script composition and performing styles due to the influences of actors. The work is exactly the kind of scholarship achieved by “conducting detailed research on chuanqi, miscellaneous writings, and novels,” a research method that Qi promoted to enhance the keban teaching of script composition.⁵² Similarly, talking about the

⁵⁰ Liaozi, “Shuo xi [On drama],” *Gongyan bao*, 28 September 1918.

⁵¹ Qi, *Keban gailiang chuyi*, p. 77-78.

⁵² Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” p. 77.

shortcomings of movement instruction in keban, Qi remarked that “instructors, in the past, were quite willing to explain the meanings of choreography in drama. However, what they taught were mostly minor and superficial matters. It was unsystematic and not thorough; they could not explain the origins [of the movements].” To fix the problem, Qi suggested that “[we] should investigate the meanings and origins of all movement in dramas, so that [keban instructors] could present systematic explanations [to the students].”⁵³ Qi’s suggestion finds examples from his own work on theatrical choreography. In his *Register of Choreography in National Drama*, detailed descriptions of movements are arranged by the topics of sleeves, hands, feet, legs, and waist. Research on textual records of ancient song-and-dance is used to trace the origins of movement sequences in contemporary drama.⁵⁴ Qi Rushan’s emphases on excavating the origins and systematized presentation are seen from both the actual productions of his drama research and his ideas of actor training. However, the gap between the written and unwritten remained. Since instructors and students of keban certainly would not be the target readers of Qi’s writing on Chinese opera, who would introduce these works of scholarship to career practitioners?

Qi Rushan did not address how exactly to bridge the gap between the world of learning and the world of acting, but he was confident that keban students would readily receive reformed education. Since those students were younger and relatively new to the performing business, they would be more malleable and welcoming to “new” learning. As Qi wrote, “the minds of young trainees are pure. It is easy to input new knowledge in them.”⁵⁵ The verb “input” (shuru 輸入) implies that actors were thoroughly passive receivers of knowledge in the process of learning.

⁵³ Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” p. 84.

⁵⁴ For more discussion, see Chapter Five.

⁵⁵ Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” p. 105.

Compared with young trainees, it would be more challenging to add new elements to the training of established career actors. “Because arrogance is human nature,” Qi explained, “it is not easy to input knowledge into those who have already become famous actors (mingjiao 名角)”⁵⁶

Celebrity actors, the most wanted and highly acclaimed in the competitive popular entertainment market, had proved themselves by their popularity. It remained an open question as to whether the success of career actors was to be judged by their grasp of “knowledge”—that is, as defined by connoisseurs such as Qi Rushan—or by their commercial success. Qi’s writings reveal a tension that existed between learned opera commentators and career opera practitioners, and between the attempt to reshape the established training system and actors’ alleged resistance to such change. The comparative ease of remolding training for young actors remained speculation, of course, since Qi Rushan had not really engaged in pedagogical experimentation at the keban. His ideal of commercial opera training schools incorporating advice from lettered educators remained just that, an ideal.

As a proposal, Qi Rushan had the liberty to paint the most optimal training he envisioned. He urged that keban training should be expanded to cover a wider scope of topics, including: the genres of Chinese drama, textual records on ancient performance, theatrical literature, the current state of drama in different regions of China and in western countries, etc. Altogether, Qi considered these topics as constituting background knowledge for theatrical art. Some of this knowledge could bring direct benefit to students’ performances. On lecturing about texts on ancient song-and-dance, for instance, he pointed out, “These sentences describe dance moves almost as if they were drawings. If students understand this, it would be an enormous help to

⁵⁶ Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” p. 78.

their movement in performance.”⁵⁷ Other learning, such as the teaching of the “evolutionary history of national drama” would contribute “invisible” advantages to the students’ future careers.⁵⁸

The common focus across all topics was an emphasis on the history and transformation of Chinese drama. With this historicized drama education, Qi strove to break the obsession with secrecy (mi 密) in knowledge transmission within theatrical circles. The preservation of secrecy had been a deep-rooted practice of the performing profession. The chou actor Wang Changling 王長林 (1858-1931) told Zhang Cixi:

We actors treasured secret scripts very much. [We] do not share them with people of the same profession and even would prefer to burn all of the [secret scripts] rather than having them circulated in the outside world after [our] death. This [practice] brings great loss to the study of opera. Also, instructors in the past mostly taught their students through oral transmission. Since most of the actors are illiterate, few of them could write records of their learnings. Once the elder generation of actors passes away, there is much secret learning that is lost in transmission. The impact of this is not trivial.⁵⁹

Under Zhang's pen, the reflection of secretiveness reads as a career actor's regret for the inability to preserve performing knowledge. The predicament was aggravated by practitioners’ sole reliance on oral teaching, since illiterate actors could not transcribe their learning into words. The transmission of theatrical knowledge is provincialized by such pedagogy, as Qi Rushan commented, “Nowadays, people within the acting circle are very willing to engage in the study

⁵⁷ Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” p. 112.

⁵⁸ Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” p. 108.

⁵⁹ Zhang Cixi, *Yandu mingling zhuan* [Biographies of famous actors in Beijing] (Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe, 1974), p. 444-45.

of technique, but they know nothing about the history of drama and situations in the past. This is all because the pupils of the Pear Garden would treat that which had been passed down generation to generations as if it was the most valuable treasure, believing it to be an exclusive secret known only to them.”⁶⁰ Arguably, the fascination with secretiveness had two negative effects on transmission of theatrical knowledge. First, it vitiated against any questioning or revision of received wisdom, causing the actors to “only stick to the teaching of their masters.”⁶¹ Second, it hindered the preservation of theatrical knowledge. As one commentator speculated: “the actors...view drama as their monopoly to be carried out through private transmission. [They] keep the inside situation [of their practice] secret and say nothing about it.” Given the distrust against actors, the commentator regrets that “therefore, the essences [of drama] have mostly been lost over time.”⁶² These comments reflect the frustration of outsiders to the performing business. Although the authors had the control over the written record and the resources to spread their criticism on the working customs of actor training, they could not really break the professional’s secretive knowledge transmission to save what might be lost over time.

The obsession with secretive knowledge was not only prominent in career acting circles, but also spread to the wider theatrical realm. This emphasis on secrecy was commonly denoted in theatrical texts with the prefix “mi 秘”—for instance, miben 秘本 (secret scripts) and michuan 秘傳 (secret transmission)—which gave such objects an alluring quality, as if it would grant their consumers (theatrical patrons) the privilege to enter an exclusive realm of drama consumption.

⁶⁰ Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” p. 106.

⁶¹ Jinliang, “Xiju conghua [Chats about drama],” *Xiju zhoubao*, vol. 1 no. 1 (November 11, 1936).

⁶² Guan Shiyong, “Preface,” in Fang, *Liyuan hua*, p. 14.

The mentality of pursuing secretiveness also encouraged the popular promotion of celebrity actors, as their followers might “highly praise the faction of their own idols, to mystify it (shenmi hua 神秘化).”⁶³ Contextualizing within the overarching theatrical culture of the time, Qi Rushan’s advocated reform of theatrical culture was to broaden the vision of drama students so they would know that the learning passed down from their masters was not the only authoritative version.

Qi Rushan's call to enlarge the scope of regular training for career actors was shared both within and outside the commercial acting circle. Regardless of the poor literacy of theatrical practitioners, one outside commentator expressed his limited hopes for educational reform, claiming, “although I dare not entertain the hope that actors might read theses on art and overviews on literature, in order to realize the value of old drama, they must read books, newspapers, and periodicals related to drama.”⁶⁴ The urgent need for an expanded training curriculum also drew attention within the opera circle. As Shen Xiushui 沈秀水, the investor of Fuliancheng, explained in his “Announcement of the Establishment of the Educational Department”:

In recent years, society has evolved, and [its] expectations for artists (yizhe 藝者) have grown deep and manifold. Accordingly, in keeping with the needs of the current time, [we] should strive to further [our] learning. This is because if we make no progress in [our] learning, it will be difficult [for us] to refine our art. Literature is the source of [our] art. If [we] want to be conversant with [our] art, we must begin with elementary learning.

⁶³ Lingxiao, “Juxue yuekan gaishu [A brief introduction to *Dramaturge Monthly*],” *Juxue yuekan*, No. 1 (January 1, 1932).

⁶⁴ Shi Hao, “Jiuju shuaibai de yuanyin [Explanations of the decay of old drama],” *Shiri xiju*, no. 34 (October 10, 1938).

Therefore, [we] propose to establish the educational department. [We] will first have a class of students attend two hours of class every day, in which they are instructed in the national language (guoyu 國語) and common knowledge (changshi 常識).⁶⁵

The appeal to reshape the existing training from within was urgent. Shen remarked that “although a thorough-going transformation is not possible now, out of consideration for prospects and profit [of our keban], seeking expeditious progress is indeed necessary.”⁶⁶ As remembered by 葉龍章 Ye Longzhang (1906-1988), son of the founder of Fuliancheng, one teacher was hired to give two hours of instruction daily on basic literacy (shizi 識字) and culture—namely brief historical materials on each play. A reading room was also established.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, in its initial stage, the educational department was of secondary importance to Fuliancheng. The two hours of classes were relatively short compared to students’ full day of training in performance techniques. Also, the connection between literature and performance training remained unclear in the “Announcement,” whereas the teaching of national language it proposed seemed more intended to eliminate illiteracy, a common issue that plagued commercial actors. In regard to literature, Qi Rushan set more specific aims for keban students. “The [scripts] of drama were mostly adapted from texts of the aforementioned three genres (novels, casual jottings (biji), and drum songs (guci 鼓詞)). So [instructors] should often talk to the students about related stories from these literary genres.”⁶⁸

Although authors of different backgrounds shared this attention on training reform, their

⁶⁵ Tang, *Fuliancheng sanshinian shi*, p. 104.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ye Longzhang, “Xi (fu) liancheng keban de shimo,” in *Jingju tanwang lu*, p. 13.

⁶⁸ Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” p. 113.

proposed teaching methods diverged. Some suggested that actors read (du 讀) to acquire new knowledge, others proposed having them lectured to. Oral delivery of knowledge might be carried out in two ways: either in a formal classroom setting as proposed by the Fuliancheng reforms; or, as proposed by Qi Rushan, in a more casual manner, without restriction on location and time. In Qi's reform proposal, the practice of "lecturing" (jiang 講) takes prominence, since all supplemental knowledge was supposed to be transmitted to students through oral delivery at any time during their stay at the keban. Intriguingly, as an outside advisor to the commercial acting circle, Qi's pedagogy shared with the well-established tradition of bodily learning of theatrical practitioners a stress on oral delivery (kouchuan 口傳). Qi's reliance on oral teaching, I argue, was a solution to a social reality of the Pear Garden. Students often joined the performing business as a way out of the economic plight of their families. As their major concern was to acquire the practical skills to earn a living, background knowledge about drama was of secondary importance. Qi agreed with this priority, as he admitted that "[the teaching of background knowledge] could be listed as extra to the main courses."⁶⁹ Given this consideration, casual oral delivery was a more flexible and convenient way to integrate new teaching into the existing framework of training, since it required neither textbooks nor even specific hours of instruction. Oral delivery was also a more efficient way to infuse knowledge into the students, who might not be able to learn by reading because of limited literacy. In Qi's scheme, the lack of structured curriculum could be compensated for by long-term immersion in the learning environment, made possible by the collective teaching and living style of the keban. This was why instead of an institutional transformation that would totally reshape the opera training, Qi

⁶⁹ Qi, "Keban gailiang chuyi," p. 105.

chose to rely on the ready-made setting of keban for reform.

The persistent tradition of oral teaching among career actors raises an interesting question as to the effectiveness of Qi's proposed teaching method in practice. In *A Glossary of the Pear Garden*, the editor and theatrical connoisseur Fang Wenxi presented his definition and view on the oral instruction of drama. Under the entry title “shuo xi 說戲,” he defines “talking about drama” as teaching drama (jiao xi 教戲).” Furthermore:

“There are students with the talents of an examination primus (zhuangyuan 狀元) but no master teachers with such skills.” This is indeed true. If the master had the qualification of a zhuang yuan, he would not have spare time for teaching...is this not the case for troupes? For this reason, most teachers are hack actors (xi baofu 戲包袱) who had built a solid background through life backstage. Although their performances are not impressive, they are real experts at teaching drama... What students learn in the initial stage [of their training] is just the common repertoire. If [students] can realize its significance, it would not be too difficult for them to be outstanding...If [students] only rely on the instructions of their masters but do no studying on their own, they will not necessarily be able to enjoy great fame.⁷⁰

Fang's remarks on teaching opera begin with the qualifications of the teachers—who had mastered the art through years of experience in the field. However, there is a limit to the teachers' influence on students' maturation as accomplished actors. For Fang Wenxi, the decisive factor in successful training was neither the teachers' credentials nor the teaching materials, but students' hard work to understand what they had been taught and their potential to pursue further insight. The training process, initiated through oral delivery, awaited completion via students'

⁷⁰ Fang, *Liyuan hua*, pp. 145-46.

own internal realization (xinshou 心授) of artistry. The inner, mental, and individual nature of grasping awareness, as indicated by the term lingwu 領悟, indicated that the attainment of silent enlightenment was not something that could be taught.

Given that Qi Rushan and Fang Wenxi shared a similar approach to engagement with career actors, Fang's comment on teaching opera presents an alternative, but equally valid, view on pedagogy. As a seasoned theatrical connoisseur, Fang was known to have conducted oral interviews with elderly actors to verify written records when compiling his *Glossary of the Pear Garden*. Based on "oral transmission from experienced actors," the work was a bold attempt to build a lexical foundation for further research on drama as a distinct field of scholarly inquiry.⁷¹ Reading Fang's reservations about the usefulness of teaching and knowledge transmission makes it worth reflecting on the viability and effectiveness of Qi's proposed pedagogy. How could keban instructors, trained as xi baofu backstage, acquire the learning ability to absorb "new" knowledge and to transmit it to their students? Would the background knowledge about drama, fragmented in its presentation, really help young pupils to grasp the unspeakable secret of the art? What influence might literate connoisseur/advisors to the opera circle have on the transformative process of reinvigorating the existing training system?

Qi Rushan alone would not be able to answer these questions. Qi never published "On Reform," nor did he ever successfully sell his suggestions to any keban headmasters. But Qi Rushan was not the only educated opera enthusiast advocating training reform. In 1919, the reform-minded actor, Ouyang Yuqian 歐陽予倩 (1889-1962), with the financial support of

⁷¹ One preface writer to *Glossary* understood the significance of Fang's work thus: "There are distinct terminologies for all [academic] subjects...and each has its dictionary. Since drama is one field of study, how could there be no need for a dictionary?" Fang, *Liyuan hua*, p. 15.

entrepreneur Zhang Jian 張謇 (1853-1926), founded the Nantong Actors Academy (Nantong linggong xueshe, 南通伶工學社). The academy, advertised as “not a keban,” was founded to “serve society.” As the headmaster, Ouyang took a radical approach to preparing future “knowledgable citizen-artists,” including, for instance, urging them to read New Culture Movement periodicals such as *New Youth*. Ouyang’s teaching philosophy ran counter to the economic and social realities that drove students to join the academy for profit. He quit his post at the Academy only three years after its establishment.⁷² Another notable example was the National Drama Academy (NDA), founded in Beijing in 1928. Unlike Ouyang’s radical experiment, NDA had many features in common with keban, including the length of training, the daily curriculum, and, an unfortunate holdover from the past, the corporal punishment. NDA also introduced new content to its curriculum. For instance, students would have Chinese language and drama history classes after a full day of performance training.⁷³ As indicated by Goldstein, NDA was the only successful reformed training school in the Republican era. Aided by financial resources from the Nationalist Government, the funding of NDA “was undoubtedly beyond any keban dream.”⁷⁴ Its connection with the acting community was impressive, since leading actors of the time, such as Mei Lanfang and Cheng Yanqiu, were affiliated with the school. Nevertheless, on account of its unprecedented mustering of resources and prestige, NDA “could hardly serve as a reproducible model.”⁷⁵

Examining both failure and success stories of Peking opera training reform in the

⁷² Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, pp. 229-30.

⁷³ Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, pp. 232-33.

⁷⁴ Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, p. 234.

⁷⁵ Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, p. 234-35.

Republican period may help to explain why Qi Rushan would choose to argue, at monographic length, for the keban as the ideal institution for reform. For Qi, the keban provided the infrastructure for reform at minimum cost. First, as a longstanding institution, the business model of the keban could weather economic and social hazards (regardless of the failure of individual keban). The cases of the Nantong Actors Academy and NDA show that new sorts of institutions were not necessarily better at tackling the problem of education reform if not backed up by considerable resources from beyond the career acting community. Second, given its collective teaching model, only the additions of a few new topics added to the existing curriculum were needed to improve the training system. Certainly, the benefits of keban training came at a certain price: physical hardship, abuse of actors by teachers, and economic extraction from young actors were the darker side of the collectivity and hierarchy of keban. No reflections on these issues, however, are mentioned in “On Reform.” Although the missing attention to harsh treatment suffered by keban students showed him to be apathetic to social and economic inequality, for Qi Rushan the keban was not a site for social reform or intellectual experiment. The reforms he promoted in “On Reform” had only one objective, namely, to prepare future generations of actors (ideally, stars) and theater staff to survive the fluctuations within and outside the acting profession. In the conclusion to “On Reform,” Qi restated the nature of the keban and defended its sole purpose for performance training:

Keban can be thought of as a special kind of school; its curriculum should certainly lay particular stress on technique and knowledge of drama. If perchance some students are not able to become career actors, through [the training of keban] they could still be molded into dramatists... Recently, when talking about the achievements of keban, keban managers always mention certain students being able to write well or find jobs in the

public sector... Although these achievements indeed count as the students' merits, this [outcome] does not match the purpose of founding a keban.⁷⁶

If decent writing skill and job placement outside the performing business were the managers' educational objectives, Qi concluded, "It would be sufficient just to operate a normal school."⁷⁷

"On the Reform of Regular Professional Training" showed possibilities for how long-established opera institutions could be reimagined to serve the purpose of reform. With his understanding of the customary practices and realities of the career acting circle, Qi Rushan's reformist approach indicates a path of change alternative to radical revolution. It also shows the continuing influence of "old" institutions, as well as the persistence of long-standing learning methods of opera actors, as having continued relevance in the face of new organizational initiatives. However, the analysis in this section does not contend that Qi's ideas for reforming the training system were the best option. In many passages in "On Reform," Qi exudes a pronounced sense of superiority; he continued to play the role of an "outsider" to the opera circle, reinforcing the gulf that had separated performing communities from their literati patrons; this, too, made the acceptability of Qi's project questionable to the insider actors.

The Piaoyou: A Problematic Role in the Theatrical Realm

Piaoyou is another group of opera learners in the theatrical realm. This section examines the practice of amateur performance and the careers of piaoyou to probe transmission of theatrical knowledge between instructors and learners, as well as across the boundary of insider and outsider in the performing business. The term, piaoyou (literally meaning "ticket friend"), dates

⁷⁶ Qi, "Keban gailiang chuyi," p. 124.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

to the early Qing. Originally, the “ticket” referred to the voucher issued by the Qing government to drum song (dagushu 大鼓書) performers touring China proper to preach the benefits of Manchu rule. Privately-owned training and brokerage agencies, known as “ticket houses,” or piaofang 票房, prepared performers for the state’s use. All personnel under the oversight of the piaofang were called piaoyou. According to Qi Rushan, piaofang fell into disuse after the Kangxi period, as by then the Qing regime had stabilized its rule.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, the terms piaoyou and piaofang remained in use. As the state-hired dagushu performers originally had sung free of charge for audiences, piaoyou came to be borrowed to refer to all amateur singers, including performers specializing in opera.⁷⁹ The term piaofang continued to refer to the location where and occasions at which amateurs gathered to sing and perform. In the following discussion, piaofang refers to gatherings of amateur pihuang performers, a practice which could be traced back to the mid nineteenth century. These amateur associations of pihuang performers first emerged in the Daoguang reign (1820-1850) and were further developed during the Xianfeng (1851-1861) and Tongzhi (1862-1874) eras.⁸⁰ Over the course of the Qing, even as the meanings of *piaoyou* and *piaofang* changed, its association with non-remunerative performance was

⁷⁸ Qi Rushan, “Piaoyou de lai yuan [The origin of *piaoyou*],” in *Xijie xiao zhanggu*, pp. 191-92.

