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The Paradoxical Peking Opera: Performing Tradition, History, and Politics in 1949-1967 China

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in

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy in Drama and Theatre

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This dissertation investigates three types of *jingju* plays known during 1949-1967 for their innovative or invented features, so as to explore the ramifications brought about by the theatre censorship, the confrontation of traditions and inventions, the dilemmas and challenges of both artists and reformers, and the paradoxical dynamics of the relationship between form and content. By analyzing a paradoxical *jingju* created by both reformers and artists—the paradox of making a modern opera reflecting contemporary history and preserving traditional performance features; the contradiction of acting conventions and realistic stage scenography; the confrontation of actors' aesthetic methodologies and the directors' considerations, it argues that, since 1919 it was the China-induced forces, rather than the colonial modernization of the pre-1949, that reshaped *jingju*, its history and its politics.

Introduction

Jingju: 1949-1967[1]

Numerous reasons explain why the time period 1949-1967 played a significant role in *jingju* history. Besides the fact that this period was under the nascent Communist regime, which witnessed startling political turmoil and drastic social changes, the performance and creation of *jingju* took numerous twists and turns under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s changeable initiatives and various reforms. What is more, a brief survey of *jingju* plays performed now in contemporary mainland China, including those which feature either "classical" or reformed and invented traditions, are surprisingly and paradoxically from a repertoire created in 1949-1967. These still regularly performed *new* masterpieces include historical plays, such as *Xie Yaohuan*, *Yezhu Lin* (*Wild Boar Forest*), and *Mu Guiying Guashuai* (*Mu Guiying Takes Command*), and plays reflecting revolutionary or contemporary themes, such as *Baimao Nü* (*The White-haired Girl*), *Zhiqu Weihushan* (*Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*), and *Qixi Baihutuan* (*Raid on White Tiger Regiment*), which were new plays invented in the 1950s and '60s to meet the CCP's political demands and were significantly different from the traditional repertoire in both their ideological and artistic features.

Even after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), when the CCP strove to correct the mistakes it had made with regard to the Chinese intellectuals and cultural heritages and encouraged a theatrical freedom and prosperity, the plays created and performed were still practically under a three-fold general directive—to revive or revise the old

[1] In this dissertation, all Chinese names and titles are romanized in pinyin, and translations of the Chinese materials are all mine unless noted otherwise.

repertoire, to create new historical plays, and to make plays reflecting contemporary life. A policy which had been brought up as "walking on two legs (*liangtiaotui zoulu*)," and then had shifted to "emphasis on three types of plays (*sanbingju*)" in the early 1960s, though abandoned during the Cultural Revolution, was apparently inherited and revived as a new means of play creation and performance in the post-Mao era, because almost all plays created and performed currently could be automatically filed into these three categories: traditional, historical, and contemporary. For instance, the performance titles listed in various *jingju* festivals in the post-1990 era were categorizable into these three types of play, which substantially suggests that the performance teams had already categorized their plays accordingly during the process of creation—to choose what kind of play to perform.

Despite the fact that *jingju* has been long considered a classical and traditional art with highly conventionalized forms, plays reflecting contemporary life emerged as early as in the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, most of the plays created by the patriotic intellectuals and artists at the time lasted only briefly. The other "new" type of play—the historical plays, did not emerge until the early 1940s. Besides Mao's favor on this new type of *jingju*, rare evidence showed that it was a most popular theatrical form since its inception and during the early phase of the nascent People's Republic of China (PRC). Obviously, the time period 1949-1967 has played a significant role in creating these two new *jingju* categories, which involve not only finding new story materials but also formulating new performance rules that the professionals must obey, and eventually shaping *jingju*'s paradoxical survival in the present day.