⁷⁹ The prefix “*piao*” is also applied to name amateur performers in the theatrical realm other than actors as, for instance, in the terms, *gupiao* 鼓票 (amateur drummer) and *qinpiao* 琴票 (amateur *huqin* 胡琴 player). Similar to acting *piaoyou*, their amateur practices did not hinder their pursuit of artistic excellence. In the early Republican era, some *gupiao* and *qinpiao* were not only well known in amateur circles, but even crossed over to become career musicians and accompanied leading commercial actors of the time. See He Xishi, “Wo shuo ranshi de jiwei qinshi han qinpiao [Several professional and amateur string accompanists that I know],” and “Huiyi jiwei gushi han gupiao [Remembering several professional and amateur drummers],” in *Zhongguo renming zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Beijing shi weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui, Jingju tanwang lu san bian* [Reminiscent materials on Peking opera, volume three] (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1990), pp. 535-540.

⁸⁰ Yihua, “Shanghai piaofang ershinian ji [Twenty years of history of piaofang in Shanghai],” in *Jubu congkan* [Monograph series on drama] (Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe, 1974), p. 218.

retained.

Even into the Republican period, acting as a “profession” was still tagged with the stigma of being degraded, while to dabble in acting as an amateur, on the contrary, was something elegant, even eccentric. In actual practice, the distinction was marked by the nonprofit nature of amateur singing. As Qi Rushan remarked, “[If] someone is looking for a *piaoyou* to perform, [he] must rely on friendship to invite or request [him]; his [talents] cannot be hired. This boundary is extremely clear.”⁸¹ The personal connection within the amateur circle ensured that the arrangement involved no financial profit, therefore maintaining the “elegant” quality and reinforcing the elite status of amateur performers, as well as their identity as “outsiders” to the performance business. As one *piaoyou* recalled the practice of amateur performance in Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s, the arrangement was carried out with much discretion to show respect for *piaoyou* as “members of proper families.” Before the show, the host would send a formal invitation card to the *piaofang* to request a performance for a special event; on the day of the show, he arranged drivers to pick up the *piaoyou* and escort him to the performance venue; he was treated to light refreshments, and all expenses for his costumes, accompaniment, and the rental of the location were covered. The host would not pay the *piaoyou*, who “gave the performance voluntarily and would take not a single cent in compensation.” The principle of the transaction was “courtesy and reciprocity.”⁸² For *piaoyou*, the benefit of putting on a show was less about financial return than about the cultural capital to be shared or exchanged among like-minded gentlemen.

⁸¹ Qi, “*Piaoyou de lai yuan*,” in *Xijie xiao zhanggu*, p. 193.

⁸² Li Yuanlong, *Jingju suohua* [Random talks on Peking opera] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Hongye shuju, 1960), pp. 39-40.

In brief, piaoyou are those who could afford the leisure and resources to enjoy performing as pastime rather than as a way to earn a living.⁸³ This economic superiority over career actors points to several cultural implications of amateur singing. Unlike career actors, who were chiefly forced into acting by financial hardship, from the outset piaoyou could embark upon performing out of “free will” and a genuine love for opera. As Qi Rushan indicated, “piaoyou learn how to perform without coercion from parents or circumstantial hardships.”⁸⁴ The only explanation for their appetite for performance was that they were born talented: “seven or eight out of ten are gifted. If they did not have this gift, they would not be fond of opera. Without such fondness, they would not study it.” Since “drama is art,” Qi Rushan opined, “it takes more than hard work to succeed in any kind of art.” Thus, the piaoyou’s “natural” inclination toward drama assumed that he could be expected to attain higher artistic achievement than someone who took up performance to make a living.⁸⁵ This fondness of drama, assumed to be innate, explained the success of amateur performers. As remarked upon by one magazine columnist, “those who learn [the art] are no match for those who are fond of it. The reason why [piaoyou] could naturally give full rein to the spirit of performance, was quite simple; it was nothing more than learning because they loved it.”⁸⁶

The “natural” devotion to performance of the amateurs might motivate them to conduct

⁸³ For instance, a vivid, if dismissive, description of how well-to-do opera patrons came to be amateur performers reads: “Piaoyou in the old days lived in impressive style. They did not have to worry about food and clothing. Their only worry was if there was nowhere for them to spend their considerable family wealth... [Therefore] they went to listen to opera. After about ten days to half a month, they seemed to become obsessed. They then hired veteran actors to initiate [them into the art of performing].” Chanweng, “Xianhua piaoyou [Random talks on *piaoyou*],” *Banyue xiju*, vol. 7 (May 24, 1938).

⁸⁴ Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” p. 47.

⁸⁵ Qi Rushan, “Tan piaoyou [On piaoyou],” in *Xijie xiao zhanggu*, p. 169.

⁸⁶ Aiping shizhu, “Xianhua piaoyou [Random talks on piaoyou],” *Banyue xiju*, vol. 8 (June 15, 1938).

in-depth research (yanjiu 研究) on drama. In one commentary aiming to distinguish amateur performers from career actors, the author contended: “piaoyou take a researcher’s attitude toward the art of drama.”⁸⁷ In writings attesting to the cultural superiority of piaoyou in the early Republican period, the scholarly quality of piaoyou is singled out as making them more capable of becoming genuine theatrical connoisseurs, engaged drama researchers, and, in some cases, better opera performers. It also complicated a simple binary between insider and outsider: “In terms of drama, there are insiders among the outsiders and outsiders among the insiders. In fact, the insiders among the outsiders surpass the outsiders among the insiders. This is the so-called outsiders outshining insiders; it is because [the outsiders] know drama in their hearts.”⁸⁸ In this self-congratulatory appraisal of the artistic superiority of amateur performers, Zhang Boju, a famous piaoyou himself, plays with the double meaning of inside/outside. Depending on how the boundary is drawn, the piaoyou, an outsider to the performance business could be an insider of theatrical artistry, knowing the essence of drama by heart.

What gave piaoyou the wherewithal to conduct research on the opera they performed? The answer lay in their advanced cultural upbringing, sustained by their superior status and economic power. We can take Zhang Boju as an example. Zhang, as a celebrity piaoyou of the time, published his research on singing entitled, “Basics of Rhyme Pronunciation in luantan” (luantan yinyun jiyao 亂彈音韻輯要), as one among many pleasurable pastimes, which also included using his wealth to establish a celebrated collection of Song and Yuan dynasty

⁸⁷ Sun Danchang, “Xianhua piaoyou [Random talks on piaoyou],” *Shiri xiju*, vol. 4 (March 17, 1938).

⁸⁸ Zhang Boju, *Hong yutan jimeng shizhu* [Notes to the poems on the dream of red carpet] (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju xianggang fenju, 1978), p. 47.

paintings.⁸⁹ The linkage between amateur performers and their higher cultural background has had a lasting impact on examining the historical significance of piaoyou. Commenting on the contribution of piaoyou to the historical development of Chinese opera, one scholar has written: “among amateur performers, there are plenty of men of letters who are excellent in calligraphy and painting. They ruminate deeply upon studies of “plots, characters, lyrics, melodies (changqiang 唱腔), and rhyme (yinyun 音韻).”⁹⁰ What empowered their engagement with drama in this way? “The reason why *piaoyou* could contribute to the art of Peking opera was predicated upon people from decent family backgrounds (liangjia zi 良家子) having a generally higher level of cultural attainment.”⁹¹

I understand this cultural advantage of piaoyou as partially factual and partially constructed. On the one hand, it reflected the economic discrepancy between career actors and their well-educated patrons; on the other, since the commentary about opera was composed by men of letters, it reinforced on a conceptual level the gap in control over cultural capital between vocational and amateur performers; the former were depicted as mere artisans, the latter as true experts. This eventually successful discursive construction overshadows a much more fluid, contesting cluster of ideas surrounding amateur performance that was at play in the early Republican period. A closer look at contemporary writings on piaoyou shows that the labelling of “educated outsiders” as experts was, in fact, subject to constant criticism and reconstruction.

⁸⁹ Zhang Boju, “Luantan yinyun jiyao [Basics of rhyme pronunciation in *luantan*],” *Xiju congkan*, no. 2. For a contemporaneous introduction to Zhang Boju, see Xiao shuangqing guanzhu, “Mingpiao shi xiaolu [Brief biographies of famous amateur performers],” *Banyue xiju*, no. 7 (May 24, 1938).

⁹⁰ Wang Anqi, “Jingju piaoyou [Amateur performers of Peking opera],” in *Wei Jingju biaoyan tixi fasheng* [Calling out for the performance system of Peking opera] (Taipei: Guojia chubanshe, 2006), p. 257.

⁹¹ Wang Anqi, *Wei Jingju biaoyan tixi fasheng*, p. 256.

The main goal for piaoyou to learn about opera was to engage in performance. As observed by one *piaoyou*, “except for a small minority, the main objective for all who conduct research on drama is performance.”⁹² Generally defined as “all non-professional players engaged in opera performance,” piaoyou had a range of performance forms in which they might choose to engage. On one end of the performance spectrum were amateurs engaged exclusively in “pure singing” (qing chang 清唱), that is, performing without costume and makeup, which traced its long tradition to amateur singers of Kun opera in the Ming.⁹³ On the other end was full stage performance (cai chuan 彩串) with costume and makeup. Although there was no fixed expectation as to the manner in which amateurs might perform, the sole emphasis on singing, as well as the inability of piaoyou to put on a full performance, drew some criticism. Qi Rushan, for instance, commented that “nowadays, piaoyou learning emphasizes only singing technique (chang gong 唱工); as soon as they can sing a few arias, they want to mount the stage, and they consider all dialogue and movement as being inconsequential. This is very wrong!”⁹⁴ Understandably, given his emphasis on the wholeness of the “song-and dance” tradition, Qi would urge that the piaoyou should not be dismissive of the “whole” and focus only on singing. Others, too, criticized piaoyou for lacking comprehensive performance skills; even the ability to apply make up was regarded as an indispensable component of performance. As one theatrical commentator pointed out. “There are many seasoned piaoyou—who have all kinds of experience and study all kinds of techniques—and yet fail to perform with makeup (ban xi 扮戲). Are they

⁹² Li, *Jingju suohua*, p. 42.

⁹³ Goldman, *Opera and the City*, p. 129.

⁹⁴ Qi, *Jingju zhi bianqian*, p. 23.

not going to be laughed at by the insiders?” Measuring piaoyou against versatile career actors, the commentator urged piaoyou to learn the skills of applying makeup, which was also deemed an art. After all, he warned his readers: “If you do not know how to perform with makeup, you cannot be counted as a fully competent piaoyou.”⁹⁵

The aforementioned examples point to several questions under debate at the time: what was considered the core of opera performance? Should *piaoyou* develop a full command of the performance techniques that career actors had acquired? How did the discussion of the study goals of piaoyou shape the identification of amateur performers? The discussion of make-up also speaks to the degree to which amateur performers’ acquisition of physical techniques was pertinent to the transmission of theatrical knowledge, and best illustrates the tension between book learning and bodily learning, as well as that between insiders and outsiders.

Central to the identity-making of amateur performers, I have suggested, was their scholarly approach to performance learning. Given their relative lack of movement training, many complained that the qualifications of piaoyou as performers were not ideal. As amateurs, piaoyou started their engagement with performance training late in life. Without family pressure, “most piaoyou do not start the study of performance for personal interest until they have entered into society. By then they are at least in their twenties.” Unlike career actors who “to meet basic needs, begin their physical training around ten years of age,”⁹⁶ amateur performers started their learning at a later age, and therefore were physically less flexible for bodily training. Compared to the acquisition of singing skill, it was difficult to develop physical dexterity in adulthood.

⁹⁵ Baixue, “Piaoyou yinggai xue banxi [Amateur performers should learn how to perform with makeup],” *Xiju zhoubao*, vol. 1 no. 8 (November 28, 1936).

⁹⁶ Li, *Jingju suohua*, p. 43.

Indeed, by then, “even if [amateurs] are willing to devote effort, it is not easy to establish a substantial foundation, and so their footwork and other techniques have no strength, to say nothing of waist and legwork.”⁹⁷ The belated bodily training of piaoyou directed their preference of genre specialization: “What piaoyou learn are mostly civil plays, which emphasize singing technique.”⁹⁸ By all measures, learning how to perform after adulthood, in Qi Rushan’s opinion, was like “entering monkhood halfway down the road” (banlu chujia 半路出家); that is, by switching to a new profession in mid career and without a solid foundation in training, *piaoyou* were at a distinct disadvantage. As Qi explains, “almost all techniques of drama require childhood training.”⁹⁹ And, again, “speaking about their study of skills, they are certainly not equal to those of keban pupils.”¹⁰⁰

The weaker bodies of amateurs were particularly problematic in the eyes of theatrical critics when they took the plunge to become vocational performers (xiahai 下海, lit., jumped into the sea). Accomplished piaoyou-turned-actors relied on singing techniques more than movement performance. Zhang Houzai observed a developing fashion of Beijing piaoyou to turn vocational in the Shanghai theatrical world for the sake of monetary profit and suspected their career perspective since “as soon as they think they have established a touch of their own distinguished style of singing, they are impatient to have a go at it” on the entertainment market in Shanghai.¹⁰¹ Zhang Xiaocang 張肖倉 (1890-1978), himself a piaoyou and a versatile theatrical commentator,

⁹⁷ Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” p. 49.

⁹⁸ Ma er xiansheng, “Piaoyou xuexi chengxu [The procedures whereby piaoyou learn to perform],” in *Jubu congkan*, p. 138.

⁹⁹ Qi, “Keban gailiang chuyi,” p. 48.

¹⁰⁰ Qi, “Tan piaoyou,” in *Xijie xiao zhanggu*, p. 169.

¹⁰¹ Liaozi, “Piaoyou xiahai tan [On amateur performances going vocational],” *Gongyan bao*, May, 19, 1918.

noted amateurs' relative strength in singing, "in terms of training, piaoyou are not comparable with insiders." Accordingly, successful amateurs-turned-vocational actors such as Sun Juxian 孫菊仙 (1841-1931), "count on the natural gifts of their vocal talent to surpass other actors."¹⁰² Singing would be the strongest suit for amateurs in competing on the entertainment market. However, successful cases of amateurs-turned-vocational were rare on the whole. The author listed many more failed attempts of amateurs dabbling in the acting business. In conclusion, he advised readers, "for amateurs, amateur play (wan piao 玩票) should be the end in itself. The two words xiahai should be understood as 'dropping into the bitter sea.'"¹⁰³

The criticism that piaoyou-turned-actors faced was harsh. Zhang Xiaocang remarked on the sharp contrast between the compliments paid to a piaoyou performer and then the bleak reviews the same performer received and after he turned vocational:

Once [piaoyou] turn vocational, the strong points of [their performance] do not necessary surpass that of leading actors of the Pear Garden, while their flaws are pointed out by the audience down to the smallest detail. And so, those who had earlier praised the amateurs unexpectedly change their opinions and attack their shortcomings.¹⁰⁴

Xiahai, or going vocational, was a boundary-crossing decision made by amateur performers, which put them across the line separating insiders from outsiders within the performing business. As a piaoyou who had onstage performance experience, Zhang Xiaocang was honest about the impossibility of impeccable performance onstage and his advice for amateurs to stay outsiders was sincere. The shift in occupation of piaoyou altered the standard by which critics reviewed

¹⁰² Xiaocang, "Piaoyou yu xiahai [Amateur performers and going vocational]," *Shiri xiju*, no. 17 (February 1, 1938). For biography of Zhang Xiaocang, see *Zhongguo xiqu zhi Shanghai juan*, p. 882.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

their performances. As Zhang Houzai argued, critics should apply more rigorous standards to examine their performances, because “once piaoyou turn vocational, their status (shenfen 身份) is no longer any different from that of actors (youling 優伶). Therefore, it is permissible for us to treat them with the same attitude that we use to judge actors. In reviewing performances, Zhang maintained that critics should “make comments on the solid basis of artistic achievement.” In other words, amateur-turned-vocational actors would be demanded to demonstrate all-round mastery with no excuses for later acquisition of training or weaker physical strength.¹⁰⁵

The strict evaluation of piaoyou performances after they turned vocational was a mixture of artistic and social criticism. First of all, theatrical commentators wrote about xiahai to purify amateur performance as an “elegant” engagement. One commentator encouraged certain piaoyou to consider turning vocational: “There are many so called ‘piaoyou’...they want to make some foreign money to spend from amateur singing, this is their biggest problem! Since they are angling for foreign money...why not just perform opera for a living and be frank and forthright.¹⁰⁶ Even if not in it for the money, *piaoyou* were warned not to “be corrupted by their pastime.”¹⁰⁷ Otherwise, the investment in amateur performance would drain resources and lead to their final transformation into career actors. Such effort reflected the fact that piaoyou-turned-actors had been a well-recognized group in the performance business since the late Qing. Taking *Succinct Biographies of Actors* (*Linggong xiaochuan* 伶工小傳, first published around 1921) for example, out of one hundred and twenty-one biographical entries, twelve are devoted to actors

¹⁰⁵ Liaozi, “Piaoyou xiahai tan,” *Gongyan bao*, May, 19, 1918.

¹⁰⁶ Yan yan, “Qing xiahai ba! [Please turn vocational],” *Dayi bao*, March, 28, 1938.

¹⁰⁷ Xiaocang, “Piaoyou yu xiahai,” *Shiri xiju*, no. 17 (February 1, 1938).

with piaoyou backgrounds. The descriptions begin with the artistic talents of the entries without mentioning any economic concerns they might have encountered when making the decision to turn vocational. The backgrounds of piaoyou before turning to vocational also varied. Entries with Manchu ancestry are noted without further comments. Some of the entries, however, remark on the dismal endings of amateur-turned-vocational actors due to loss of vocal and physical strength or bad luck in their later careers.¹⁰⁸ To be sure, since there were piaoyou who had never succeeded in making a name in the performance business, the actual numbers of piaoyou that turned (or attempted to turn) professional must have exceeded those written into the records. The line differentiating amateur from career performers was blurred and in need of constant construction, while a stricter standard was imposed on piaoyou-turned-actors to maintain the boundary between those inside and outside of the performance profession .

Competition over cultural capital existed not only between piaoyou and career actors, but also within amateur circles. The claims of a “true” amateur required delicate differentiation between advanced performers and beginners, earnest learners and inattentive students—by how they approached the learning of performance. The categorization of opera fans by veteran piaoyou and playwright Chen Moxiang provides an example. Chen maintained that “opera is also a kind of learning (xuewen 學問).” And yet, in Beijing, the city with the greatest number of opera lovers, he claimed, “[learning] is not the objective of drama research for most opera enthusiasts.”¹⁰⁹ Chen further classified opera fans into three types. His sardonic observation is

¹⁰⁸ Yanshan xiaoyin, *Linggong xiaozhuan* [*Succinct biographies of actors*], (Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe, 1974), pp. 351-390.

¹⁰⁹ Chen Moxiang, “Guanju shenghuo sumao [A sketch of a life of watching theater],” in Zhe Zhang ed., *Liyuan waishi* [An unofficial history of the Pear Garden] (Beijing: Baowentang shudian), p. 406.

worth a quoting in full:

Those at the highest level do their utmost to imitate the on-stage techniques of career actors. They get in costume and apply make-up to perform a play. If audiences cannot distinguish them from career actors, and view them as not at all like outsiders, they see themselves as supreme talents in the theatrical realm.

The next level down are those who promote themselves before having completed their learning of the art. They could care less about whether they are laughed at or criticized so long as they get to sing good plays.

Below them are those who have only sat in the audience for a few days; they barely know any actors and have learned a few lines. They buy a few handcopied scripts from the bookstore Baiben Zhang 百本張, treating them as golden laws and precious rules without any discretion.¹¹⁰

In short, Chen Moxiang summarized the attitudes toward performing for these three kinds of opera enthusiasts as “arrogance because of great self-perceived contribution” (gonggao wo man 貢高我慢). He regretted that “the more Peking opera enthusiasts of this sort there are, the worse opera has become.” When did such change take place? In tracing the emergence of such attitudes, Chen remembered a watershed change had coincided with the political transition: “Upon entering the Republic, although opera in Beijing had developed, the number of these three kinds of people also increased.”¹¹¹

Chen Moxiang categorized the engagement of opera fans with performance on the basis of their learning goals and methods. In Chen’s eyes, none of the three kinds of enthusiasts

¹¹⁰ Chen, “Guanju shenghuo sumao,” in *Liyuan waishi*, pp. 406-07. For partial translation of the paragraph and an analysis of Chen Moxiang’s mistrust of Baiben Zhang scripts, see Andrea S. Goldman, “The Nun Who Wouldn’t Be: Representation of Female Desire in Two Performances Genres of ‘Si Fan,’” *Late Imperial China* vol. 22 no. 1 (June 2001), p. 78.

¹¹¹ Chen, “Guanju shenghuo sumao,” in *Liyuan waishi*, p. 407.

intended to become genuine amateur performers; all they pursued was merely outward resemblance to career opera actors. In this regard, the top-rated opera enthusiasts chose passable models—career actors—to learn from. Despite the fact that in the eyes of some educated critics (including Chen Moxiang) career actors failed to grasp the artistic essence of their performances, their tough training and precise execution of acting techniques made them ideal teaching models. The second-rate opera enthusiasts diverged further from the goal, since they had not completed mastery of basic acting skills before presenting themselves as authentic performers. The lowest-ranked opera fan was the worst because of their limited exposure to the theatrical world and superficial guides to learning. Mere acquaintance with actors was insufficient to enable opera fans true performance knowledge. Scripts of Baiben Zhang, a bookstore established in the Qianlong period to sell cheap, handwritten copies of popular scripts to the general public, hardly prepared an amateur to learn about plays—at least in the elitist view of Chen Moxiang. All three kinds of opera fans, in Chen Moxiang’s observation, were failed students of opera. None of them satisfied his expectations for amateur performers.

Chen Moxiang's career in the theatrical realm explains why he asserted the authority to make judgments on piaoyou, and how he identified himself along the spectrum of insiders/outsiders in the theatrical realm. Born in 1884 to an official family, Chen recalled that he had a “natural love for drama” and abandoned pursuit of an official career after the Boxer debacle in 1900.¹¹² He grew into a keen opera lover, a devoted amateur performer, and a prolific theatrical writer.¹¹³ Chen’s career as a playwright was equally successful. Having written or edited more

¹¹² Chen, “Guanju shenghuo sumao,” in *Liyuan waishi*, p. 388.

¹¹³ For a succinct biography of Chen Moxiang, see Shoushou, “Ganzhi: Chen Moxiang [In recognition of Chen Moxiang],” in Chu Shushen *Tongguang chao mingling shisan jue zhuanglue* [Brief biographies of the thirteen leading actors of Tongzhi and Guangxu period] (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2008), vol. 1, p. 366.

than one hundred plays, Chen was most well-known for his playwriting for the famous dan actor Xun Huisheng 荀慧生 (1900-1968). He was also a regular contributor to drama periodicals such as *Dramaturge Monthly* (Juxue yuekan 劇學月刊), which published his column “Moxiang on Drama” (Moxiang juhua 墨香劇話).

In many respects, Chen’s career as a theatrical connoisseur is comparable to that of his contemporary Qi Rushan. Both Chen and Qi were well-to-do theatrical connoisseurs who nurtured encyclopedic knowledge of drama through in-depth interaction with the opera scene in Republican Beijing. Both enjoyed successful playwrighting careers through cooperation with preeminent *dan* actors as well as the access to write and publish. Chen and Qi certainly knew each other and were aware of their respective drama research activities.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, Chen and Qi diverged in one crucial respect. Unlike Qi Rushan who strived to write the history and theory of Chinese opera for the new national state, Chen was content to pursue the modes of opera connoisseurship continued from late imperial times. As one writer remembered Chen Moxiang, “After the fall of the Qing state (guobian 國變), [Mr. Chen] showed even less interest in mundane matters. He frequented singing halls and theaters as a way to release his feeling of melancholy.”¹¹⁵ In a sense, Chen presented more as a Qing loyalist rather than one of a new generation of drama researchers.

Nevertheless, although he had no intention of theorizing Chinese drama via systematic knowledge production, Chen Moxiang’s approach (his close interaction with the commercial acting circle) to understanding drama did not diverge too far from some of the research methods

¹¹⁴ Chen Moxiang, “Tici,” in Fang, *Liyuan hua*, 28.

¹¹⁵ Shoushou, “Ganzhi: Chen Moxiang,” in *Tongguang chao mingling shisan jue zhuanglue*, vol. 1, p. 366.

advocated by Qi Rushan. Chen self-identified as “an outsider who also speaks the language of insiders.” Even when speaking to “insider” audiences, such as at a lecture he delivered at the Zhonghua Specialty School for Chinese Opera (Zhonghua xiqu zhuanke xuexiao 中華戲曲專科學校), Chen wished to contribute his “thirty years of opera-listening experiences and knowledge gained by befriending the people of the Pear Garden” to opera education, although he made no claims “to talk about the principles and theory of opera.”¹¹⁶ In building his authority to talk about insider knowledge, Chen tactfully skipped his piaoyou experience. Direct engagement with performance was a sensitive topic in maintaining the boundary between self-assigned advisor and his advisees.¹¹⁷

However, amateur singing played a substantial part in Chen Moxiang’s activities in the theatrical realm. Learning from legendary dan actor Wang Yaoqing 王瑤卿 (1881-1954), Chen specialized in the *dan* role and had participated in performances as a piaoyou. Comments on contemporary amateur singing practice also occupy a central place in Chen’s autobiographical work, *A Sketch of My Life of Watching Theater* (*Guanju shenghuo sumiao* 觀劇生活素描, hereafter *Sketch*)—where Chen wrote about experiences, observations, and criticisms of the thriving opera life in Republican Beijing. In *Sketch*, Chen expresses a concern with a perceived decline in true opera appreciation in Republican Beijing. Best illustrated by “the eccentric

¹¹⁶ Chen Moxiang, “Shuo dan [On female impersonator],” *Juxue yukan*, vol. 1 no. 4 (April 1933). Chen was well acquainted with Qi’s scholarship, as he pointed out in a lecture delivered at the Zhonghua Specialty School for Chinese opera: “[The topic] of my lecture has been covered by Qi Rushan’s *Xiju jiaose mingci kao* [戲劇角色名詞考, Textual research on the roles of drama]. However, you probably have not read this book. Moreover, I focus more on the current status, he mostly on archeological research.” See Chen Moxiang, “Shuo dan,” *Juxue yukan*, vol. 1 no. 4 (April 1933).

¹¹⁷ For instance, Qi Rushan emphasized his noninvolvement in amateur singing.

behavior of piaoyou in recent years,”—many examples of which are found in Chen’s account—a universal standard of good art had become impossible as opportunities for consumption of and participation in performance flourished.¹¹⁸ Also noteworthy, in Chen Moxiang’s reflection, the disorder in the theatrical realm coincided with the dramatic political transition he had personally lived through from the Qing to the Republican period. For people from this transitional generation of men of letters, such as Chen Moxiang, indulgence in the theatrical world—where artistic ideals of the old days were imagined as unified and stable—was a last ditch effort to survive the collapse of political and cultural orders once maintained under the Qing. For them, proliferation of unlearned and incompetent piaoyou in the opera world posed a threat to their final refuge.

To hold firm against both cultural and political instabilities reflected in the theatrical realm, Chen Moxiang provided this advice to amateur performers:

[One] should know that there are only two paths for piaoyou: one is to research the music of opera, the other is simply to satisfy one’s craving. To study the music of opera, one has to read a lot of books, first clarifying the origin and developments of opera since the Yuan and Ming dynasties, and then conducting research on the music of the East and the West; this [goal] cannot be achieved without a lifetime of effort. To just indulge oneself, all one needs is a stage for singing opera. There’s no need to compete with others over who is best.¹¹⁹

The two paths for amateur performers that Chen Moxiang proposed lead to different ends: the first, with its emphasis on book learning, led to the career of the scholar-amateur who performs on the basis of historical understanding of Chinese drama and a transnational comparison of

¹¹⁸ Chen, “Guanju shenghuo sumao,” in *Liyuan waishi*, p. 420.

¹¹⁹ Chen, “Guanju shenghuo sumao,” in *Liyuan waishi*, pp. 421-22.

stage arts. This constituted Chen Moxiang's ideal path. The second path focuses more on pleasurable, and casual, learning of singing techniques. It is also the path more viable for the majority of piaoyou, since regardless of the skills attained, it would only require relatively short-term effort to mount a performance. Either way, Chen concluded for his readers: "If you follow these two principles, you'll save yourself a lot of unnecessary aggravation."¹²⁰ After all, the most important lesson for amateur performers was to put aside "the jealousies within the amateur circle" and to stay honest and humble when learning the art of performance.¹²¹

As amateurs set their goals of learning, they would need to find proper instructors. This was no simple problem given the existing unequal social and cultural status between amateurs and career actors, as well as the competition among amateurs. Amateur learners could choose to learn from advanced piaoyou or they could hire career actors as instructors. The former were favored candidates as instructors for several reasons. One commentator observed: "performance instructors in Beijing are mostly of piaoyou origins. [This is because] amateur learners prefer to be well-versed in all matters about opera. Also, because they come from the class of intellectuals (zhishi jieji 知識階級), they know better about how to guide those with this interest." In contrast, career actors were considered inferior instructors since they were deemed to have shallow book knowledge, and even when it came to acting, they were limited by the role in which they specialized.¹²² A career actor might push his amateur students too hard in one speciality and thus spoil their enjoyment. The commentator opted for piaoyou as the more suitable instructors

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Shashi Ren, "Tingde renjia shuo pihuang shi yesheng de yishu," *Shiri xiju*, vol. 12 (June 10, 1937).

¹²² Jisheng lunju, "Guanyu jiaoxi [On teaching drama]," *Dayi bao*, December, 31, 1937.

because only instructors from the same sociocultural cohort could appreciate the mentality of most piaoyou to try a little of everything but not go deep into anything.

The advantage of piaoyou as teachers was also their disadvantage. It was the equal cultural standing between amateur teachers and students that made the teaching difficult. Chen Moxiang provided an excellent illustration of this problem. On the withdrawal of the excellent amateur performer Pu Tong 溥侗 (1877-1952) from one piaofang, Chen remarked: “There was no one whose erudition in opera could surpass that of Houzhai 厚齋. However, were there any piaoyou who would fall in line and listen? All of them thought they were on a par with Houzhai. Sometimes, when Houzhai would expound the subtle mysteries of an opera to them, they not only did not listen, but they also would slander him.”¹²³ Pu Tong, also known as Master of the Red Bean Hall (Hongdou guanzhu 紅豆館主), a descendent of the Qing royal family, had acquired the Manchu fondness for amateur performance and became a distinguished piaoyou. Acknowledged by contemporaries as a true successor of laosheng (old male role) actor Tan Xinpei 譚鑫培 (1847-1917), Pu Tong was reputed to be extremely knowledgeable about the various roles and theatrical genres with vocational specialists, and his cooperation with career actors was widely acknowledged.¹²⁴ Even if Chen may have exaggerated the knowledge gap between Pu Tong and “ordinary” piaoyou to make his point about differentiating true and bogus amateur actors, discrepancy in mastery of performance learning did exist. Those with less learning often squandered the opportunity to gain better knowledge about opera due to the peer

¹²³ Chen, “Guanju shenghuo sumao,” in *Liyuan waishi*, pp. 410.

¹²⁴ Yanshan xiaojin, “Linggong xiaozhuan [Brief biographies of actors],” in Zhang Xiaocang ed., *Jubu congkan*, p. 383.

status they shared with their instructors.

One side effect of the amateurs' pride is best illustrated by Republican-era opinions about piaofang. Commenting on the shortcomings of piaofang as a training institution, Qi Rushan noticed, "in piaofang, all [participants] are a group of equal friends. No one has the right to discipline the others. Although everyone gathers together with the intention of observing from the others, because they are friends, most of the time no one intervenes overly much."¹²⁵ "Friendship" among amateurs indicated their equal social status and shared cultural identity. Ironically, these commonalities among amateurs did not necessarily facilitate learning and exchange of performing skills within the piaofang. To the contrary, as all piaoyou viewed themselves as peers, there was no single authority at a piaofang to advise its members on performance. The pursuit of performance learning, then, easily turned into a subject of debate and a reason for competition.

To be sure, in the history of amateur performing, piaofang varied greatly in quality. There were distinguished piaofang in the early twentieth century that brought together highly skilled amateur performers and career actors to make contributions to the formation of new acting styles and a deeper understanding of the linguistics of singing.¹²⁶ However, in the eyes of some contemporaries, the function of piaofang to further the study and learning of performance was dubious. Speaking from the position of a drama researcher, Qi Rushan contended:

Nowadays, there are many people conducting research on drama, and many places have established piaofang and drama associations (ju she 劇社). However, most focus on

¹²⁵ Qi, "Keban gailiang chuyi," p. 50.

¹²⁶ For instance, the cooperation between famous *laosheng* actor Yu Shuyan 余叔岩 (1890-1943) and the piaofang The Friendly Association of Spring Sun (Chunyang you hui 春陽友會) was a successful one. See Wang, "Jingju piaoyou," in *Wei Jingju biaoyan tixi fasheng*, pp. 258-60.

singing skills and often neglect dialogue and movement. Moreover, with this research approach, one could at best become the equal of leading actors (hao jiao 好角). What would be the meaning of that? This is why I often say that for the purpose of amusement, piaofang and drama associations provide the highest class of entertainment. But if the objective is drama research, they still seem to be a step removed.¹²⁷

While piaofang were acknowledged for their promotion of elegant recreation, they also stood at the center of criticism about the decline in quality among amateur performing associations, especially those that mushroomed due to the popularity of pihuang in the early twentieth century. This kind of piaofang, great in number but small in scale, observers complained, suffered from lack of selectivity. One commentator railed against the growth of inferior piaofang in Shanghai, which were full of members who “called themselves celebrity amateurs (ming piao 名票) after little more than paying the two dollar membership fee and learning just half of the lyrics of a play.” With their lower expectations for performance learning, such piaofang also solicited prospective members with the slogan, “We guarantee on-stage performance after one month of training.”¹²⁸ Such advertisements were understandably attractive given the popular motivations for joining piaofang. In another commentary, the same author observed that “most of the piaofang in Shanghai [operate] on the premise of pursuing pleasure and entertainment. This is especially the case when it comes to learning how to perform.”¹²⁹ For the majority of piaoyou, the ultimate pleasure of learning was to act onstage, and the faster they could achieve the goal

¹²⁷ Qi Rushan, “Guoju de tedian (13) [Distinguishing features of national drama (13)],” *Beiping wanbao* [Beiping evening], June, 4, 1937.

¹²⁸ Xiao piaoyou, “Taofa xianzai de piaofang han piaoyou [Criticizing amateur associations and performers nowadays],” *Xiju zhaobao*, vo.1 no. 4 (October 31, 1936).

¹²⁹ Xiao piaoyou, “Piaoyou ying chanchu buliang xiqi [Amateur performers should root out their bad habits],” *Xiju zhaobao*, vol. 1 no. 2 (October 17, 1936).

the better. Nevertheless, the bitter recriminations elicited by this fashion indicate that learning how to perform for fun—one of the reasons for the proliferation of piaofang—was actually a popular phenomenon.

Apart from learning from their peers, amateur learners could also hire commercial actors as instructors. For social and pedagogical reasons, however, this option was not necessarily more effective. The constructed cultural hierarchy with amateurs on the top and career actors at the bottom persisted, causing amateurs to be cautious when they approached career actors for instruction. Sensitivity about boundary crossing was vividly illustrated by the long-standing disdain for career players, *ling 伶*:

By the time of the Tongzhi and Guangxu reigns, the line separating amateurs and career actors was strict. Career actors were proud of their association with amateurs, while the amateurs felt ashamed to befriend career actors... Career actors flattered amateurs by asking for their advice on art... Today it is different. Amateurs feel honored to make the acquaintance of career actors, while career actors see amateurs as their fan base.¹³⁰

The dismay herein expressed over the dissolving boundary between piaoyou and commercial actors was based on the assumed moral and cultural attributes of the two groups, as the commentator went on to aver: “all career actors misbehave, whereas amateurs perform are experienced and knowledgeable.”¹³¹ Amateurs seeking instruction from career actors, then, were constantly under social pressure, burdened with the responsibility of preventing their own moral decay and of upholding the ultimate cultural authority to arbitrate theatrical knowledge and taste.

In addition to the urgency of maintaining a social boundary between career and amateur

¹³⁰ Zhang Guyu, “Tan piaoyou yu lingren [On amateur performers and career actors].” *Shiri xiju*, no. 55 (date unknown).

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

performers, the lax mindset of amateur learners, some complained, was another obstacle to good instruction. Reasoning why amateur learning was inferior to keban training, Qi Rushan wrote:

The instructors are not very conscientious about teaching since [amateurs] study performance for pleasure, not necessarily to make a living. The instructors are not willing to be critical face to face, and so amateurs naturally are not able to master the art at a vocational level.¹³²

This sort of teaching would not be very effective since the students were not sufficiently motivated to reach the highest standard. Compounded with other issues, it was difficult for amateurs to be taught to become serious performers. Although Qi's assumptions about the ineffectiveness of piaoyou learning are not totally borne out, given the handful of amateurs who did learn enough to turn vocational, his comments still captured the general circumstances of amateur learning.

This section has delineated a sharp contrast between the idealization of piaoyou in discourse and perception of piaoyou by theatrical commentators and critics of the time. Ideally, piaoyou, on account of their wealth, literacy, and cultural exposure, were considered to be model learners and transmitters of theatrical knowledge. In reality, however, they came under constant criticism for dumbing down theatrical appreciation. Ironically, the perceived downturn in the quality of piaoyou knowledge came with the widespread proliferation of amateur performers and associations that had accompanied the growing popularity of pihuang since the turn of the early twentieth century. Underlying the contrast between ideal and reality was a concern of contemporary opera lovers about proper transmission of theatrical knowledge in the face of rapid changes in drama consumption and appreciation in a vibrant entertainment market.

¹³² Qi, "Keban gailiang chuyi," p. 48.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused on two groups of learners of opera—career actors and amateurs—to examine discourse and discussion on the transmission of theatrical knowledge in early twentieth century China. I situate their learning experiences at the conjunction of book and bodily learning. I also use the controversies surrounding how to teach opera as a window onto the identity-claims of insiders and outsiders to the performing business. I have shown that while different learning methods intersected with and supplemented one another, the boundary separating the insiders and outsiders was constantly shifting.

In the discussions on knowledge transmission in the theatrical realm, knowledge itself was never fixed or systematized. Instead of being a stable subject that might be preserved and passed down to subsequent generations, theatrical knowledge came into being as the related discourses emerged. In other words, the process of knowledge transmission was also a process of knowledge production. In the course of contemporaneous discussions on what and how to learn about opera performance, the scope and content of theatrical knowledge came into being.

Chapter 5:

Writing a History of Chinese Drama with the Classics

Introduction

In the early twentieth century, the thriving theatrical scene provided many resources to the forming scholarly interest in opera. The urban theater of Beijing allowed Qi Rushan to collect both tangible and intangible theatrical materials, while its long-established training institutions prepared the human resources to transmit aestheticism onstage. The fluidity of the theatrical scene, however, was at the same time problematic for constructing a systematic understanding of Chinese operatic art. To counter against this fluidity in making a coherent narrative of Chinese opera, Qi Rushan attempted to “uncover” a “theory” to substantiate performance on the contemporary stage. Qi took a historical approach to expound potential connections between an imaginary tradition of Chinese performance and the opera performance of his time. This focus on “history” to understand drama raises many intriguing questions: What was the history of Chinese drama? How was it to be written in the early twentieth century? How did the process of historical production intertwine with contemporary historiographical practices, both within the study of drama and within larger Sinological contexts? In answering these questions, I explore how the past—both recent and distant—came to be appropriated and mobilized in the making of theatrical knowledge in modern times.