It is easy to see that although *jingju* has not been separated from "its anti-imperialist and anti-traditionalist agenda"[2] since the May Fourth Movement and was promoted to a position of "national drama" during both domestic and international political entanglements in the context of "colonial modernity," it was mainly the early decades of the new totalitarian society which, with their theatre censorship along with the various reforms and innovations, drastically altered *jingju* from a highly successfully commercial and actor-centered art into a state-controlled, state-subsidized, and director-oriented genre. Obviously, this is not to say that *jingju* was unchained from its conventionalism. Rather, it means that the so-called aesthetic aspects of the genre are inextricably intertwined with thematic concerns, which are profoundly political as well as personal, and can be ultimately appreciated and culturally meaningful only if they play appropriately along with these political considerations.

This dissertation, *The Paradoxical Peking Opera: Performing Tradition, History, and Politics in 1949-1967 China*, investigates several *jingju* plays known in 1949-1967 for their innovative or invented features, so as to explore the ramifications brought about by the theatre censorship, the confrontation of traditions and inventions, the dilemmas and challenges of both artists and reformers, and the paradoxical dynamics of the relationship between form and content. The dissertation consists of three chapters which are respectively devoted to a discussion of the three types of *jingju* plays performed during this time period: classical plays with revisions and reforms, newly written historical plays (*xinbian lishixi*), and new plays with contemporary themes (*xiandaixi*).

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[2] Xiaomei Chen. "A Stage in Search of a Tradition: The Dynamics of Form and Content in Post-Maoist Theatre," *Asian Theatre Journal*. Vol. 18, No. 2 (Autumn, 2001), 200. Though Chen is talking about Chinese *huaju* (modern spoken drama) specifically in this paper, the idea can be applied to the modern Chinese theatre as well.

Though theatre censorship did not reach its heyday until the Cultural Revolution, it was indeed the CCP's various reform policies towards *jingju* during the early phase of the nascent Communist China that foreshadowed an exclusive revolutionary theatre in 1966-1976, and further, had a far-reaching influence on *jingju*'s development in the post-Cultural Revolution era and even in the twenty-first century.

Jingju, compared with many other traditional theatrical genres, certainly is not an ancient form. The current scholarly consensus is that *jingju* did not coalesce until about 1840 and did not enter a period of full bloom until approximately 1917. Throughout its coalescence and evolution, *jingju* established a series of features that identify it as a distinctive theatrical genre. In terms of the theatrical forms, *jingju* consists of *chang* (singing), *nian* (speaking and reciting), *zuo* (dancing and miming) and *da* (combating and acrobatics).[3] Each part has its performance codes, rules, and conventions. For example, in singing, though different actors have different usages of their voices, *banshi* (aria types), such as *erhuang yuanban*, *erhuang sanyan*, *xipi liushui*,[4] etc., sets the basic foundation for *jingju* music and singing. In speaking and reciting, there are *yunbai* (speaking in Hubei and Anhui dialects) and *jingbai* (speaking in Beijing dialect). In terms of the story, *jingju* plays are mainly adapted from all kinds of Chinese literary sources, such as legends, (historical) novels, folktales, classics, etc. For example, *jingju* has a series of plays featuring historical figures of *sanguo*—the Three Kingdom Period in Chinese

[3] *Chang* (singing), *nian* (speaking and reciting), *zuo* (dancing and miming) and *da* (combating and acrobatics) are the major terms used by the *jingju* professionals to define generally the basic performance components of *jingju*. Of course, they might not be terms comprehensive enough to include all kinds of *jingju* performances and variations, but they are the most representative and widely acceptable terms used to define the basic components of the genre.