Born to a transitional generation, the relation between new modes of opera appreciation and theatrical connoisseurship of the recent past was a poignant one for Qi Rushan. Growing from his alleged dissatisfaction with literati accounts on theater, Qi strove to find alternatives to understand the theatrical arts. Close comparison of Qi’s writings and literati precedent, however,

shows that Qi's departure was not drastic as he claimed it to be. Late Qing institutions of the urban theater remained robust in the early Republican period, and the imprint of literati connoisseurship on opera remained influential. For one, the sense of superiority of lettered men vis-à-vis performers was crucial to the identity-claims of learned connoisseurs as well as personal networking between audiences and actors. In addition, the late imperial dichotomy between elegance (*ya*) and vulgarity (*su*), which defined a continuum of theatrical genres (where Kun opera exemplified the elegant and the once-lowbrow *pihuang* represented the vulgar), was widely applied in the debate on genre candidates for national drama. Nurtured by the urban theater that had continued to develop since Qing times, Qi's research on Chinese drama retained a link with established views on *pihuang* opera. He wrote about topics not unlike those that once caught attention of late imperial writers. For instance, both provided social analyses of the space of theatrical venues and observation about performance management.

Clearly, Qi's conscious search for textual materials other than Qing connoisseurship texts cannot simply be explained by his disdain of the latter. As will be shown in this chapter, it was the transnational context of the emerging Sinology and renewed interest in opera that separated Qi from early generations of opera connoisseurs. Within the specific context of the early twentieth century, Qi chose *gewu* 歌舞 (song-and-dance) as the key to writing a history of Chinese opera from antiquity to contemporary times. To historicize Qi's writing of the history of song and dance in Chinese drama, this chapter complicates the making of his notion of *gewu*, and especially its relation to the ancient classics and pre-Song literature. It further situates Qi's efforts to trace the origin of Chinese drama to antiquity in relationship to two kinds of history that emerged in Qi's time. The first is an "internal history" of Chinese drama, best illustrated by

Wang Guowei (1877-1927), whose *A History of Song and Yuan Drama* places the golden age of Chinese drama in the Song (960-1279). The second is an “external history” of Chinese drama, including debates on the rise and fall of Chinese civilization that arose in the transnational context of the emerging Sinology in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as in Chinese intellectuals’ responses to this transnational trend.

Approaching Qi’s writing on the gewu notion as a historiographical issue of opera study, this chapter attests to the modernity of Qi Rushan’s scholarly project on Chinese opera. If, in Qi Rushan’s case, this modernity consists in neither opposition to late imperial connoisseurship nor his self-designation as a modern researcher, what were the concerns specific to his times to which Qi attempted to respond? This chapter shows that it was the temporal break in early twentieth-century China that delimited the recent and distant past and that informed Qi’s writing of a history of Chinese opera.

My discussion begins with Qi’s retrospective writing on his dissatisfaction with Qing connoisseurship texts. In his autobiography, in explaining why he launched the search for alternative research materials, Qi expressed rather strong opinion on late imperial connoisseurship writings:

No matter what our research subject is, [we] need to consult some books. [I] found around twenty titles--nothing but books such as *A Brief Registrar of the Orchids of Yan* and *Records of Boy Actors (Mingtong lu 明僮錄)*. However, these titles addressed neither theatrical theory nor the conditions of troupes. All of them only talked about “assisting lords” (xianggong 相公) and their “domestic quarters” (tangzi 堂子); [or, for instance, for such-and-such an actor, they record who he trained under, his troupe affiliation, and his role specialization, meaning that he belonged to a particular troupe and sang the qingyi

青衣 (blue-robed female role) or huadan 花旦 (flowery female role). They also included poems flattering specific actors, etcetera, and yet all these complimentary writings read similar to those adulating courtesans. All in all, these works are too distant from drama. They are utterly useless for drama research.¹

According to Qi, Qing literati writings on opera—that is, texts from the recent past—did not constitute genuine research materials since they failed to transmit a theatrical theory or to capture the reality of the historical circumstances of the theatrical realm. Even worse, he blamed late imperial literati for downgrading interest in drama to sensational indulgence in sex. In the first part of this chapter, I contextualize Qi’s discontent with the recent past within the transitional generation of early Republican commentators, while also noting certain shared interests between Qi and Qing opera aficionados. In the second part, I address Qi Rushan’s appropriation of the distant past—exploring how he drew upon Chinese antiquity and pre-Song literature for his project to write the definitive history of Chinese drama.

Escape from the Recent Past?

Under Qi Rushan’s pen, Qing connoisseur texts appear almost useless as research materials. My interest lies not in defending Qi’s criticism, but rather in understanding its possible motivations. Qi denigrated Qing dramaturgy, I argue, so as to identify his engagement in opera appreciation as something distinct from the late imperial mode, as something “modern.” Qi’s attitude reflects a larger early Republican interest in reassessing Qing connoisseurship texts.

Qi’s contemporary Zhang Cixi, for example, another theatrical collector and connoisseur,

¹ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, pp. 84-85.

shared a similar perspective. In his Preface to fellow opera enthusiast Fang Wenxi's 方問溪 publication of *A Glossary of the Pear Garden*, Zhang laments the lack of works on opera in Qing Beijing, claiming that "there are rarely dedicated works that one can find in bookshops that account for [this history]." Books such as *A Brief Registrar of the Orchids of Yan*, *A Precious Mirror for Ranking Boy Actresses* (*Pinhua baojian* 品花寶鑑), *Miscellaneous Records of Life in the Capital* (*Jingchen zalu* 京塵雜錄), *Heroes of the Chrysanthemum Quarter* (*jubu qunying* 菊部群英), he continues, "are nothing more than fragmented records of romantics without any discussion of the artistic organization [of opera]." In contrast, he commends works such as Fang Wenxi's that "investigate the historical record of the Pear Garden," while also expressing concern that some [readers] with shallow mindset might underestimate the significance of *Glossary of the Pear Garden*. Zhang was nevertheless certain that future researchers would distinguish the value of a new kind of scholarly writing on theater illustrated by Fang's work.²

As a collector and publisher of Qing connoisseur texts himself, Zhang's comments on the genre are ironic. Three years after his preface to Fang's *Glossary of the Pear Garden*, in 1934, Zhang reprinted his personal collection of Qing literati writings about theater under the title *Collected Historical Sources*, which was highly acclaimed by drama researchers and opera performers alike.³ While it cannot be denied that Zhang acknowledged Qing connoisseurship texts for preserving information (such as the hometowns, names, artistic talents, and temperament of actors) of Beijing theater during Qing times, he was also looking for a new kind of writing about the theater, based on investigation of the theatrical realm and oral interview with

² Zhang Cixi, "Zhang xu [Preface by Mr. Zhang]," in Fang Wenxi, *Liyuan hua*, p. 19.

³ See Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion on the publication of *Collected Historical Sources*.

opera practitioners.⁴ Holding this expectation as the standard, Qing connoisseurship would come to be labelled as inferior kind of research material. This ambiguous attitude toward Qing connoisseurship is also seen from Qi Rushan. For the transitional generation that Zhang and Qi belonged to, a total rupture from the late imperial past was not readily possible, and both evolution out of and breakthrough from that past were equally pressing issues.

The connoisseurship genre that that Qi Rushan and Zhang Cixi criticized was Qing huapu 花譜, or “flower registers.” Recent scholarship on late-imperial theatrical connoisseurship has examined the formation of literati aesthetics and social community through the lens of literati writings on theater. Highlighting Qing flower registers as the main historical sources, Andrea Goldman has shown how literati audiences of commercial theater in Qing Beijing engaged in a communal writing endeavor to express their aesthetic concerns; in doing so, they differentiated themselves from other groups of audiences sharing the same theatrical space. The customers from which the literati especially strove to distinguish themselves were the lao dou 老斗, rich patrons who were described as “cultural philistines.” By writing within the long-standing literary traditions of connoisseurship, literati audiences managed to maintain their self-identification as true, sophisticated connoisseurs in a theatrical culture that was increasingly dominated by the power of money. Given the literary games and allusions with which literati writers “draped metaphors of courtesan beauty and talent onto cross-dressing boy actresses,” it is understandable why Qi Rushan held the opinion that Qing theatrical connoisseurship texts were “similar to those adulating courtesans.”⁵ Notwithstanding Qi’s criticism on the eroticized implications of Qing

⁴ Zhang Cixi, “Qingdai yandu liyuan shiliao zixu [Author’s preface],” in *Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao*, p. 41.

⁵ Goldman, *Opera and the City*, p. 27.

theatrical writings, these texts revealed one intriguing facet of the theater as seen from and recorded by elite male audiences.

To more precisely pinpoint the differences and similarities between Qi Rushan and Qing precedents, in this section, I focus on theatrical space and performance management as topics of comparison within their writings. Both topics address certain operational knowledge of theater and are of the interest to Qi's performance-oriented approach to opera research. I use "space" instead of place to designate the object of connoisseur writings because under the eyes of sophisticated connoisseurs, theater was not merely a physical place, but a fluid space for human interactions, interpretations, and innovations. In theatrical space, connoisseurs were learned observers who stayed in tune with the shows on-stage while always keeping in sight the happenings around them. Situating themselves within the theater (both physically and textually) to create their superior footing on the cultural front, literati audiences disclosed (or, at least, described) some operational characteristics of the space. Through their "ethnographical" vision, they shared with Qi Rushan a curiosity about the theatrical space.

In "The Playhouses" (Xi guanzi 戲館子), a manuscript devoted to investigating the operation of Chinese theater around the turn of the twentieth century,⁶ Qi Rushan approached the theatrical space first from the problem of the naming of the performance venue. As Qi pointed out, since "there has not been a fixed designation for performing venues in our country," it was not easy to come up with a unified term to signify the theatrical space. He lists different names for theaters in different cities in China: "In Beijing, it is called xiguan 戲館 [or] xiyuan 戲園; in

⁶ Qi's "Playhouses" is a 2010 reprint from manuscript. The work is presumed to have been composed by the 1920s. See Qi Rushan, *Qi Rushan wenlun* [Collected theses of Qi Rushan] (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 2010), p. 372.

Tianjin, it is also called xiguan 戲館; in Shanghai it has been called wutai 舞台 for decades,” and he concluded that “there is no Chinese term which is synonymous to the term ‘theater’ in western languages; this is because there has not been unifying regulations to [define] such a term in the Chinese language.”⁷ The lack of “unifying regulation” of terminology was problematic for Qi. As each signifier indicated specific ideas about the theatrical space (its quality, its functionality, its sociability, etc.), the multiplicity of names inhibited conceptual consistency. For Qi, a unified name for the theatrical space—generalized and conceptualized—was crucial to developing a coherent, systematic understanding of Chinese drama.

After addressing the challenge of establishing a universal name, Qi goes on to examine the implications of each of the existing designations for theatrical space:

[Some of these terms] that consider the qualities of [the theatrical space] include: song (ge 歌), dance (wu 舞), song-and-dance (gewu 歌舞), play (xi 戲), and drama (ju 劇).

These are still applicable. However, I suggest that the character xi should be used to name [the theatrical space]. This is because national drama equally emphasizes song and dance, neither term is sufficiently inclusive to describe [the theatrical space]; using the two characters of ge and wu together sounds better, but it is still less ideal than the one character xi 戲. Xi, as in zhongguo xi 中國戲 (Chinese drama), has become a very common proper noun. In addition to song-and-dance, there are other specific qualities and characteristics of Chinese drama that cannot be encompassed by ge and wu.

Moreover, for everyone nowadays, xi contains the implications of song-and-dance.

Therefore, xi can cover the meanings of ge and wu.⁸

In this passage, Qi Rushan attempts to make logical explanations for his choice of *xi* as the

⁷ Qi, “Xi guanzi,” in Qi, *Qi Rushan wenlun*, p. 5.

⁸ Ibid.

optimal name for the action that happens within the theatrical space. Xi is the best option, since, according to Qi, the Chinese character encapsulated his theorization of Chinese drama in an efficient way. Qi's argument shows how the examination of the material space supported his construction of the equivalence between Chinese drama and the gewu notion. It was of little real concern to Qi if the connection between xi and gewu was actually accepted by the general public. His goal was that his readers might spontaneously associate the performing venue designated xi with the song-and-dance qualities of Chinese theater.

Late imperial writers did not share the burden of theorizing contemporary performance. What concerned them more was how to accommodate their indulgence in drama in light of the suspicious attitude of the Qing state toward popular entertainment. They wrote, for example, about the locations of theater in imperial Beijing within a kind of “urban geography” that materialized the ruling legitimacy of the Manchus and as part of connoisseurs’ “guides” to their readers for enjoying theatrical consumption in the capital city. Combining “factual information on how to identify and locate the city’s best actors,” and “more subtle guidance on how to recognize artistic excellence and physical beauty” of the actors, late-imperial writers “initiated the reader into the domain of theatrical connoisseurship.” By writing and reading about the space, educated audiences in the Qing capital satisfied their yearning for aesthetics by locating and dabbling into an urban world where “authentic” theatrical connoisseurship was to be enjoyed and validated.⁹

While Qi supposed playhouses to be a field that had been nourishing the gewu tradition of Chinese theater for years, Qing literati viewed it as a pleasure ground for enjoyment of drama

⁹ For an in-depth discussion on Qing huapu writing, see Goldman, *Opera and the City*, Chapter 1.

wherein they could escape from political constraints and social competition. However, it was the historical continuity from the Qing that made Qi's later conceptual construction of the space possible. The playhouse, as one of the focal points in Qi's writing on drama in the early Republican period, asserted its centrality in late imperial cultural life and reached maturity as an urban institution during the mid to late Qing.¹⁰ Various names for the performing venue, which captured the growth of the urban theater, presented Qi Rushan with the lexicon that he used to theorize his *gewu* notion. By regularizing the terminology for the theatrical space, Qi rewrote the thriving performance infrastructure in the Republican period into a living testimonial to theatrical aesthetics.

Historical continuity between Qi Rushan and Qing theatrical connoisseurs can also be seen in his observations and interpretations of the social dynamics within the playhouses. Qi, too, records that within the playhouse literati audiences confronted competition for favorable seating and access to performances with the great patrons (*hao ke* 豪客)—who were mostly powerful officials and rich merchants. In a commercial playhouse, the differentiation of seats was a combination of well-established practices of theater-viewing and careful partition of the space. Qing connoisseurs were concerned with who sat where and what sort of viewing experience money could buy.¹¹ They noted that price differentiation paralleled the socioeconomic hierarchy of audiences. Discrepancy between control of socioeconomic resources and cultural capital was a pressing issue to the literati connoisseurs, who hoped to make themselves an

¹⁰ Goldman, *Opera and the City*, p. 68.

¹¹ Zhang Jiliang, *Jintai canlei ji* [A record of tear stains from the golden stage], in *Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao*, p. 527. See also Goldman, *Opera and the City*, p. 18.

exception to the rule of money.¹²

Qi Rushan, writing roughly a century after the huapu writers, offered his own analysis of the social dynamics inside the playhouse. In the chapter titled, “An Analysis of Social Status within Playhouses (lun xiguan nei diwei zhi fenxi 論戲館內地位之分析),” he detailed seating assignments and the composition of audiences within each section. Many of Qi observations read like more explicated reiterations of earlier literati accounts. For instance, in talking about the “pond,” he notes:

The pond (chizi 池子): this is where spectators can enjoy the show the most... However, there has been an established custom for over two hundred years since the Qing, in which the people who sit here have been mostly peddlers and servants. Due to its crowdedness, not only literati and officials refused to sit there, but also merchants with better taste declined these seats. Therefore, those who fanatically shouted out hao 好 in a playhouse mostly sat in this [section].¹³

Identifying the audiences in the pond as “peddlers and servants,” Qi’s account echoed the social judgement of Qing writers on the audiences within playhouses.

Compared to the Qing connoisseurs, Qi Rushan offers more detail about the divisions of seating areas within the theatrical space. For instance, in addition to the “pond,” Qi recorded that there was a section called the “small pond” (xiao chizi 小池子) on the first floor:

The small pond: its social status was as low as the pond. Since this section is located on the side, it is inconvenient to watch the performance; however, because it is situated close to the stage, it was a perfect place to listen [to the performance]. Therefore, normally

¹² Andrea S. Goldman, “Actors and Aficionados in Qing Dynast Texts of Theatrical Connoisseurship,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (June, 2008), p. 37.

¹³ Qi, “Xi guanzi,” in *Qi Rushan wenlun*, p. 21.

those who sat there versed in the study of singing and melody. They were by nature gentler and quieter [than those in the pond].¹⁴

The advantage of the “small pond” was access to acoustic appreciation. Calling this “the general practice of ordinary people in the old society,” in another essay, Qi Rushan disagreed with the common practice of listening to performance (tingxi 聽戲) in Beijing, and he argued that watching performance (kanxi 看戲), or paying attention to visual manifestation of the character’s interiority, is the way to fully appreciate opera.¹⁵ The spatial arrangement of a playhouse shaped practices of theatrical appreciation. Even more, his detailed descriptions speak to his interest in differentiated opera aesthetics. It is clear that for Qi composition of audiences was a crucial factor in defining the status (diwei 地位) of any given seating section. The manifestations of the audiences’ character (through their preferences of and responses to performances), all together, reflected a social hierarchy within the theatrical space.

After examining the nature of each seating section, Qi Rushan continues to offer an integral social analysis of the theatrical space. Knowing full well that seating option was chiefly an economic issue, Qi compared the profits to be obtained from seats of every section:

Each section is distinguished by superior and inferior social statuses; and the management of seat sections is distinguished by simplicity and complexity. The income that ushers earned greatly differed from one section to another. The pond section was the most profitable; as there were more viewers, ushers there got more tips and tea fees. The “two balconies” (lianglou 兩樓) were also good. Although the number of patrons might

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Qi Rushan, “Lun Beijing ming guanju yu tingxi zhi bu tuo [On the inappropriateness of calling opera-viewing as opera-listening in Beijing],” in *Zayan* [Miscellaneous Writing]. Reprinted in *Qi Rushan wencun* [Collected writings of Qi Rushan] (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 2010), p. 317-18.

not be as great as in the pond, those who sat upstairs were mostly more generous so they gave larger tips. The seats right beneath the front balcony were not bad either. Even though many audiences went to sit there in the hope of listening for free (ting baixi 聽白戲), since they were mostly cultured people from officialdom, they [were willing to] pay more for the tea fees, as they had saved money from the ticket fare...¹⁶

Each section in the playhouse had a price tag, which was the result of careful design and long-standing practices of theater-going dating back to the late eighteenth century. Qi Rushan's matter-of-fact description about ushers' income from opera consumption sounds more like the observations of a playhouse manager than an enthusiastic opera lover. With this management mindset, Qi took a position different from that of Qing literati connoisseurs. In Qi's eyes, a playhouse was an economic space, open to pure calculation of profit. As the observer (and recorder), he kept himself aloof from the economic hierarchy that his analysis reflected, as he wrote free from the social anxiety that had troubled Qing commentators on the playhouse.

From where might the seeming objectivity in Qi Rushan's analysis have come? First, with regard to Qi's personal experience, his affluent background saved him from competition for access to the better seats inside the playhouse. As a well-to-do owner of several businesses, Qi Rushan seemed never to have had to worry about whether he could afford a good seat.¹⁷ Second, and more importantly, Qi Rushan's neutral tone was a product of a historian's sensibility. Qi, for example, often qualified his analyses: "the aforementioned circumstance was that prior to the Guangxu period; there were frequent changes after the Republic."¹⁸ In fact, the picture Qi

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Qi recalled he always made a reservation for one of the upstairs boxes in a playhouse. Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 82.

¹⁸ Qi, "Xi guanzi," in *Qi Rushan wenlun*, p. 25.

presented was a mixture of Beijing playhouses past and present: it was “almost” historical, but the process of historicization had not yet been concluded. When Qi was writing his chapter, some of the playhouses in Republican Beijing remained similar to their configuration in Qing times, while others either had undergone renovation or had been remolded in the new style.¹⁹ Considering the juxtaposition of changing interior design and behavioral norms of performing venues from the late Qing to the early Republican period, there could be no clear-cut line to designate the periodization of social evolution within playhouses. While Qi Rushan, in his writing, created a temporal distance from a very recent past, he also linked that history with the status quo of playhouses in his own times. Given the historical continuity of Beijing’s urban theater from Qing to early Republican times, it is not surprising that Qi shared the ethnographic gaze of Qing literati connoisseurs. Both, seeing the theatrical space as a microcosm of society, focused keen eyes on the social and cultural stratification of audience groups. Both enjoyed a sense of cultural superiority in contrast with other audience groups in the playhouses.

An interest in portraying human actors and their activities within the theatrical space is also apparent in the accounts of playhouse management by Qing connoisseurs and Qi Rushan. Serving as guidebooks to capital theaters, connoisseurship texts discussed the line-up of plays during a day of performance to advise readers when was the best time to attend a good show. To enjoy the best performances, one needed to know what time during the day the most famous or greatest actors would show up onstage.²⁰

Qi Rushan also wrote about arrangement of performance, but he was more interested in

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See, for instance, the observations in Yang, *Menghua suobu*, in *Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao*, pp. 715-16.

the management that made performance possible.²¹ His inquiry led him to write a monograph entitled, *Opera Troupes* (*Xiban* 戲班)—a work that explores acting professions within the basic unit of performance operation. The work provides a structural overview of company organization, examining aspects of finance (*caitong* 財東), personnel (*renyuan* 人員), religious beliefs (*xinyang* 信仰), regulations (*guiju* 規矩), income and expenditure (*kuanxiang* 款項), and public relations (*duiwai* 對外). For each category, Qi divided the content into smaller entries and supplemented them with detailed definitions and/or related examples. Altogether, discussion in *Opera Troupes* covers both internal management of a troupe as well as development and maintenance of relations between the acting company and other social organizations. If Qi's other monographs investigate the ways of putting together a performance onstage and inside a performing venue, *Opera Troupes* reveals the rules particular to conducting the entertainment business, especially within the "old" capital.

Seeing the acting company as a social organization, Qi wrote to unveil its customary rules unknown to readers outside of performing circles. Taking financial transaction, for instance, Qi pointed out that "at the first glance, the flow of money into and out of a troupe seems to be quite simple... However, the transactions are actually pretty complicated... There are also many procedures not easily known to outsiders."²² The obstacle to understanding the operational practices within a troupe was largely due to the lack of written regulations. Qi, for example, pointed out that "there never has been written law regarding the regulations of troupes." For Qi

²¹ For instance, in "Da Zhouzi [Finale session]," Qi talked about the arrangement of performance sessions in a similar vein as Qing huapu writers. See *Zayan*, p. 317-18.

²² Qi Rushan, *Xiban*, [Opera troupes], in *Qi Rushan quanji* (Taipei: Qi Rushan xiansheng yizhu bianyin weiyuanhui, 1964) p. 41.

Rushan, the absence of written documentation in no way meant that the regulations of troupe operation were underdeveloped or arbitrary. Instead, he contended, “indeed, there are strict rules about the duties of each role as well as the responsibilities of each position within a troupe.”²³ Qi’s mission in writing about a troupe was to account for those “unwritten laws.” To accomplish this task, he took a position empathic to theatrical practitioners, attempting to understand from the inside why and how the customary practices had evolved into their present-day forms.

Even for aspects that might appear most incomprehensible to outside readers, Qi Rushan boldly defended his subject of research. In the opening paragraph of the chapter on religious beliefs among career performers, Qi argued that this, too, was a topic worthy of intellectual investigation:

People say that [members of] the opera world are extremely superstitious. Actually, these words do not make any sense at all. Every society must have some objects to worship; every group must have something to believe in... There is no definite standard of right and wrong; why must [we] assert that the world of opera performers is superstitious? Furthermore, most of the content of such worship and belief is justified by legitimate reasons.”²⁴

In the rest of the “Xinyang” chapter, Qi Rushan explores the “legitimate reasons” that would make the religious beliefs of opera actors intelligible to his readers. He introduces the origins of the deities worshipped and connects the religious practices of troupes to the rhythm of actors’ everyday lives. In so doing, Qi confronted the common view that saw the opera troupe as an organization whose rules were incompatible with modern norms of society at large. His purpose, certainly, was not to convince his readers to follow the practices and beliefs of the Pear Garden;

²³ Qi, *Xiban*, p. 13.

²⁴ Qi, *Xiban*, p. 28.

instead, Qi Rushan attempted to view the troupe as a mini society with its own logic, and possibly, to satisfy voyeurism of readers outside the performance business. Qi's devotion to unearthing the hidden logics of the opera troupes also imbued his works with an empathy for career actors, revealing understanding of operational practices that had not been seen in Qing connoisseurship accounts.

While Qi Rushan, as we have seen, shared with the writing of Qing commentators many of the same interests in actual performance, on actors, and on their social dynamics within the theatrical space, he made a concerted effort to distance himself from these precedents due to the Qing connoisseurs' eroticization of the boy actresses. Indeed, as will become apparent, Qi's avowal of his histories of Chinese drama as something entirely new was more historiographical (and ideological) than methodological.

Writing the History of Song-and-Dance in Chinese Drama

The early Republican reevaluation of Qing connoisseurship reflects an interest among intellectuals-cum-opera enthusiasts to write a continuous history of the Chinese civilization with new approaches to drama research materials. To explain Qi Rushan's conscious dismissal of the rich late imperial theatrical connoisseurship heritage, I historicize the making of Republican-era Chinese drama historiography, in which Qi played a central role. The renewed interest in Chinese antiquity and critical reflection on China's historical past led Qi to explore remote dynasties in search of the guiding principles of contemporary onstage performance. Within the distant past, Qi found what the recent past did not provide: aesthetic concepts to construct a performance tradition that he would argue was unique to China and its civilizational essence.

My inquiry begins with Qi Rushan's choice of research materials. Qi's selection of texts was drawn from diverse literary genres and covered a long timespan, ranging from classic texts of the pre-Han period to literary works of the Tang. He expanded his references not only in terms of time and space, but also in kind. Qi's goal was to include as diverse a set of textual materials as possible. In his memoir, Qi pointed to fellow researchers in a wide assortment of fields he considered worth consulting as inspiration for collecting research materials:

If one wants do research about numerous kinds of poses, singing, and music, etc, one has to consult archaeology and not just stop at history. One also has to read the records of the four distant quarters (siyi 四裔) as well as the sections on local customs in gazetteers (fengtu zhi 風土志) of the different provinces and counties. The latter are especially relevant since they are very informative about drama, minor melodies (xiaodiao 小調), acrobatics (zaji 雜技), and the various arts.²⁵

Qi Rushan's constant inquiry into the singing and movement in drama reflected his abiding interest in the *gewu* characteristic of Chinese drama. He encouraged scholars to expand their search in time (from history to archaeology) and space (to many regions within China) for records of song and dance, even if the linkage between these records and drama might not be readily apparent. His suggestion was revolutionary, as he advised scholars to look at sources that had not been considered relevant to drama in the literary tradition of theatrical appreciation. To explore these unconventional fields, a researcher had to have a clear vision of where to look at as well as what to look for. The aforementioned passage was written by Qi in retrospection and there are no citations in his scholarship to confirm that he consulted the materials he suggested

²⁵ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 94.

when conducting his own research. Nevertheless, his comments are remarkable for revealing Qi's intention to look for a larger corpus of textual records out of which drama scholars might build their research.

Also because of Qi's curiosity about the *gewu* notion, he turned to works on *qu* 曲 written in Ming and Yuan dynasties in spite of his harsh criticism of Qing connoisseurship texts. As he comments in his memoir:

As for *Essential Knowledge of Songs Composition* (Duqu xuzhi 度曲須知), *Tao Jiucheng on Songs* (Tao Jiucheng lun qu 陶九成論曲), *Yannan Zhi'an on Songs* (Yannan zhi'an lun qu 燕南芝庵論曲), *Zhou Tingzhai on Songs* (Zhou tingzhai lun qu 周挺齋論曲), *Mr. Danqiu on Songs* (Danqiu xiansheng lun qu 丹丘先生論曲), *Han xuzi on Songs* (Han uzi lun qu 涵虛子論曲), *A Records of Ghosts* (Lu guibu 錄鬼簿), etc.—although these works all specialize in drama, they examine singing and record the circumstances of songs (*qu*). In these works, there is absolutely no discussion on topics such as movement in plays.²⁶

There is no direct evidence to suggest that Qi made the foregoing comment after a thorough survey of the contents of the titles he mentioned, since Qi regarded these works as useless to his objectives. Nonetheless, his primary interest in tracing the historical development of Chinese drama through works on *qu* composition was sensible for two reasons. First, despite the fact that during Qi's time *qu* had become a defunct genre that was no longer performed on the contemporary stage, it retained an iconic status in the literati tradition of theatrical appreciation. Second, these works, mostly composed during Yuan and Ming times, were more distant from his own time than Qing theatrical connoisseurship texts. It stood to reason to consult these works if

²⁶ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, p. 85.

Qi wished to trace the history of Chinese drama back in time. These works, too, disappointed Qi, but not because they were not informative or lacked historical significance. Taking a look at some of the works on the list, for instance, *Yannan Zhi'an on Songs* is acclaimed by modern scholars as “the earliest existing work on theatrical singing.”²⁷ *Zhou Tingzhai on Songs* contains detailed instruction on the rules of lyric prosody.²⁸ *Mr. Danqiu on Songs* even examines some of the terminology of the acting profession.²⁹ However, these works were not suitable for Qi’s research materials, he claimed, because they failed to explicate how singing (and, in particular, composition and performance of qu) and was to be incorporated into the entirety of a theatrical production on stage.

This disappointment pushed Qi further back in time and guided him to the works of early China and Chinese antiquity. As seen from Qi’s own writing of Chinese drama history, Qi clearly remembered how these works had benefited his research. He writes:

In addition to the *Thirteen Classics*, there are records [about drama] in the sections on music (樂志) in the *Twenty-Four Histories* (*Ershisi shi* 二十四史), poetic works about song-and-dance in the *Selections of Refined Literature* (*Wenxuan* 文選), and miscellaneous notes by famous writers of different dynasties. I benefited most from the *Book of Rites*, the *Rites of Zhou*, the *Book of Music* (*Yueshu* 樂書) by Chen Yang 陳暘 of the Song, the *Comprehensive Volume on Music Prosody* (*Yuelü quanshu* 樂律全書) by the Ming prince Zhu Zaiyu, *Standardization of Tonality* (*Lulu zhengyi* 律呂正義) of the

²⁷ Wang Xueqi ed., Zang Maoxun, *Yuanqu xuan jiaozhu* [Annotated collection of Yuan songs] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994), p. 41.

²⁸ Wang Xueqi ed., Zang Maoxun, *Yuanqu xuan jiaozhu*, p.

²⁹ For instance: “In a theater, entrance and exit doors are called ‘the gate of ghosts (guimen dao 鬼門道). This is because it is said that all figures impersonated by actors were deceased. As actors pass on and off [the stage] through these doors, they are called guimen.” See *Yuanquxuan jiaozhu*, p. 89.

Qing, as well as classic works on music in the *Complete Collection of Illustrations and Writings from Ancient Times to Present* (*Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成)... All of the aforementioned works tell the origin of Chinese drama as a whole.³⁰

Qi's recommendations of research materials identify certain key questions: Why are ancient texts and certain classical works on musicology given upmost importance, considered by Qi as revealing "the origin of Chinese drama as whole"? It is clear that the classics contained a certain historical legitimacy and political authority that could buttress Qi Rushan's research project on Chinese "national" drama. But the explanation of Qi's choices is more complex than the authoritative status of the classics. To answer these questions, I contextualize his research work within the political and intellectual contexts of his time, reading it along side general trends within historiography in the early Republican period, namely, the writing of the history of China within the transnational context of an emerging Sinology.

Intriguingly, Qi Rushan's call for rigorous scholarship and novel research materials first guided him to the work of Qing textual critics, chief among them being the eighteenth-century commentator Jiao Xun 焦循 (1763-1820):

As for works such as Jiao Xun's *On Drama* (*Jushou* 劇說), before having read the book, I presumed that since he was a leading scholar of the classics, his *On Drama* must be superior to *A Brief Registrar of the Orchids of Yan* and the like. After I read the book, I acknowledge that indeed his work possesses a kind of scholarly quality. However, it always gives one-sided emphasis on recording notes about the scores and scripts of southern and northern qu; it speaks very little about the theory [of drama].³¹

³⁰ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyiliu*, pp. 93-94.

³¹ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyiliu*, p. 85.

The recognition of Jiao as a master of the ancient classics (jingxue dajia 經學大家) indicates Qi's confidence in Jiao. Here, it becomes clear that Qi Rushan first read *On Drama* in the hope that Jiao would be a serious scholar distinct from the "indulgent" opera hobbyists of theatrical connoisseurship texts. He seems to assume that since Jiao was known for his evidential learning, he would have applied the methodology of textual criticism to drama study as well.³² Perhaps, Qi expected to find in *On Drama* either exhaustive citation of the available evidence for tracing the historical origin of contemporary theater or detailed commentaries on *all* components of a theatrical production, which might enable Qi to reconstruct historical performance onstage and reveal an underlying "theory" of Chinese drama. From Qi's expectations regarding *On Drama*, we can detect an implicit link between Qing evidential research and the emerging modern drama research of the early twentieth century. From a methodological viewpoint, Qi followed the path of evidential scholars: he investigated the origins of Chinese drama from all existing historical and contemporary evidence and pursued his dissection of drama in the greatest particulars.³³ For Qi, these endeavors in and of themselves, without need for explicit justification, validated the value of research of, in his words, "scholarly quality," (yanjiu de xingzhi 研究的性質). In this sense, Qi shared with Qing evidential scholars a belief in methodological precision and extensive culling of research materials, and this is reflected in Qi's expectations for what he might find in Jiao's work.

Qi Rushan's approach to drama diverged from Jiao Xun, then, not in terms of

³² For the history of Qing textual criticism, see Benjamin Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Changes in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984).

³³ For the historical continuity between Qing evidential scholarship and emerging new fields of humanistic research (archeology), see Brown, *Pastimes*.

methodology, but in research focus. Jiao Xun, best known for his evidential research, had an extensive interest in conducting textual excavations of the origins of things he encountered in everyday life—including drama—a topic about which Jiao was undoubtedly an expert.³⁴ Native to the Yangzhou region, Jiao had exposure to a vibrant theatrical milieu as well as collections of literature on drama. He also associated with other dramatists and theatrical connoisseurs of the times, most notably Li Dou 李斗 (-1817), the author of *The Painted Boats of Yangzhou*, which included copious entries on drama as practiced in Yangzhou.³⁵ These resources provided Jiao ample opportunities to examine drama of the past and present.

Qi's dissatisfaction with *On Drama*, underscoring his pursuit of a total theory of Chinese drama, grew from the book's emphasis on plays written and performed in northern and southern qu, a genre which was no longer performed on the stage in Qi's time. But Qi's disappointment is not entirely warranted. Indeed, a closer look at the content of *On Drama* ought to dispel such discontent. Although Jiao spends most of the pages of *On Drama* tracing the authorship and contents of qu scripts, he also recorded customary practices and anecdotes about theatrical practice. In addition to textual investigations on theatrical roles and usages of stage props, Jiao addressed the historical developments of singing and dancing, a topic that had always been the core of Qi Rushan's research. Citing *Words on Lyrics by the Side of Western River* (*Xihe cihua* 西河詞話), Jiao wrote: "In ancient times, the singing was not paired with the choreography.

Singers did not dance; and dancers did not sing. Even the lyrics of dancing songs did not have to

³⁴ Fan Chunyi, *Jiao Xun xijuxue yanjiu* [A Study on Jiao Xun's drama research] (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2012), pp. 42-51.

³⁵ For Jiao Xun's exposure to Jiangnan theatrical culture and association with dramatists and theatrical connoisseurs, see Fan, *Jiao Xun xijuxue yanjiu*, pp. 11-41.

correspond with the dancer's performance." Jiao dated the synchronization of song and dance to an innovation of the Yuan dynasty, remarking that "only in the plays composed in Yuan times did singing and dancing come to be performed by a single performer. Dancers on the stages [were assigned to be] in charge of singing by themselves."³⁶ Although there is no definitely evidence to show that Qi intentionally neglected Jiao's observations about the historical development of drama performance, it was hardly conceivable that Qi Rushan would have missed such an important clue regarding his concern with gewu—the synchronicity of song and dance in Chinese opera.

Other than the simple remark on Jiao's work in his memoir, Qi Rushan dismissed Jiao Xun in totality in his scholarly writings on Chinese drama. Qi Rushan was not the only drama researcher disappointed by the limitations of Jiao's work. With the emergence of drama research in the early twentieth century, Qing scholarship on drama was easily downplayed in the praise of new attempts to understand China's native theater. One author, when praising Wang Guowei's breakthrough contribution to drama research, commented that "there were not many people who appreciated opera in Qing times. However, during the Qianlong period, Jiao Xun, one master of evidential research, edited a volume called *On Drama*. Regretfully, although he collected many materials, he did not systematically examine these materials."³⁷ Unlike the general unfavorable judgement on Jiao's scholarship, Qi's case illustrates a more specific reason to dismiss Qing scholarship. Qi's choice, I suggest, was historiographical in nature, involving neither research

³⁶ Wei Minghua annotated, Jiao Xun, *Ju shou* [On drama], in *Jiao Xun lun qu sanzong* [Three works on songs by Jiao Xun] (Yangzhou: Guangling shushe, 2008), p. 33.

³⁷ He Changqun, "Wang Guowei xiansheng zhengli zhongguo xiqu de chengji jiqi wenyi piping [The achievement of Mr. Wang Guowei in materials of Chinese opera and his literary critics]," *Wenxue zhoubao* [Literature weekly], June 16, 1927.

materials nor methodology, but rather interpretations of Chinese history. What Qi dismissed was the theatrical history of the Yuan and, more generally, a time during which China was under non-Han rule. The personal biases of the historian intertwined with the history he wrote. With regard to respect for historical facts, Jiao Xun, perhaps ironically, is the better historian.

Historians' choices are personal within context. Contrary to Qi Rushan's downplaying the importance of Yuan drama, Wang Guowei (1877-1927), upheld it as the highest achievement in the history of China's dramatic literature. Wang valued Yuan drama as having attained a Chinese equivalence of tragedy, a category highly venerated in the realm of "world literature." In making his arguments, Wang emphasized the linkage between drama in the Song and Yuan, and dismissed the influence of the Yuan Empire to claim the independent agency of Han playwrights under non-Han rule.³⁸ As theater scholar Patrica Sieber has pointed out, Wang saw Yuan zaju as the historical evidence of the strength of the Han Chinese and his "retrospective characterization of early song-drama as Han Chinese literature created under the Yuan offered a cultural solution to the contemporary threat of foreign occupation."³⁹ Intriguingly, Wang's importation of the western concept of tragedy (and a linear historical narrative of Chinese literature) reflects the transnational network within which he wrote *A History of Song and Yuan Drama*. As shown by Yuming He, this transnational network, connecting Beijing, Shanghai, and Kyoto, fueled personal and institutional resources for Wang Guowei to produce "a hybrid of Chinese and western intellectual traditions."⁴⁰ In the process, Wang also participated in the emergence of

³⁸ Sieber, *Theaters of Desire*, p. 26.

³⁹ Sieber, *Theaters of Desire*, p. 6.