[4] These are some musical patterns of *banshi*. Each pattern has different tempi. Generally speaking, *erhuang banshi* is normally used to describe tragic feelings of the characters in *jingju*, while *xipi banshi* is normally used to express the happy emotions, despite the fact that in some specific cases, due to the artists' need and consideration, certain musical patterns of *xipi* might also be used to express extreme disdress or sorrow.

history (220-280 AD), which are named *sanguo xi* (plays of *sanguo*).[5] In terms of the *hangdang* (type of role), *jingju* has *sheng* (male role), *dan* (female role), *jing* (painted face) and *chou* (clown), while each type of role has its own subdivisions, such as *xiaosheng* (young man) and *laosheng* (old man) in the *sheng* category, and *qingyi* (virtuous lady) and *huadan* (vivacious young female) in the *dan* category. What is more, each type of role has its own performance conventions, styles, and representative plays.[6] In terms of the performers, there are a number of representative actors and actresses for their particular type of role, and some of them have established their own performance styles[7] both by performing the existing repertoire and by creating their own representative plays. Generally speaking, from 1790—when the first *huiban* (a performance troupe from Anhui province) came to Peking to celebrate the 80th birthday of Emperor Qianlong, bringing the basic musical element that would later form the core of *jingju*'s muscial system to the capital city,[8] and thus laying the foundation for the coalescence of *jingju* as a distinctive form—to 1917, *jingju* gradually developed as a popular theatrical genre which has its own performance conventions, a large number of frequently-performed plays, numerous representative actors and actresses, a strict educational system, and a stable and wide audience reception.

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[5] For example, *Jie Dongfeng* (*Borrowing Eastern Wind*), and *Huarong Dao* (*Huarong Path*), etc.
[6] For example, for *qingyi*, there are *Liuyue Xue* (*Snow in June*), *Sanniang Jiaozi* (*Sanniang Teaches Her Son*), etc. For *laosheng*, there are *Dingjun Shan* (*Dingjun Mountain*), *Zhuofang Cao* (*Capture and Release Caocao*), etc.
[7] In *jingju*, there are various kinds of performance styles due to different performance characteristics of actors and actresses, such as Tan (Xipei) Style and Yu (Shuyan) Style in the *laosheng* category, as well as Mei (Lanfang) Style and Shang (Xiaoyun) Style in the *qingyi* category.
[8] Definitely, what the *huiban* has brought to the Peking city was not limited to the basic music elements (e.g. aria types and musical instuments). It also brought a certain number of popular plays and their performers.

Joshua Goldstein, in his examination of *jingju*'s (re-) creation in 1870-1937, suggests that there is an apparent instability of this distinguished genre, which has obscured the audiences' experience of *jingju*. Indeed, we can see that this instability lies in the constant changes, tiny or huge, throughout its history. Besides *jingju* players themselves, who continually make certain reforms, innovations, or tentative "experiments" in plays, in musical patterns, in costumes and in stage representations, court patrons, social intellectuals and *jingju* amateurs have all, consciously or unconsciously, been (re-) constructing the genre in one way or another. For example, originally in *jingju*'s music, *jing erhu* (a two-stringed bowed musical instrument) was not included among the musical instruments accompanying *jingju* performances. It is not until Mei Lanfang's private *jinghu* musician Xu Lanyuan (1892-1977) added *jing erhu* in 1923 into the orchestra that it became a significant and inseparable part of most *jingju dan* plays' music, and later widely applied to the *jingju* orchestra. Additionally, many reforms have also been carried out on *jingju* costumes and performers' makeup throughout *jingju* history. For example, both *jingju* costumes *mang* and *kao* have been redesigned by famous artists, such as Ma Lianliang (1901-1966). Moreover, in spite of the fact that many theatre workers, scholars and *jingju* fans believe that *jingju* is such a conventionalized and fixed genre that it defies any attempt at reforming or reshaping it,[9]

[9] For example, I will discuss later in this dissertation how the *jingju* master Mei Lanfang clearly presented his opinions in his collections about *jingju* reforms that it's better to leave *jingju* in its original form, otherwise, its essence and aesthetics might be severely harmed. Another *jingju* artist, Cheng Yanqiu (1904-1958), after he returned from observing and studying western theatre in Eupope in 1933, said that, "if we apply European stage senery to the Chinese [traditional] theatre, it is like committing suicide by drinking a glass of poisonous wine." See Weng Sizai, ed. *Jingju Congtan Bainian Lu* (*A Collection of Jingju Criticisms in 100 Years*), 2 vols. (Hebei: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999), 22. This colletions also includes many other important intellectuals' and scholars' articles and critiques, such as Huang Zuolin (1906-1994), who expressed his idea that *jingju* has a quite explicit, unique, and independent performance system.