⁴⁰ Yuming He, "Wang Guowei and the Beginning of Modern Chinese Drama Studies," *Late Imperial China* vol. 28, no. 2 (December 2007), p. 130.

Sinology in Japan, broadly defined as “the scientific study of China”⁴¹ As he was recognized as an authority of Chinese drama study by Japanese scholars in Kyoto University, his presence and scholarship conferred legitimacy on the study of Chinese civilization in Japan.

Wang Guowei dismissed the value of drama after the Yuan—a choice that stood in sharp contrast to Qi Rushan, who was most concerned about contemporary performance and its hidden principles. Still, Wang and Qi had one goal in common: both aimed to illustrate Chineseness within native traditions of art. While Wang argued for authentic Han literary creation under alien rule, Qi strove to make national prominence of pihuang—a genre that began to flourish in the old imperial capital Beijing under Manchu patronage—for the emerging Chinese nation state. Unlike Wang Guowei who applied a literary category to defunct dramatic scripts, Qi began his thesis with performative categories. His choice was a compound of two kinds of performance: gewu 歌舞 (song-and-dance).

In Qi’s time, despite the well-established ritual significance and political associations of *gewu* that had developed over time (which Qi strove to invoke in his writings about Chinese drama), the term (and its constituent parts) had acquired new meanings of being expressive, entertaining, and sensational. These new meanings emerged within a transnational context. In the translation of foreign theatrical genres into Chinese terms, *ge* and *wu* describe characteristics of the performance. For instance, as the Chinese translation of “opera,” *geju*, *ge* (song) is used to specify the vocal characteristic of *ju* (theater).⁴² Exposure to foreign performance also invited Chinese audiences to revisit categories of native performance. Qi Rushan recalled that his

⁴¹ Seiber, *Theaters of Desire*, p. 33.

⁴² Song Chunfang, “Xiju gailiang pingyi [Suggestions for drama reform],” *Gongyan bao*, August, 17, 1918.

interest in researching ancient Chinese dance actually grew from seeing contemporary performance of “western style” dance.⁴³ In the contemporary entertainment realm, the spectacular sing-song girls and western musicals also added new dimensions to his gewu notion. Second, Qi Rushan did not invent the compound gewu in his research on drama. In *A History of Song and Yuan Drama*, Wang Guowei used the term extensively. He traced the emergence of “the combination of singing and dancing to perform one story” to the northern Qi period and viewed mature drama as a form that integrated dialogue, movement, and song to present a story.⁴⁴ However, Wang’s discussion remains mostly text-oriented. He examines more about the scripts that carry the performance of song and dance rather than the aesthetics of performance. Qi’s approach greatly diverged from that of Wang Guowei, since for Qi, gewu by itself stands as the essence of drama and does not need to be expression of specific scripts.

Although it is difficult to fully reconstruct the transnational traces of the intellectual genealogy with which Qi Rushan inherited and expanded his *gewu* notion, it is clear that when he addressed *gewu* as a Chinese heritage, the purposes, contexts, and audiences were not purely domestic. These historical complexities, however, were often disguised by Qi’s direct references to Chinese antiquity in his writings on *gewu*. For instance, at the beginning of *A Register of Choreographies of National Drama* (*Guoju shenduan pu* 國劇身段譜, hereafter *Choreographies*, published in 1935), Qi Rushan maintained there was a direct link between Chinese drama and ancient performance of song-and-dance. He offers this rather abruptly and bold observation: “It has been widely acknowledged by our countrymen that China’s drama

⁴³ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyiliu*, p. 148.

⁴⁴ Ma Meixing annot., Wang Guowei, *Songyuan xiqushi chuzheng* [*A History of Song and Yuan Drama: with annotation*] (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2004), pp. 4, 57.

originated from the song and dance of ancient times.”⁴⁵ Written to explicate the various choreographed movements on the Chinese opera stage (which Qi represented mostly via contemporary pihuang), *Choreographies* aims to demonstrate the longstanding notion and practice of gewu on the basis of both textual evidence and examples from present-day performance. The work addressed Qi’s main theoretical concern with uncovering an integral formation of the gewu notion in early Chinese drama history and to prove its continuity down to present times. In the following paragraphs, through a close reading of his *Choreographies*, I analyze how Qi culled early traces of gewu in Chinese drama history from the classics and early imperial literature.

At the beginning of *Choreographies*, Qi asserts an inherent association between Chinese drama and the gewu notion. This “historical fact,” Qi suggested, was supported by ample evidence from the literature of the early Chinese dynasties:

During the Han, Wei, and the Six Dynasties, the fashion of song-and-dance flourished more than it had in the Zhou. We can obtain the general picture by readings literary works from the time. Take, for instance, “Rhapsody on Watching Dance” (Guanwu fu 觀舞賦), “Rhapsody on Dancing” (Wu fu 舞賦), “Rhapsody on the Dancing Crane” (Wuhe fu 舞鶴賦), and “Rhapsody to the Goddess of the Luo River” (Luoshen fu 洛神賦); although it is impossible to exhaust their contents here, these writings all very beautifully describe the images and wonders of song-and-dance. Therefore, we can know that there must often have been occasions of song-and-dance that captured the eyes of men of letters. That is why they took delight in writing [about these themes]. The fashion of song-and-dance rose to new heights in the Sui and Tang periods. Accordingly, more records of song-and-

⁴⁵ Qi, *Guoju shenduan pu*, p. 1.

dance can be seen in the poetry and literary works [of these times].⁴⁶

In Qi Rushan's argumentation, the textual evidence bridges the gap between observations of contemporary performing practices and their presumably ancient origin. By referring to the existence of an abundant record of song-and dance in early imperial literature, Qi garnered the materials to support his theory. Moreover, he argued that it was possible to learn the early development of Chinese drama from these texts, since "descriptions of song-and-dance in writings from various dynasties match well with the rules of drama nowadays."⁴⁷ In this way, Qi justified textual analysis as a reliable methodology for tracing the starting point of Chinese drama. Texts relating to song-and-dance in the past, he maintained, should be the foundation for understanding the theatrical performances of his times. Qi's job was to "cite some paragraphs on song-and-dance from ancient books and compare them with the organizations and rules of drama today."⁴⁸

As Qi Rushan arranged the writings of the "various dynasties" into a coherent textual basis for his drama research, the historical time sequence of the dynasties pointed to an origin of Chinese drama. Based upon limited textual evidence ("The records [of song-and dance] were rarely seen in the classics prior to the Zhou dynasty"), Qi located the origin in the Zhou dynasty.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, this choice might not be a simple reflection of Qi's command over the textual materials. Since the last decades of the Qing, there emerged a historiographical trend of "discovering" China's ancient past. As Shana Brown has pointed out, late Qing scholars such as

⁴⁶ Qi, *Guojia shenduan pu*, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Sun Yirang 孫詒讓 (1848-1908) approached oracle bones as historical evidence of a “developmental process” of Chinese civilization. Adopting the concept of evolution, Sun unified the “positioning of China in global historical discourse” while “championing its historical and cultural distinctiveness.”⁵⁰ This “new historiography” is also evidenced by historical textbooks in the late Qing, which “conveyed a sense of national identity deeply rooted in the past—rooted in a vision of ancient ‘China’ stretching back four to five thousand years.” The national identity dated back to the most distant dynasties, and even mythical figures such as the Yellow Emperor, to exalt national distinctiveness and antiquity.⁵¹

In modern Chinese historiography, antiquity plays an increasingly important role in the appreciation of the Chinese past. Informed by the Japanese model of writing national history, since the turn of the twentieth century, the historical writings on China often divided into tripartite periodization: ancient, medieval, and recent.⁵² What remained a matter of debate among different historiographical interpretations was the identification of the golden era and the age of decline. For instance, Japanese Sinologist Naka Michiyo (那珂通世, 1851-1908) contended that China began experiencing decline after the Han dynasty.⁵³ Naito Konan (内藤湖南, 1866-1934), the leading scholar of the Kyoto school of Sinology, also argued that Chinese antiquity—the formative period of Chinese civilization—ended by the middle of Latter Han. In contrast to

⁵⁰ Brown, *Pastimes*, pp. 94-96.

⁵¹ Peter Zarrow, “The New Schools and National Identity: Chinese History Textbooks in the Late Qing,” in Tze-ki Hon and Robert J. Culp eds., *The Politics of Historical Production in Late Qing and Republican China* (Brill: London, 2007), p. 23.

⁵² Tze-ki Hon, *The Allure of the Nation: the Cultural and Historical Debates in Late Qing and Republican China* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 39.

⁵³ Hon, *The Allure of the Nation*, p. 35.

China's later decline, antiquity was seen as the golden age and a source of national revival by Chinese writers. Looking backward in time for "lessons from ancient antiquity," a generation of Chinese historian aimed to achieve, in the words of Liang Qichao (梁啟超, 1873-1929), "liberation by returning to the antiquity."⁵⁴

Qi Rushan did not articulate his participation in, or even comment upon, this larger historiographical trend in his own writings. Nevertheless, he certainly shared dissatisfaction with China's recent past and the intellectual yearning for national inspiration from Chinese antiquity. This approach is evident in Qi's heavy reliance on the classics to explain the formation of the *gewu* tradition. Quoting *Yue ji*, or *The Record of Music*, Qi found the general principles for artistic generation:

"Music (yue 樂) is the arousal of heart; sound (sheng 聲) is the outward form of music; lyrics and rhythm (wencai jiezou 文采節奏) are the decorations of the sound."⁵⁵

As Scott Cook has shown in analyzing the "Yue Ben 樂本" chapter in *The Record of Music*, an individual's musical development is seen as a process that comes in stages, beginning from being "little more than a medium through which external things touch off certain emotions resulting in different sounds" to becoming "a creative being" who "strives to effect influence in others through music." This "continual process of constant growth completes as a supreme type of Music which exemplifies nothing less than all the order of the natural world and man's place

⁵⁴ Hon, *The Allure of the Nation*, p. 47.

⁵⁵ Qi, *Guojia shenduan pu*, p. 1.

within it.”⁵⁶ The affective potential and harmonizing power of music explains its close link to ideal governance and its critical functions in proper ritual process. More importantly, in the thought of early China, music was seen as a medium to connect humans and a larger cosmos, “tantamount to its harmonious patterns and idealized modes of operation.”⁵⁷

The Record of Music addresses a wide range of issues about the origin, substance, and characteristic of music and its relationship to government and society, with many of its materials and thoughts derived from Confucian concepts. It is also labeled “as the earliest Chinese text to deal systematically with music and aesthetics.”⁵⁸ Clearly, in *Choreographies*, Qi’s discourse focused on how the affective power of music sustains theatrical performance at the individual level. He observes that in any particular case, Chinese drama performance could be divided into three layers: a character only begins to sing when he or she is moved by sentiments of the heart; the accompaniment, upon receiving the actor’s initiation of emotional expression (jiaoban 叫板), responds with melodies specific to the mood; these expressions are further enhanced by the various poses of the actors and the percussive instruments in the accompaniment.⁵⁹ Each layer of a performance, Qi argues, corresponds to the nature of music, sound, lyric, and rhythm as described in *The Record of Music*. In other words, from this Confucian classic, Qi Rushan found the wholeness of an ideal artistic expression fully illustrated by the three-tiered structure of Chinese drama. In turn, this correspondence to the ideal principles of music justified the working

⁵⁶ For the authorship and dates of the *Record of Music*, see Scott Cook, “‘Yue Ji’ 樂記—Record of Music: Introduction, Translation, Notes, and Commentary,” *Asian Music*, vol. 26, No. 2 (Summer, 1995), pp. 12-13.

⁵⁷ Erica Fox Brindley, *Music, Cosmology, and the Politics of Harmony in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), p. 1.

⁵⁸ For the authorship and dates of the *Record of Music*, see Cook, “‘Yue Ji,’” *Asian Music*, Vol. 26, No. 2, p. 11.

⁵⁹ Qi, *Guoju shenduan pu*, p. 2.

principles of performance in Qi's day.

From Qi Rushan's emphasis on the expressive and affective power of music in theatrical performances, it is clear that the musical dimension remained a prominent focus in his drama research. Unlike late imperial connoisseurs, Qi was not interested in examining singing *per se* (for which he criticized late imperial drama commentary), but rather on an underlying principle that combined song-and-dance together. In order to sustain his gewu notion with historical evidence he found from ancient texts, which address mostly yue 樂 (music) but not ge 歌 (song), Qi very took a rather broad definition of yue, which was not "limited to instrumental music," but also included art forms such as "poetry, song, and dance—forms which allow for a more programmatic content than pure music alone."⁶⁰ As seen in *Choreographies*, yue and ge are treated as interchangeable terms, different representations of the same principle of artistic generation. This is nevertheless an intriguing interpretive twist on the classics: Qi Rushan reordered the aesthetic discourses of music in *The Record of Music* toward the concrete, vocal performance of contemporary theater onstage.

After establishing the connection between the actor's emotional resonance and expressive singing, Qi Rushan moves on to integrate song with dance. To make the linkage between music and movement more explicit, Qi explains how dance enriched theatrical expression with references from annotations of Confucian classics, quoting *The Zheng Commentary on the Zhou Rites* (*Zhouli Zhengzhu* 周禮鄭注):

"Sounds and rhythm are not yet sufficient to touch the heart; however, expression through

⁶⁰ Cook, "'Yue Ji,'" *Asian Music*, Vol. 26, No. 2, p. 13.

dance is sufficient to arouse the feelings.”⁶¹

The commentary speaks to the ways in which minds are moved (gandong 感動). Within the context of Confucian discourse, to move means to transform. As Michael Nylan has illustrated, the three *Rites* canon—including *Ceremonials* (*Yili* 儀禮), the *Zhou Rites* (*Zhouli* 周禮), and the *Rites Records* (*Liji* 禮記)—“attempt to illustrate the process by which the distinctive character of each person develops.” To achieve an ideal personal development, the transformative aspect of the rites is materialized “by training the body through the practice of choreographed physical movements.” As an individual's body participates in ritual activities, which “constitute an aesthetic order,” he or she would be able to internalize the rites as second nature.⁶² Dance, defined as “choreographed physical movements,” played a key role in this transformative process of personal enrichment.

Reading together the original purpose of dance in the *Rites* and Qi Rushan's use of in his writings on gewu, it is obvious that Qi Rushan transported the classics into a very different context. He was not concerned about human capacity for moral betterment, but the aesthetic rationales a performer could deploy to move audiences. Music and dance formed an inseparable whole: music revealed the character's innermost sentiments, while dance amplified such expression for better audience reception. Qi Rushan contended this was why dance (which Qi characterized as all onstage movement, *zuogong* 作工) was most emphasized by career opera practitioners. It was through techniques of *zuogong*, or stylized movement, that performers could make the meanings of lyrics clear to the audiences and arouse their sentiments. With advanced

⁶¹ Qi, *Guojia shenduan pu*, p. 2.

⁶² Michael Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 170-72.

zuogong techniques, he claimed, an actor could excel in performances even with imperfect singing skill.⁶³ Qi's argument here was not to deny the significance of singing or argue that it could be replaced by dance for stronger onstage effect. Rather, with references from both Confucian classics and their commentaries, he was constructing a theoretical basis to explain why and how the gewu practice in Chinese drama could best express human emotion in the most simultaneous and exquisite way. This construction was a historical novelty. In fact, "the dancing and other visual aspects of yue usually appear to be of secondary importance" in the discussion of yue in early Chinese thought.⁶⁴ What Qi Rushan's writing does is to promote (if not to ultimately prioritize) the status of dance in the tradition of Chinese performance so that the contemporary practice of emphasizing the visual elements of pihuang could find its historical source, and, thereby, theoretical support.

In Qi's quotations from and interpretations of the ancient classics, if read as philosophy, contained timeless and universal qualities. The timeless quality implicitly supported Qi argument for the continued correspondence between human sentiments and their expression through *gewu* in Chinese drama from the past to the present. In theatrical performances onstage, Qi saw live manifestation of the age-old, Confucian emphasis on the driving power of the arts as animated by the human heart. At the same time, the universal quality of philosophy allowed Qi the flexibility to interpret performances in accordance with ancient texts. Since there were no specific examples in the classics to gird Qi's actual interpretations, these texts provided ripe material from which to pair his observations and philosophical discourses on arts and human feeling. In other words, Qi

⁶³ Qi, *Guojia shenguan pu*, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Brindley, *Music, Cosmology, and the Politics of Harmony in Early China*, p. 6.

found an ideal type of “theory” in the classics, and opined that their best application and manifestation could be found even, especially, in theatrical performances of contemporary times. Given Qi Rushan’s conviction that he had proved that the rules of performance (as drawn from contemporary pihuang) echoed the guiding principles of Confucian teachings, the status of pihuang as the national drama could be secured; related research could be promoted.

Nonetheless, references drawn from the Confucian canon were at times far too generalized to establish any one-on-one correspondence between the ancient principles and contemporary performance. To further strengthen the links between an allegedly hallowed gewu tradition and contemporary stage practice, other textual references were necessary. In this regard, Qi Rushan turned to poetic literature to shore up his evidentiary base. The majority of Qi’s sources are fu, a literary genre that describes human feelings and objects of interest with rhapsodized language in exhaustive detail. By choosing fu works composed between the Han and Tang, this source, too, provided Qi Rushan an alternative to Qing theatrical connoisseurship texts. Unlike connoisseurship writings, which for Qi allegedly were “tainted” by eroticized imaginings of literati patrons about cross-dressing boy actors, Qi cast fu as pure poetic expression. With their highly lyrical language representing delicacy of feeling and things, fu read as examples *par excellent* of a spirit pursuing and realizing the idealized beauty that Qi contended had been continuously transmitted through drama over time.

Qi’s choice of source texts was not value-free. He drew upon no textual sources later than the Tang. Qi explained his choices on the grounds of his understanding of the historical development of dance in the Sui and Tang. At that time, he maintains, “the fashion of song-and-dance was especially popular. This is roughly because back then [China] learned many dancing

techniques from foreign countries. The emperors also promoted [dance] so that both the court and the populace paid considerable attention to dance.”⁶⁵ Due to the openness of the Tang empire, this was “the age during which the fashion of dance was extremely popular in China.”⁶⁶ Qi’s historical observation implies an interpretation that sees everything from the Song on as one long decline and the glorious height—in this case the synchronicity of *gewu* in drama—had to have been attained by the Tang. Born into a generation for which cultural interaction between China and the outside world brought both challenge and hope, Qi Rushan took the Tang dynasty as the paradigmatic ideal in which foreign influence could be “transformed, adapted, and absorbed” into the Chinese soil for high cultural achievement. This veneration of the Tang was well-supported by the historical research of contemporary historians such as Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 (1890-1969), who contended that the Tang dynasty was an “open environment so that domestic and foreign elements could mix.” To push the argument further, the centrality of the “Chineseness” of the Tang was dominant enough that cultural achievements resulting from interactions would become an integral part of national/cultural identity.⁶⁷

Qi’s invocation of fu poetry filled the blanks of Chinese drama history that he considered unanswered by the literati accounts of the late imperial period. Specifically, Qi correlated the metaphorical descriptions of beautified movement and feeling in fu poetry with actual performances in contemporary theater. The gap between reading (literary texts) and seeing (live performances) , I argue, created the space in which Qi could develop his aestheticized theory of

⁶⁵ Qi, *Guojia shenduan pu*, p. 1.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Hon, *The Allure of the Nation*, pp. 134-35.

Chinese drama.