numerous movements or campaigns were launched to reform *jingju* as a result of changes in the political, social and economic environment even before the Communist era. Thus, it is indeed difficult to draw a clear demarcation line between the reformer and the preservationist of *jingju*, as artists, amateurs, intellectuals, politicians, educators, and scholars have all (re-) interpreted the genre in their own ways and tried to build up "traditions" which have (re-)shaped *jingju*. Seemingly, this continual reinterpretation problematizes my examination of the modern *jingju* history from 1949 to 1967 under the governmental influence and in different political environments; for if *jingju*, as a genre, was and still is in flux, does it really matter for us to examine and try to determine which kinds of forces might have brought about its (re-)shaping and (re-)creation?

However, I think there are fundamental differences between the changes made to *jingju* by the artists (professionals) and those made by the government (non-professionals). In particular, *jingju* reforms during the 1949-1967 were largely practiced within the context of a heavily political discourse, in which the artists were forced to perform in accordance with the correct party line, and the so-called artistic freedom was actually exercised under such political impositions. Even though, historically, all *jingju* professionals had made themselves more recognizable by making certain changes to the genre, either in its singing style, musical pattern or performance skills and techniques, these changes, appearing as new, were actually based on the shared knowledge and aesthetic principles which substantially reinforced *jingju* as a distinctive genre. Without the CCP's political involvement, *jingju* was practically following a concept of Darwinism that the fittest is surviving. For instance, those changes made by the artists which were successful with audiences would automatically become part of *jingju* (e.g. *jing erhu*

added into the orchestra), while those uncompetitive changes would fade away from the stage and be forgotten (e.g. *shizhuang xinxi* created by Mei during the early 1920s turned out to be failures). Though we cannot deny that *jingju* plays created to meet the solely political needs might have their own aesthetic or artistic accomplishments, the premise of artistic creation had already been twisted and altered by the political nature of the intervention. In my opnion, ideally artists should be granted their freedom and no art should be interfered with by politicians. It is likely that a classical art would not be able to escape from the flow of time into modernity and the tide of globalization. However, the use of art as propaganda, making it be constantly and arbitrarily applied to changeable political needs, was more harmful than an aesthetically driven evolution since both the artists and the audiences were forced to participate in a compulsory theatre class in accordance with the political lines while their artistic freedom and imaginative experience were severely interfered with and eventually lost.

Certainly, *jingju*'s "function in a traditional society went beyond that of an entertainment medium,"[10] and the reforms of *jingju* should not be ascribed only to the CCP's regime. The first "subversive" *jingju* reform movement occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries under the bourgeois-democratic revolutionary influences. In this movement, many *jingju* actors, actively and of their own accord, participated in creating new *jingju* plays with contemporary themes (*shizhuang xinxi*) to promote and advocate the ideas of the bourgeois-democratic revolution so as to save the Chinese nation and its people. This can be regarded as the first utilitarian use of *jingju* for

[10] Nancy Guy. *Peking Opera and Politics in Taiwan*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 8.

political propaganda. The Nationalists' idea of establishing a national theatre that can represent the essence of Chinese culture might be praised as patriotic and idealistic, but many reforms in *jingju* were generally considered overly radical and, in the wake of the political turmoil in which these new *jingju* plays were created, the new *jingju* plays lost their appeal. Mei Lanfang, who had created a series of *shizhuang xinxi* during that time, admitted that they were totally failures.