In *fu* literature on dance Qi Rushan found in principle the instructions for stylized movement in drama performance. For instance, Qi matched literary texts and actual movements on stage in his reading of “Rhapsody on Dance” by the Han writer Fu Yi 傅毅 (47-92). He pointed out that the “circling walk” (yuan chang 圓場) performed by the leading female role Mu Guiying 穆桂英 in *The Mu Mountain Fortress* (Mu ke zhai 穆柯寨) realized the literary imagination of “subtle motions appearing, now as flying, now as running” in Fu’s work. Similar to the technique of “riding a horse” (tang ma 趟馬), the stage presentations of yuan chang would be “as beautiful as real flying,” with the intricate footwork and the balance of the performer.⁶⁸ Qi also discovered in *fu* literature general guidelines for bodily movements, and, most importantly, coordination between actors’ eye and hand motions. On stage, the consecutive movements of finger pointing and pointed looking had to follow the tempo of the music and stop when the music paused. This “established rule” (yi ding de gui ju 一定的規矩), Qi suggested, corresponded to Fu Yi’s phrase: “pointing and gazing responds to the sounds (zhi gu ying sheng 指顧應聲).⁶⁹

The acting guidelines that Qi Rushan “recovered” from *fu* literature were multi-genre. Illustrating the meaning of “sound must respond to footwork” (sheng bi ying zu 聲必應足) in “Rhapsody on Watching Dance” by the Tang author Xie Yan 謝偃 (-643), Qi found examples of this rule in both Kun opera and pihuang. For Kun opera, Qi maintained that strict correspondence

⁶⁸ Qi, *Guoju shenduan pu*, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Qi, *Guoju shenduan pu*, p. 4.

between music and footwork had been always maintained “no matter in which play,” and there were plenty of examples such as *Fleeing by Night* (*Ye ben* 夜奔) and *The Mountain Gate* (*Shan men* 山門), just to name a few. For pihuang, even though the choreography for the genre was not as defined by one-to-one match between movement and music, he still could point to many plots requiring tight synchronization between the actors’ physical acting and vocal performance. Qi observed that when the actor playing Song Jiang 宋江 appeared on stage in the play *Wulong yuan* 烏龍院, his easy footwork echoed the relaxing melody of the *si ping diao* 四平調 that he sang.⁷⁰ These multi-genre examples signified universal applicability of the guidelines of performance ensconced within ancient fu poetry. Despite distinct characteristics of specific opera genres, for Qi Rushan all music-movement theatrical performances on stage were simply various manifestations of the rules of dance that had been captured by and transmitted through fu. Furthermore, Qi strengthened this universality by averring a historical continuity within these texts. He contended that although the fu passages on dance were not written to describe contemporary theatrical performances, they captured the essence of the onstage motions of “modern theater” (*xiandai xiju* 現代戲劇).⁷¹ Upholding both universality and continuity, Qi summarizes his reading of fu literature with a holistic assessment of Chinese drama, concluding “thus we see that there is a direct connection between the choreography of theater and dance transmitted down from the ancient past.”⁷²

My analysis of Qi Rushan’s references to fu literature is not meant to suggest that his

⁷⁰ Qi, *Guoju shenduan pu*, p. 5.

⁷¹ Qi, *Guoju shenduan pu*, pp. 5-6.

⁷² Qi, *Guoju shenduan pu*, p. 6.

literary/historical readings were correct. In fact, Qi had no interest in fu poetry in and of itself; his highly selective and fragmented quotations from fu only served his goal of constructing a continuous gewu tradition. The numerous examples taken from observations of theater, and annotated by Qi's selections of words on dance in fu literature, in a way helped his readers to imagine how the highly poetic descriptions might be "acted out" on stage. Qi's effort to match stage performance and literary description also shows how he painstakingly engaged in building working principles of Chinese drama from textual references. In the end, the validity of fu literature as performance guideline needed to be proven by reflection in contemporary theater. Lacking visual records of the theater from the recent past, phrases from fu were mobilized to stand in for portrayal of ideal dance in the distant past; Qi's "rediscovery" of the gewu principle would, accordingly, remain speculative.

References drawn from fu literature worked well for Qi Rushan's theorization of Peking opera for two reasons. First, without expressing the authors' praise for or obsession with specific performers, Qi's quotations of fu read as master guidelines of performance, detached from any possible accusations of personal indulgence in the aesthetic (and erotic) lure of specific actors. In Qi's eyes, fu authors were concerned only with instructional basics that might bring out the ideal beauty of dance performance. This ostensible purity in fu writings absolved them from the stigma associated with Qing connoisseur writers. It also justified Qi's claim to be writing about Peking opera so as to produce new understanding of the genre, as opposed to replicating late imperial modes of opera consumption and appreciation. Second, the highly allusive quality of fu allowed Qi vast liberty to interpret his chosen quotations. There was doubtless a gap between lyrical depictions and performances given the differences in time, space, and mode of

representation. However, precisely because there was no mention of specific performances or performers in Qi's selected quotations, he was able to present his illustrations of contemporary popular performances as the quintessential examples of these time-honored principles. The writing style of fu also distilled from ordinary human movements and mundane life an alluring quality, which, in Qi's reading of fu, could be captured in theatrical performance. As Qi quoted from "Rhapsody on Dance," "at initiation of [dancing]...her composure and melancholy are beyond embodiment."⁷³ It was in this literary beautification that Qi found textual precedent for his concept of the aestheticization (meishu hua 美術化) of Chinese drama, that is, stage performances of Peking opera were the re-realization of beauty (mei 美), which had been described and prescribed by fu writers thousands of years in the past. The irony of aestheticization is also shown in Qi's quotation. If, according to the original phrase, the true beauty cannot be embodied, the literary illusion of fu cannot be taken as an enduring principle about the embodiment of performance on the stage.

On the whole, Qi Rushan evinces no qualms about drawing upon textual references from ancient classics and pre-Song literature. He considered them trustworthy repositories from which to rediscover the ancient practices and underlying rules of Chinese drama. As he reflected:

The above quotations are writings from the era prior to the Tang dynasty. After the Song dynasty, writings in praise of singing or recordings of song-and-dance were all [overly] detailed, nearly identical with those of contemporary drama. Therefore, there is no need to cite them.⁷⁴

Qi recognized that the writings he cited were not really detailed (juti 具體): they might be overly

⁷³ Qi, *Guoju shenduan pu*, p. 3.

⁷⁴ Qi, *Guoju shenduan pu*, p. 6.

abstract or diverge from performances in recent times. However, these writings were indispensable to recapturing ancient song-and-dance, the records of which would otherwise be lost to time. In this assertion, Qi made three assumptions: the first was a rupture between pre-Song and post-Song periods in terms of records of actual performances; the second was that textual materials of the pre-Song period preserved the essence of Chinese theater; the third was that drama in post-Song times was identical to what Qi saw in his own day. Again, these assumptions linked to a declension critique of Chinese history, in which the foundation of Chinese civilization was completed before the Song, and the whole history from the Song to the Qing was one of stagnation due to alien invasion and cultural hybridity. Considering the fact that Qi Rushan was proud to have participated in the anti-Manchu overthrow at the end of the Qing, it may not be too surprising that he might seek to erase the history of Chinese drama after the Song in his narrative of the gewu notion.⁷⁵ With the aid of textual references, Qi established the continuity of the gewu practice from ancient to contemporary times, further solidifying his view on the aesthetics of Chinese drama.

In spite of Qi's seeming confidence in the textual basis for his theorization of Chinese drama, he does show evidence of understanding the risk of relying too exclusively on literary sources. In a later chapter in which Qi translates titles of dances in the Tang register of court performance into shenduan for contemporary pihuang performance, Qi defends his methodology:

My interpretations could not avoid the possibility of taking the words too literally. Readers must be laughing at me for forcibly making far-fetched analogies. However, since a person only has two hands and two legs, movements in ancient times and today should not be too different. Although I dare not say this is definitely true, it cannot be too

⁷⁵ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, pp. 70-74.

far off either.⁷⁶

The problem of matching performance to literary description persisted, and was especially problematic when working with ancient texts. In fact, exact match between movements and description could not have disturbed Qi Rushan too much given that he was seeking from such materials a theory with universal applicability. What troubled Qi was the tension between the details of actual performance and this abstracted theory. As seen from Qi's attempt in *Choreographies of National Drama*, the process of theorizing Chinese drama into the beautified *gewu* notion relied heavily on the researcher's personal interpretations of both texts and performances. It also shows that, at least in its formative stage, Qi's aesthetization theory was not taken for granted even by himself. It was through Qi's consistent writings and theatrical productions that his conceptualization became deeply embedded in later understanding of Peking opera.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined how the recent and distant pasts of Chinese history stand in relation to Qi Rushan's theorization of Chinese opera. In my discussion, the separation between the recent past and Qi's active period of writing is marked by a political incident, namely the fall of the Qing. This sudden temporal and political break sat in uneasy relation to the continuity of Beijing's urban opera theater and established rubrics of theatrical appreciation that had developed in late imperial times; indeed, as I have shown, Qi's own treatment of contemporary opera life showed considerable similarity with that of Qing precedents. This continuity, I argue,

⁷⁶ Qi, *Guoju shenduan pu*, p. 13.

pushed Qi to search further back in time for evidence to sustain his theorization of Chinese opera, since the “recent past” was actually ongoing and ever-changing.

Qi Rushan’s appropriation of the ancient classics and early imperial literature in writing his *gewu* notion into the history of Chinese drama notwithstanding, his approach was distinctly modern because it responded to its contemporary historiographical context: the transnational emergence of Sinology and the evaluation of China's past within the framework of the Chinese nation-state. Although written in Chinese with textual evidence drawn from the distant Chinese past, Qi Rushan’s imaginary audience was transnational within a comparative framework. In another of Qi’s early works on Chinese drama, *The Organization of Chinese Drama* (published in 1928), Qi characterized drama the world over via the fundamental categories of *ge* and *wu*, observing that “As for the theater of Japan (*dongyang* 東洋) and the theater of the West (*xiyang* 西洋), one is dance without song, the other song without dance. Only Chinese theater (*Zhongguo ju* 中國劇) performs song-and-dance simultaneously.”⁷⁷ For Qi, the synchronicity of *gewu* implicitly illustrated the supremacy of Chinese theater. More importantly, by mobilizing textual materials from the Zhou through the Tang to support his history and theory, Qi Rushan attempted to fabricate historical continuity dating from the ancient period to recent times, leaving his readers the impression of an unbroken history of Chinese drama: heritage was culture, and culture was contemporary.

⁷⁷ Qi, *Zhongguo ju zhi zuzhi*, p. 27.

Conclusion

Anxious about the prospect of Communist rule over China, at the end of 1947, Qi Rushan moved from Beijing to settle in Taipei in advance of the Nationalist's retreat to the island of Taiwan after defeat in the Chinese Civil War.¹ In Taiwan, Qi soon reconnected with his mainland friends, most notably Zhang Daofan 張道藩 (1897-1967) and Chen Jiying 陳紀滢 (1908-1997), both of whom played critical roles in shaping and institutionalizing the anti-communist cultural policy of the Nationalists in 1950s Taiwan. At the behest of Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975) and with financial support from the Nationalist Party, Zhang and Chen founded the Chinese Association of Literature and Art (Zhongguo wenyi xiehui 中國文藝協會) in 1950 to promote anti-communist literature and art.² Because of their patronage, Qi was able to partake of the party-state's resources to continue his career as a researcher and playwright of Peking opera—now “nationalized” to represent the essential aesthetics of the Chinese nation—until his death in 1962.

Within the context of cross-strait competition between the Nationalists and the Communists over political legitimacy, Qi Rushan's scholarship on pihuang became a ready-made resource for the Nationalist party-state to uphold its “identity as the legitimate Chinese government—the one mandated to safeguard China's cultural heritage” and to justify its “dominant ideology of mainland recovery.”³ Many of Qi's post-1949 writings recycled his early works, only to essentialize the link between Peking opera and the aesthetic characters that he

¹ Qi, *Qi Rushan huiyilu*, pp. 306-315.

² Cheng Rongning, *Wenyi doushi Zhang Daofan zhuan* [A biography of the literary fighter Zhang Daofan](Taipei: Jiandai zhongguo chubanshe, 1985), p. 84. See also, Chen, *Duanlie yu shengchen*, pp. 33-35.

³ Guy, *Peking Opera and Politics in Taiwan*, pp. 4-5.

claimed to be unique to the Chinese nation. Qi Rushan, as a nationally renowned dramatist in exile, was praised in Taiwan as the “Chinese Shakespeare,” figuring as a compelling symbol of cultural continuity in the face of the rupture of Civil War and the 1949 divide. It was also in Taiwan that Qi was recognized for his contribution for “turning the art of national drama into a scholarly discipline (xueshu hua 學術化).”⁴ Since the interest in opera was equalized to devotion to a national art, it was no longer considered a “minor path.” Engagement in opera was finally formalized as a respected, modern field of academic inquiry.

However, the “national” opera in Taiwan was a lonely art. In spite of the support of the Nationalist party-state, it no longer enjoyed the large audience base it once had on the Chinese Mainland. In post-1949 Taiwan, Peking Opera troupes were managed by the various branches of the military and catered mostly to military and government officials and other Mainlanders. The genre’s strong association with the Nationalist regime alienated it from local Taiwanese.⁵ The loss of its native urban theater had a negative impact on opera performance, too. Even Qi Rushan, who enjoyed high status as the “founding father” of modern Chinese opera research, was said to be living a lonely life in Taiwan since many great actors with whom he had collaborated remained in China. Without well-trained and experienced actors to embody the theatrical aesthetics onstage, Qi’s eight-words maxim of Chinese opera, “There is no sound that is not song; no movement that is not dance,” rang as unfounded theory.

The great irony of the formation of modern opera research is that it was not fully completed until the native locale of the art was lost for its researchers. Seen in retrospect,

⁴ Chen Jiying, “Xu,” in Qi Rushan, *Guoju yishu huikao* [A comprehensive study on the art of national drama] (Taipei: Chongguang wenyi chubanshe, 1962), p. 9.

⁵ Nancy Guy, *Peking Opera and Politics in Taiwan*, pp. 41-42.

pihuang was taken by Qi Rushan and his contemporary connoisseur-researchers as the epitome of Chinese national opera because it was one of the most popular entertainment options during the time it was being researched. As Qi Rushan plainly stated in *Organization of Chinese Drama*, “the Chinese opera discussed in this book roughly takes pihuang—which is currently popular (xianxing 現行) in Beijing—as its standard.”⁶ The bleak prospects for Peking Opera in post-1949 Taiwan was a bitter reminder of the close link between the theatrical form and its native place. In post-1949 Taiwan, what had been “currently popular” was already history and the city of Beijing was lost. While the interest in opera was nationalized and the operatic aesthetic formalized, the fluidity of urban theater and the possibilities it provided were gone. In later writings on Chinese national drama in Taiwan, a history of Beijing’s urban theater and its potential for scholars inquiry is largely dismissed.

This dissertation has examined from many angles how the thriving urban theater and contemporary theatrical culture in early twentieth-century China fueled the making of modern Chinese opera research. Chapter One has examined the multiple naming of pihuang as a genre. Due to a temporal rupture between past and present, the importation of new theatrical categories (such as spoken and song drama), and the reorganization of the geo-political landscape in China, it became a pressing issue for theatrical connoisseurs and commentators to understand pihuang by certain qualifying characteristics. Through debate and discussion on the characteristics of the genre, pihuang came to be understood as a genre of its own: as a unique synthesis of spoken and song elements and as a national form. These characterizations of pihuang explain why this specific song-drama style has come to represent “Peking Opera” and “Chinese national drama”

⁶ Qi, *Zhongguo ju zhi zuzhi*, p. 1.

in later, and even contemporary, research.

The interest in naming a theatrical genre reflects the fact that opera consumption was central to the urban experiences of Republican Beijing, where many who wrote about pihuang were actively involved in theatrical appreciation and critique. The flourishing urban theater produced an abundance of theatrical materials for opera researchers to collect and study. Chapter Two has investigated the collecting of theatrical materials in Beijing against the backdrop of a series of political transformations from the mid-nineteenth to the first decades of the twentieth century, as well as the city's long-established performing community that survived these political changes. The decline and the final downfall of the Qing facilitated the release of objects (written and material) related to performance from the imperial court. Together with those acquired from Beijing's popular theater, these materials were examined for their potential to tell the history and customary practices of opera performance. Equally desirable in the eyes of opera researchers was the oral knowledge of theatrical practitioners. Curiosity about practical knowledge invited researchers to conduct a kind of field-study in the theatrical realm, through which the practitioner's insider knowledge was collected, edited, and circulated for outside readers.

Chapter Three has explored the urban theater from the production side. It shows that Mei Lanfang's signature plays were responding to contemporary market trends rather than being the materialization of any pre-existing aesthetic ideas. It was not until these productions were translated to contexts different from the entertainment market in 1910s and 1920s China—Mei's U.S. tour and Qi Rushan's later theorization of Chinese opera—that they came to be identified as illustration of an aesthetic representing Chinese theatrical art. In addition to their commercial success, the association between the taste of men of letters and the decline of elegant opera

impeded positive appreciation of the aesthetic that Qi aimed to deliver through these productions. The difficulty of directly promoting aesthetics through onstage performance worsened as the body of the actor—Mei Lanfang—aged. It was not merely coincidental that these productions began to circulate in non-performative forms (in writing and photography, etc.) as Mei reduced his appearance on the domestic onstage.

Shifting the focus on body from onstage to backstage, Chapter Four has investigated the body and identity of players who participated in opera performance. The discussion on education for career actor uncovers a tension between aspiration for full-rounded preparation and the economic and social restraints encountered. Qi Rushan's proposal to reform the keban institution was a compromise to optimize training for career actor with existing resources. The education of amateur performers posed different problems. Exactly because of the real possibility of crossing the boundary from outside to inside the performance business, as well as the cultural hierarchy implied such a boundary, opera commentators—many of them also amateur performers— anxiously commented on proper and less-than-proper amateur performance to maintain the boundary. The complicated position and practices of amateur performers, or piaoyou, reflected the fluidity of the theatrical realm. Not only was the performer's body a fragile medium, but also the identity of performer and viewer/patron was subject to change.

Writing a history of Chinese opera was one of the ways to counter against such fluidity, to stabilize an understanding of Chinese theatrical art. Chapter Five has traced Qi Rushan's effort to achieve this goal. Moving beyond connoisseurship texts of the recent, late imperial past, Qi turned to the distant past—that of Chinese antiquity and the early imperial dynasties—to write a history of song-and-dance in China. The gap between pre-Song texts on performance and

pihuang performed on contemporary stage notwithstanding, Qi depicted an unbroken genealogy of the Chinese performance tradition dating from the ancient period to recent times with his selection and interpretation of textual materials. Centering on the gewu notion, he endowed song-and-dance with new meanings. For Qi, gewu was the guiding principle of making an aesthetic that attested to the superiority of Chinese theatrical art.

An interest in performance occupies the center of this discussion on opera—both of my own and that of the theatrical connoisseurs and researchers I examine. The discussion on the making of pihuang as a genre addresses its interpretation as performance. The research materials that Qi Rushan collected were the traces of performance in the Qing court and the popular theater of Beijing. The production process of Mei's signature plays unfolded within an ongoing exchange between the formation of aesthetic ideas and popular demands on performance. The body and identity of performers gained weight in theatrical commentaries because it was the performer's renovations that shaped the outlook of the art. It is also because of the centrality of performance that Qi Rushan applied the performative category of gewu to construct his historical narrative of opera in China.

The continued production, consumption, and interest in opera performance outlived the drastic political changes of the early twentieth China. Viewed in retrospect, the emergence of China's modern drama research was propelled by a series of political incidents. The 1911 Revolution, especially, induced a sudden "temporal" rupture to theater lovers residing in Beijing, such that everything before the Republic became "old" (as exemplified by the term qian qing 前清) and everything after it became "new." The emergence of the nation-state and the transnational competition over national dominance collapsed the everyday experience of opera

into the need for making a grand, national narrative out of a native art form. With Qi Rushan's investment in researching the art, pihuang became the carrier of a national aesthetic. The Chinese Civil War interrupted the process and reconfigured the political landscape across the Taiwan Strait in the post-1949 era. This "geographical" rupture engendered new incentives to nationalize the interest in opera in service of the party-state. When theatrical connoisseurs and researchers relocated to Taiwan because of the loss of their homeland, their indulgence in opera was finally accepted as "elegant."

Bibliography

- Aiping shizhu. "Xianhua piaoyou [Random talks on piaoyou]." *Banyue xiju* [Drama bi-weekly], vol. 8 (June 15, 1938).
- Anonymous. "Mei ju zhi mingjia xinping [New Reviews on Mei's Drama by Famous Critics]." *Gongyan bao* [The Public Opinion], May, 17, 1918.
- Baixue. "Piaoyou yinggai xue banxi [Amateur performers should learn how to perform with makeup]." *Xiju zhoubao* [Drama weekly], vol. 1 no. 8 (November 28, 1936).
- Barlow, Tani E. ed. *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Brindley, Erica Fox. *Music, Cosmology, and the Politics of Harmony in Early China*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012.
- Brown, Shana. *Pastime: from Art and Antiquarianism to Modern Chinese Historiography*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011.
- Bu deng da ya wenku zhenben xiqu congkan* [Collections of precious theatrical scripts from the bu deng da ya studio]. Edited by Beijing daxue tushuguan. Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2003.
- Chanweng. "Xianhua piaoyou [Random talks on piaoyou]." *Banyue xiju*, vol. 7 (May 24, 1938).
- Chen Moxiang. "Shuo dan [On female impersonator]." *Juxue yukan* [Dramaturge Monthly], vol. 1 no. 4 (April 1933).
- . "Guanju shenghuo sumao [A sketch of a life of watching theater]." In Zhe Zhang ed., *Liyuan waishi* [An unofficial history of the Pear Garden]. Beijing: Baowentang shudian, 1989.
- Cheng Rongning. *Wenyi doushi Zhang Daofan zhuan* [A biography of the literary fighter Zhang Daofan]. Taipei: Jiandai zhongguo chubanshe, 1985.
- Chow, Tse-tung. *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967.
- Chu Shushen. *Tongguang chao mingling shisan jue zhuanglue* [Brief biographies of the thirteen leading actors of Tongzhi and Guangxu period]. Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2008.

- Chun An. “Jianchao pai guoju de weiji [Crisis of Beijing style national drama].” *Beiping chenbao* [Beiping morning post], January, 10, 1935.
- Cook, Scott. “‘Yue Ji’—Record of Music: Introduction, Translation, Notes, and Commentary.” *Asian Music*, vol. 26, no. 2 (Summer 1995).
- Dong, Madeleine Yue. *Republican Beijing: the City and its Histories*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Du Zhengsheng and Wang Fansen eds. *Xin Xueshu zhi lu—zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo qishi zhounian jinian wen* [The road to new scholarship: commemoration essays for the seventieth anniversary of the Institute of History and Philology]. Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1998.
- Elman, Benjamin. *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Changes in Late Imperial China*. Cambridge, MA.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984.
- Fan Chuny. *Jiao Xun xijuxue yanjiu* [A Study on Jiao Xun's drama research]. Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2012.
- Fang Wenxi. *Liyuan hua* [A glossary of the Pear Garden]. Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe.
- Fogel, Joshua. *Politics and Sinology: the Case of Naito Konan*. Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984.
- Fu Xihua ed. *Guoju xuehui tushuguan mulu* [Catalogue of the library of the Learned Society of National Drama]. Beijing: Beiping guoju xuehui, 1935.
- Fu Yunzi. “Mission Statement.” *Xiju congkan* [Drama series], vol 1 (1933).
- Ge Yihong ed. *Zhongguo huaju tongshi* [General history of spoken drama in China. Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1997.
- Goldman, Andrea S. “Actors and Aficionados in Qing Dynast Texts of Theatrical Connoisseurship.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 68, no. 1 (June 2008), p. 37.
- . *Opera and the City: the Politics of Culture in Beijing, 1770-1900*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012.
- Goldstein, Joshua. *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-Creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937*. Berkeley: California University Press, 2007.

- Gu Chao. *Gu Jiegang nianpu* [A chronicle of Mr. Gu Jiegang's life]. Beijing: Zhongguo shehuixue chubanshe, 1993.
- Gu Jiegang. *Wuge jiaji* [The First Collection of Songs from Wu Region]. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 2010.
- Guldin, Gregory Eliyu. *The Saga of Anthropology in China: from Malinowski to Moscow to Mao*. London: M.E. Sharpe, 1994.
- Guy, Nancy. *Peking Opera and Politics in Taiwan*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005.
- Haozhi. "Guanyu xin jiu ju [On new and old dramas]." *Beicheng bao* [Northern dawn], January 1, 1934.
- He Changqun. "Wang Guowei xiansheng zhengli zhongguo xiqu de chengji jiqi wenyi piping [The achievement of Mr. Wang Guowei in materials of Chinese opera and his literary critics]." *Wenxue zhoubao* [Literature weekly], June 16, 1927.
- He, Yuming. "Wang Guowei and the Beginning of Modern Chinese Drama Studies." *Late Imperial China* 28:2 (December 2007).
- Hevia, James. *English Lessons: the Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger eds. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Hon, Tze-ki and Robert Culp eds. *The Politics of Historical Production in Late Qing and Republican China*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- . *The Allure of the Nation: the Cultural and Historical Debates in Late Qing and Republican China*. Leiden: Brill, 2015.
- Hou Xirui. *Xuexi he yanxi* [On Learning and Performing Drama]. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1961.
- Hung, Chang-Tai. *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folklore Literature*. Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1985.
- Huters, Theodore. *Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005.

- Jingju tanwang lu [Reminiscent materials on Peking opera]. Edited by Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Beijing shi weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiu yanjiu weihuanhui. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1985.
- Jingju tanwang lu san bian* [Reminiscent materials on Peking opera, volume three]. Edited by Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Beijing shi weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiu yanjiu weihuanhui. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1990
- Jingpu. “Pingju qucai fenxi ji jinghou ying nuli zhi fangxiang [An analysis on the themes of pingju and directions for further efforts].” *Banyue xiju*, vol. 6 (May 1, 1938).
- Jinliang. “Xiju conghua [Chats about drama].” *Xiju zhoubao*, vol. 1 no. 1 (November 11, 1936).
- Jisheng lunju. “Guanyu jiaoxi [On teaching drama].” *Dayi bao* [Great Justices Times], 31 December, 1937.
- Johnson, David, Andres J. Nathan, and Evelyn S. Rawski eds. *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*. Berkeley: California University Press, 1985.
- Jones, Andrew. *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Jun. “Beiping xingjiu du zhi dongxiang [Current trend of new and old drama in Beiping].” *Xiju zhoubao*, vol. 1 no. 2 (October 17, 1936).
- Jubu congkan* [Monographs series on drama]. Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe, 1974.
- Karl, Rebecca. *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Lee, Haiyan. “Tears That Crumbled the Great Wall: The Archaeology of Feeling in the May Fourth Folklore Movement.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 64:1 (February 2005).
- Li Yuanlong. *Jingju suohua* [Random talks on Peking opera]. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Hongye shuju, 1960.
- Liang Yan. *Qi Rushan juxue yanjiu* [A study on Qi Rushan’s opera research]. Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2008.
- Liangge riben hanxuejia de Zhongguo jixing* [Travel notes of two Japanese Sinologists]. Edited by Guangming ribao chubanshe. Beijing: Guangming ribao chubanshe, 1999.

- Lingxiao. "Buchong Huilu de hua [Supplement to Huilu's words]." *Juxue yuekan*, vol. 1 no. 1 (January 1, 1932).
- . "Juxue yuekan gaishu [A brief introduction to Dramaturge Monthly]." *Juxue yuekan*, vol. 1 no. 1 (January 1, 1932).
- Liu Fu. *Bannong chawen er ji* [The second volume of miscellaneous writing by Liu Bannong]. Shanghai: Liangyou tushu gongsi, 1935.
- Liu, Siyan. *Performing Hybridity in Colonial-Modern China*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ma Meixing annot. Wang Guowei. *Songyuan xiqushi chuzheng* [A History of Song and Yuan Drama: with annotation]. Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2004.
- Mackerras, Colin. *The Rise of the Peking Opera, 1770-1870: Social Aspects of the Theater in Manchu China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Mei Lanfang and Xu Jichuan. *Wutai shenghuo sishi nian* [My forty years of life on the stage] Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1987.
- Mei Lanfang and Liu Tianhua. eds. *Mei Lanfang gequ pu*. Shijiazhuang Shi: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000.
- Muyi. "Pihuang zhengming zhi wo jian [My personal opinion of the rectification of the name of pihuang]." *Shiri xiju*, vol. 15 (July 11, 1937).
- Ning Shouqian, "Ju de yishu jiazhi [On the artistic values of drama]," *Xinxing bao* [Rising Times], November 19, 1936.
- Nylan, Michael. *The Five "Confucian" Classics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.
- Qi Rushan. "Keban gailiang chuyi" [On the reform of regular professional training]. Manuscript. Circa 1900-1930s. Taipei: National Central Library.
- ed. *Beiping guoju xuehui chenlieguan mulu* [Catalogue of the exhibition hall of the Learned Society of National Drama in Beiping]. Beijing: Beiping guoju xuehui, 1935.
- . "Guoju de tedian (13) [Distinguishing features of national drama (13)]." *Beiping wanbao* [Beiping evening], June, 4, 1937.
- . *Qi Rushan huiyilu* [A Memoir of Qi Rushan]. Taipei: Zhongyang wenwu gongying she, 1953.

- . *Guoju yishu huikao* [A comprehensive study on the art of national drama]. Taipei: Chongguang wenyi chubanshe, 1962.
- . *Guoju mantan* [Musings on national drama]. Taipei: Qi Rushan xiansheng yizhu bianyin weiyuanhui, 1964).
- . *Guoju shengduan pu* [A register of choreographies of national drama]. Taipei: Qi Rushan xiangsheng yizhu bianyin weiyuanhui, 1964.
- . *Jingju zhi bianqian* [The transformation of Peking opera]. Taipei: Qi Rushan xiansheng yizhu bianyin weiyuanhui, 1964.
- . *Mei Lanfang you Mei ji* [Mei Lanfang's travel to the United States]. Taipei: Qi Rushan xiansheng yizhu bianyin weiyuanhui, 1964.
- . *Qingdai pihuang mingjiao jianshu* [Brief biographies of famous pihuang actors in the Qing]. Taipei: Qi Rushan xiansheng yizhu bianyin weiyuanhui, 1964.
- . *Xiban* [Opera troupes]. Taipei: Qi Rushan xiansheng yizhu bianyin weiyuanhui, 1964.
- . *Xijie xiao zhanggu* [Anecdotes from the opera circle]. (Taipei: Qi Rushan xiansheng yizhu bianyin weiyuanhui, 1964.
- . *Zhongguo ju zhi zuzhi* [Organization of Chinese drama]. Taipei: Qi Rushan xiansheng yizhu bianyin weiyuanhui, 1964.
- . *Bianju huiyi* [My recollections of playwriting]. Taipei: Tianyi chubanshe, 1978.
- . *Qi Rushan wencun* [Collected writings of Qi Rushan]. Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 2010.
- . *Qi Rushan wenlun* [Collected theses of Qi Rushan]. Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 2010.
- Riley, Jo. *Chinese Theater and the Actor in Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Rong Dingchang. "Mantan jiuju zhi piping [Casual talks on criticism of old drama]." *Shiri xiju*, vol. 25 (April 30, 1938).
- Shashi Ren, "Tingde renjia shuo pihuang shi yesheng de yishu [I learned that pihuang is a wild art]." *Shiri xiju*, vol. 12 (June 10, 1937).

- . “Pihuang keyi chengwei guoju ma? [Can pihuang become the national drama].” *Shiri xiju*, vol. 15 (July 11, 1937).
- Shi Hao. “Jiuju shuaibai de yuanyin [Explanations of the decay of old drama].” *Shiri xiju*, no. 34 (October 10, 1938).
- Shou He. “Xiju de diandi [Drama bit by bit].” *Juxue yuekan*, vol. 2 no. 2 (March 1933).
- Sieber, Patricia. *Theater of Desire: Authors, Readers, and the Reproduction of Early Chinese Song-Drama, 1300-2000*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Song Chunfang. “Xiju gailiang pingyi [Comments on Drama Reform].” *Gongyan bao*, August 18, 1918.
- . *Song Chunfang lunju* [Song Chunfang on drama]. Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1923.
- Su Shaojing. “Xiandai sida mingdan bi bijiao (xia) [A comparison on the four leading dan actors (part B)].” *Banyue xiju*, vol. 6 (May 1, 1937).
- Sun Danchang. “Xianhua piaoyou [Random talks on piaoyou].” *Shiri xiju*, vol. 4 (March 17, 1938).
- Sun Dianqi, ed. *Liulichang xiaozhi* [Minor record of Liulichang]. Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1982.
- Tanaka, Stefan. *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Tang Botao. *Fuliancheng sanshi nian shi* [A history of the thirty years of Fuliancheng]. Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe, 1974.
- Volpp, Sophie. *Worldly Stage: Theatricality in Seventeenth-Century China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011.
- Wang Anqi. *Wei Jingju biaoyan tixi fasheng* [Calling out for the performance system of Peking opera]. Taipei: Guojia chubanshe, 2006.
- Wang Jilu, trans.. Aoki Masaru. *Zhongguo jinshi xiqu shi* [A history of Chinese drama in modern times]. (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1965).
- Wang Xueqi ed. *Zang Maoxun, Yuanqu xuan jiaozhu* [Annotated collection of Yuan songs]. Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994.

- Wang Zhizhang. *Qing Shengping shu zhilue* [A Brief History of Shengping Shu in the Qing]. Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1937.
- Wei Minghua annotated, Jiao Xun. *Ju shou* [On drama]. In *Jiao Xun lun qu sanzong* [Three works on songs by Jiao Xun]. Yangzhou: Guangling shushe, 2008.
- Weng Sizai ed. *Jingju cuntan bainian lu* [Miscellaneous writings on Peking Opera over one hundred years]. Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999.
- Weston, Timothy Weston. *The Power of Position: Beijing University, Intellectuals, and Chinese Political Culture, 1898-1929*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- Wu Cuncun. “Ershi shiji chu guanyu siyu, changyou bingti yu zhongguo xingshi de xihua [On siyu, courtesan-actors, and westernization of the history of sex in China].” *Zhongguo wenhua* [Chinese culture] (2008: 2), pp. 98-111.
- Wu Sheng. “Beiping guoju chenlieguan gaiguan [An overview of the Exhibition Hall of the Beiping Learned Society of National Drama].” *Beiping chenbao*, September, 1, 1936.
- . “Beiping guoju tushuguan gaiguan [An overview of the Library of the Beiping Learned Society of National Drama].” *Beiping chenbao*, October, 8, 1936.
- Xiang. “Tan linggong de baoshou [On the conservativeness of actors].” *Beiping chenbao*, December 19, 1935.
- Xiao piaoyou. “Piaoyou ying chanchu buliang xiqi [Amateur performers should root out their bad habits].” *Xiju zhaobao* [Drama weekly post], vol. 1 no. 2 (October 17, 1936).
- . “Taofa xianzai de piaofang han piaoyou [Criticizing amateur associations and performers nowadays].” *Xiju zhaobao*, vol.1 no. 4 (October 31, 1936).
- Xiao shuangqing guanzhu. “Mingpiao shi xiaolu [Brief biographies of famous amateur performers].” *Banyue xiju*, no. 7 (May 24, 1938).
- Xu Muyun. “Xi chuan ren yu ren chuan xi [Plays promote actors, and actors transmit on plays].” *Shiri xiju*, vol. 1 no. 1 (February 15, 1937).
- . *Zhongguo xiju shi* [A history of Chinese drama]. Shanghai: shijie shuju, 1938.
- Xu Xiaoding. “Jingpai xinxi han haipai xinxi de fenxi [Analysis on new productions of jingpai and haipai operas].” *Xiju yuekan* [Drama monthly], vol. 1, no. 3 (May 1931).

- Yanshan xiaoyin. *Linggong xiaozhuan* [Succinct biographies of actors]. Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe, 1974.
- Yansheng, “Qi Rushan zhi shengping [The career of Mr. Qi Rushan].” *Beiping chenbao*, March, 27, 1936.
- Yanyan. “Qing xia hai ba! [Please turn vocational],” *Dayi bao*, March, 28, 1938.
- . “Jiuxi? Maxi! [Old drama? Circus!].” *Dayi bao*, April, 8, 1938.
- Ye Xiaoqing. *Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas: Drama and the Qing Imperial Court*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2012.
- Yeh, Catherine. “The Press and the Rise of Peking Opera Singers to National Stardom: the Case of Theater Illustrated (1912-17).” *East Asian History*, no. 28 (December 2004), pp. 53-86.
- Yu Huijing. *Zheng Zhendou xiju lunzhu yu houdong shuping* [A review of the drama criticism and activities of Zheng Zhendou]. Taipei: Xiuwei zixun keji kongsi, 2004.
- Yu Shangyuan ed. *Guojia yundong* [National Drama Movement]. Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1992.
- Yue, Meng, *Shanghai and the Edges of Empires*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
- Yujun. “Shishei zhi guoyu [To whom should the faults be attributed].” *Shiri xiju*, vol. 12 (June 10, 1937).
- Zhang Boju. “Yishu keyi qiqiang mo [Can Art Be Opportunistic].” *Xin Beiping* [New Beiping], November, 19, 1932.
- . *Hong yutan jimeng shizhu* [Notes to the poems on the dream of red carpet]. Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju xianggang fenju, 1978.
- Zhang Cixi ed. *Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao* [The Collected Historical Sources on Theater in Qing Beijing]. Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe, 1974.
- Zhang Faying. *Zhongguo xiban shi* [History of opera troupes in China]. Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2003.
- Zhang Guyu. “Tan piaoyou yu lingren [On amateur performers and career actors].” *Shiri xiju*, no. 55 (date unknown).

- Zhang Houzai. “Haishang zhi tiannu sanhua [The production of the “Celestial Lady” in Shanghai].” *Gongyan bao*, April 4, 1918.
- . “Piaoyou xiahai tan [On amateur performances going vocational].” *Gongyan bao*, May, 19, 1918.
- . “Shuo xi [On drama].” *Gongyan bao*, September 28, 1918.
- Zhang Yuhua. *Xiqu zhi biaoyan gongfa: yi Kun Jing biaoyan yishu wei fanchou* [The principles of Chinese opera performance: a discussion focusing on Kun opera and Peking opera]. Taipei: Guojia chubanshe, 2010.
- Zhang Xiaocang. “Piaoyou yu xiahai [Amateur performers and going vocational].” *Shiri xiju*, no. 17 (February 1, 1938).
- Zhang Zhi. “Zi tou fawang tan guoju [Walking right into the trap to talk about national drama].” *Beiping chenbao*, January, 24, 1935.
- Zhao Yue. “Jingju mianmian guan [A multifaceted discussion on Peking Opera].” *Beiping chenbao*, October, 10, 1935.
- Zheng Guoyi. “Bianyi xiaoyan [Minor notes from the editor].” *Shiri xiju*, vol. 1 no. 1 (February 15, 1937).
- Zheng Zhenduo. *Zhongguo suwenxue shi* [A history of folk literature in China]. Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 1954.
- Zhongguo geju she* [A General history of opera in China]. Edited by Zhongguo geju shi bianweihui. Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2012.
- Zhongguo jingju shi* [A history of Peking opera in China]. Edited by Beijing shi yishu yenjuso and Shanghai she yishu yenjuso. Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1999.
- Zhongguo xiqu zhi—Beijing juan* [All-China drama gazetteer—Beijing volume]. Edited by Zhongguo xiqu zhi bianji weiyuanhui. Beijing: Xinhua shudian Beijing faxingsuo, 1999.
- Zhongguo xiqu zhi—Shanghai juan* [All-China drama gazetteer—Shanghai volume]. Edited by Zhongguo xiqu zhi bianji weiyuanhui. Beijing: Zhongguo ISBN zhongxin, 1994.
- Zhou Zhifu. *Zhen liu da wen* [Answers to questions about Chinese song drama]. Hong Kong: Zhou Zhifu, 1955.

Zhu Xizu. “Zhengli Shengping shu dang’an ji [Notes on the Collection of Documents of the Shengping shu].” *Yanjing xuebao* [Yanjing Journal of Chinese Studies], vol. 10 (December 1931).

Zhuang Qingyi “Xi zhong jiaose jiu guize [Old principles of roles in opera],” *Xiju zongkan*, no. 3 (December, 20, 1932)