Different from the reform initiated by the *jingju* actors of their own accord under the bourgeois-democratic influence, the reforms of *jingju* during 1949-1967 were made in very complicated political environments, undergoing, successively, resistance and obedience to the hegemonic control, as well as rises and falls of the political forces within the government and the Party, and the (ab-)use of *jingju* as propaganda to meet the class struggle and the CCP's varying political initiatives. Moreover, the CCP pushed the utilitarian use of *jingju* to an unprecedented and abusive extreme. The centralized power significantly reshaped the genre with the persistent involvement of the state (e.g. top-down reforms), as Constantine Tung states:

> No country believes more deeply in the power of drama or takes greater pains about what is in a play than does the People's Republic of China, and no drama in any country and in history has been so frequently and so directly involved and used in ideological feuds, political purges, mass campaigns and high-level power struggles as has that of the People's Republic of China.[11]

The CCP's demand that drama serve politics was put into practice during the Sino-Japanese war when numerous new *jingju* plays with contemporary themes were created to stress the army-people relationship, self-defense against the enemy, prevention

[11] Constantine Tung and Colin Mackerras, eds. *Drama in the People's Republic of China*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 1.

of sabotage, and fighting behind enemy lines.[12] During the Yan'an time, institutes for reforming *jingju*, such as Lu Xun Arts Academy and later, the Yan'an Pingju [Jingju] Research Institute, were established to foster Party cadres and create both new historical plays and plays reflecting revolutionary and contemporary themes.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, despite the artists' resistance and reluctance, the CCP carried out a top-down *jingju* reform during 1949-1957 as part of the New-democratic Revolution. In the process, private *jingju* troupes were nationalized, old plays and their performances were either censored or banned, and new systems and methods were adopted and applied in the creation and performance of *jingju*. For instance, the CCP adopted the director system in the reform, which substantially challenged and revolutionized *jingju*'s aesthetic principles and performance traditions.

What is more, the entire 1949-1967 time period witnessed the creation of new historical plays as well as the invention of plays reflecting revolutionary and contemporary themes. The creation of new historical plays officially began with Mao's praise of the *Bishang Liangshan* (*Driven Up to the Mountain Liang*), but ended up with severe attacks on historian Wu Han's historical play *Hai Rui Baguan* (*Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*), an attack which was one of the opening shots of the Cultural Revolution. The creation of plays on contemporary themes went through numerous experiments during the Yan'an time and, under the pressure of the Great Leap Forward Movement (1958-1961), produced a series of *xiandaixi* (new plays reflecting contemporary life), which became the major source of *yangbanxi* (model works) during the Cultural

[12] *Ibid.*, 3.

Revolution. Though the historical plays and, in particular, new plays with contemporary themes were significantly different from the *jingju* traditional repertoire, and though their modern themes and political messages were awkwardly contradictory with *jingju*'s conventionalized and symbolic nature of performance, these two new types of plays were inherited as revolutionary traditions, revived and frequently performed after the Cultural Revolution. These newly created historical plays and plays with contemporary themes constituted what Eric Hobsbawm calls an "invented tradition," that is "a set of practices…to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition."[13] Even though these performances broke with the past because of the revolution and the drastic social change, still the notion of tradition "automatically implies continuity with the past"[14] because these new inventions became an inseparable part of *jingju*'s new status quo. In this sense, the modern *jingju* seemingly was not only a rupture with the past but also a "continuity with the past." For instance, despite the fact that these new *jingju* plays were created under governmental influence, historical plays created during the 1950s and 1960s were added to the traditional *jingju* repertoire, and some of them became "reserved" plays (*baoliu jumu*) frequently performed by present-day actors as plays representing the national tradition.

If the banning of the traditional theatre during the Cultural Revolution turned out to be a disaster to the cultural heritage and resulted in the loss of a generation, how shall we evaluate the model theatre built up at the time, which also nurtured a generation? Was it another process in which the Chinese people actively participated in the creation of their

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[13] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.
[14] *Ibid.*

own culture, history and nation? Was the whole modern *jingju* history together with its cultural products a natural process of the continuous inventing of the tradition, or a perpetual nightmare filled with censorship, politics, governmental interference, and a simultaneous struggling with the complexity of modernization?

Though many of these questions remain complicated and unsolvable, my approach towards modern *jingju* history has been definitely influenced by two recent contributions to *jingju* scholarship though neither of them is focused on the time period 1949-1967 for *jingju* in mainland China. Joshua Goldstein, a historian at University of Southern California (and an alumnus of UCSD), analyzes how "historical forces" assigned *jingju* a fixed essence and simultaneously re-shaped it from the late Qing Dynasty to the early Republic Era.[15] By positioning *jingju* in a social context of "colonial modernity," Goldstein discusses how *jingju* as a genre, was perceived, produced, and performed in the late Qing and the Republican era. He analyzes how in a few decades *jingju* was transformed from being a court art, to catering to the personal taste of Mao Zedong in Yan'an during the war against Japan in the late 1930s, and to becoming a genre manipulated both by the Japanese as a strategy of cultural assimilation and by the Guomingdang (the Nationalist Party) as a weapon to promote the anti-Japanese war respectively. Goldstein emphasizes that all these historical moments escalated *jingju* from a "melodic and stylistic" genre to a national icon closely related to Chinese identity and cultural nationalism. The questions Goldstein brings up in his chapter "The Limits of

[15] Joshua Goldstein. *Drama King: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera 1870-1937*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

Reforms," such as "is bigger (usually) better" or "how to act in a theatre," continue to be *jingju*'s main problems in the post-1980 era. In a sense, I regard my project as a continued exploration of *jingju*'s (re-)creation in the period 1949-1967 with the state's involvement in a changed and changing political and social discourse, which connects and develops Goldstein's time period (1870-1937) to a modern period (1949-1967).

Nancy Guy at the University of California San Diego has written on a branch of the *jingju* traditiona in exile under the changes of political environment in contemporary Taiwan.[16] In her exploration of the substantial changes of *jingju* in contemporary Taiwan, Guy proposes a "two-part structure" model in analysis of the relationship between *jingju* and its associated environment. It involves two circles where the "performing tradition is encircled by its environment." She further explains that the "performing tradition" circle contains two parts—*jingju* as an art form (text, music, and performance) and the people who create it (performers and other relevant artistic professionals), while the environment circle contains "an enormous range of interrelated forces" which she identifies as political, social and economic.[17] She questions how these two circles would interact and influence each other and explores the consequences of the state's involvement in *jingju*'s development in Taiwan.

Moreover, despite the fact that many Western scholars and educators have been trying hard to introduce *jingju* to Western readers, their focus has been on the history of *jingju* prior to 1949, and the post-1949 *jingju* history has been treated only cursorily. In particular, there are few discussions about the 1949-1957 period in *jingju* history in the

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[16] Nancy Guy. *Peking Opera and Politics in Taiwan*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005.
[17] *Ibid.*, 6.

English-speaking world, even though a series of western scholars who have specialized in Chinese history and theatre arts has laid a foundation for the research of modern *jingju* history in their survey chapters and overview articles. For instance, Colin Mackerras is a pioneer in the introduction of Chinese theatre to western readers. He is regarded as "the" scholar of Chinese theatre in the West. In many of his influential works, such as *The Chinese Theatre in Modern Times: from 1840 to the Present*, Mackerras provides as comprehensive an overview of the whole modern Chinese theatre history as he could within the limited space of a book. He touches upon the government policy regarding the Chinese traditional theatre, introduces briefly the main ideology and rhetoric in the Communist drama reform, and outlines the Communist drama reform movement according to the rise and fall of different political powers within the government in the nascent Communsit China.

Richard F.S. Yang is probably the first scholar in the West who discusses briefly but specifically the CCP's reform of *jingju* from 1949 to the Great Leap Forward. In his article "The Reform of Peking Opera under the Communists,"[18] although he claims that *jingju* is a dramatic form that almost remained unchanged prior to 1949, Yang argues that along with the profound political, economic, and social changes since the Communist regime took over China in 1949, *jingju* has been altered dramatically. He introduces briefly how the reformers proposed the reform policies and how the government controlled *jingju* and performance by banning some of the plays.

[18] Richard F.S. Yang. "The Reform of Peking Opera under the Communists," *The China Quarterly*. No. 11 (Jul.-Sep., 1962), 124-139.

Siyuan Liu's " Theatre Reform As Censorship: Censoring Traditional Theatre in China in the Early 1950s," probably is the first article in the English language introducing the CCP's detailed banning policies and theatre censorship during the early 1950s.[19] Though he examines the entire traditional theatre, he does mention and discuss briefly as examples the imposition on certain *jingju* artists and the banning of certain plays.

In "The Politics of Peking Opera, 1962-1965," Byung-Joon Ahn gives an introduction to the debate that took place in 1962-1965.[20] The debate occurred between Mao's supporters, particularly his wife Jiang Qing, who insisted that traditional *jingju* plays should be replaced with plays with contemporary and revolutionary themes so as to update the art to cater to the needs of the Socialist and Communist era, and those from the Party Propaganda Department who had little enthusiasm for such reforms and innovations. The focus in this debate was whether the reform of *jingju* was a political or a purely artistic and academic issue. The article concludes that this issue is the cause for the various conflicts which eventually led to the Cultural Revolution.

In another journal article "Communist China's War Theatre," Walter J. and Ruth Meserve argue that by adopting Lenin and Mao's attitudes on war, i.e., perceiving war as "the continuation of politics," actors and theatre workers were socially abused by Mao and his wife Jiang Qing in Communist China. In accordance with Mao's Marxist ideology that war is an inevitable outcome of exploitation, "war theatre" was created by the Communist Party for the teaching of Mao's military thoughts and for political propaganda. Although admitting that the "war theatre" and all the propaganda plays

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[19] Siyuan Liu. "Theatre Reform as Censorship: Censoring Traditional Theatre in China in the Early 1950s," *Asian Theatre Journal*. No. 61 (2009), 387-406.
[20] Byung-Joon Ahn. "The Politics of Peking Opera, 1962-1965," *Asian Survey*. Vol. 12, No. 12, *The Culture Revolution and Its Aftermath* (Dec., 1972), 1066-1081.

worked out both in the anti-Japanese war times and after the establishment of the PRC, they conclude that this theatre was not appealing to the Chinese people.[21]

Rudolf G. Wagner writes mainly on the "historical drama."[22] As I have mentioned, creating new historical *jingju* plays was one part of the CCP's drama reform. To be more specific, "historical drama" is a play genre that uses traditional theatre forms to embody historical themes or figures. Actually, how to judge an essentially anti-communist but unavoidable past has been a permanent issue for the Communist Party after it took over power. Thus, how to "correctly" use historical materials in the theatre and performance becomes a rather sensitive issue. "Correctness" here means, when adopting historical themes, that the new plays have to perceive the historical events from a contemporary ideological (Marxist) point of view and speak for a contemporary audience (the working class). For example, *Hai Rui Baguan* (*Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*) is one of these new *jingju* "historical plays," which is generally regarded as the fuse of the Cultural Revolution. Personally, I think on the one hand that Wagner is one of the few western scholars who have paid attention to those "untouched" and valuable historical plays created under post-1949 circumstances. However, on the other hand, the plays discussed in his book, which Wagner calls "fringe" pieces of the genre—*Guan Hanqing* (1958), *Xie Yaohuan* (1961) and *Monkey King Subdues the White-Bone Demon*—actually turned out to be quite popular both in their time and in the post-Mao era. For instance, *Xie Yaohuan*, swiftly revived after the Cultural Revolution, became one

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[21] Walter J. and Ruth Meserve. "Communist China's War Theatre," *Journal of Popular Culture*. 6:2 (1972: Fall), 313-324.
[22] Rudolf G. Wagner. *The Contemporary Chinese Historical Drama: Four Studies*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990.

of the reserved plays of the *Guojia jingjuyuan* (China National Peking Opera Company).[23]

What is more, although my research does not discuss specifically how the new plays reflecting revolutionary or contemporary themes were performed during the Cultural Revolution, I do introduce and analyze how these plays were substantially created during an earlier phase in the late 1950s and early 1960s, which foreshadowed the heyday of model theatre in the Cultural Revolution.

With regard to the availability in English of the Chinese revolutionary theatre, one of the model plays *The Red Lantern* has already been translated by Yang Hsien-Yi and Gladys Yang and published in *Chinese Literature* as early as 1965. It was then reprinted in a collection *Modern Drama from Communist China* edited by Alter J. Meserve.[24] This collection also includes a Ting Yi and Ho Ching-chih's translation of *The White-haired Girl*.[25]

In *The Drama Review* (*TDR*), Daniel S. P. Yang uses several pages to give a brief introduction to the eight model *jingju* plays created during the Cultural Revolution.[26] This is probably one of the earliest documents by western scholars writing on the model theatre. Yang first elaborates how Chinese Communist theatre policy has consistently reflected the principles spelled out by Mao Zedong at the Yan'an Forum in 1942. Then,

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[23] *Guojia jingjuyuan* (China National Peking Opera Company), formerly named *Zhongguo jingjuyuan* (China Peking Opera Company), was one of the most important and representative *jingju* performance companys/troupes in China. It was established in 1955 in Beijing with Mei Lanfang as its first president. In terms of translating the names of these *jingju* performance companys/troupes, I use the pinyin form *jingju* in this dissertation (such as Beijing Jingju Company) unless the company has its own translation specified in their official English website page (such as China National Peking Opera Company).
[24] Walter J. Meserve and Ruth I. Meserve, eds. *Modern Drama from Communist China*. (New York: New York University Press, 1970), 328-368.
[25] *Ibid.*, 105-180.
[26] Daniel S. P. Yang. "8 Model Works," *TDR*. Vol. 15, No. 2, *Theatre in Asia* (Spring, 1971), 258-261.

he points out that a number of traditional plays were revised or banned after the Bureau of Drama Reform was established right after the Communists took over power in China. In his paper there is a general analysis of the types of plays, which were banned by the government. He concludes that with the proscription and revision of the old repertoire, changes had to be made in some stage conventions, which were also considered as "harmful" and "backward" according to the Communist ideology. However, Yang does not introduce the eight model works themselves in any detail.

An important collection of articles about the post-1949 Chinese theatre edited by Mackerras fills the gap left by previous scholarship.[27] In this collection, Ellen R. Judd writes specifically about the "prescriptive dramatic theory of the Cultural Revolution," in which she introduces the basic political principle and ideology of creating revolutionary drama. Kirk A. Denton analyzes one of the model plays *Zhiqu Weihushan* (*Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*) and regards it as a modern myth—to mythologize the Maoist ideology. Several essays in the collection deal with western influences: particular attention is paid to the interpretation of Brecht by Huang Zuolin (1906-1994), a Chinese theatre scholar and director, and there is also a comparison of the aesthetic significance of Mei Lanfang, Stanislavski and Brecht. Both Daniel S.P. Yang and Colin Mackerras examine the post-Cultural Revolution theatre activities in China, including the productions of western plays, quality of performance, theatre facilities, the audience and admission prices, innovative changes in the traditional theatre and the development of

[27] Constantine Tung and Colin Mackerras, eds. *Drama in the People's Republic of China*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987.

Chinese theatre (professionals, semi-professionals, amateurs, and audiences) in a process of modernization and commercialization.

Though my dissertation does not focus on a post-Mao *jingju* theatre, another Chinese theatre scholar who does introduce these more recent developments is also worth mentioning. At the University of Hawaii since the 1980s, Elizabeth Wichmann has kept publishing particularly on *jingju* in the past 30 years, by which she introduces *jingju*'s origin, tradition and convention.[28] In her later career as a *jingju* scholar and performer, she develops her interest in the study of *jingju* reforms and innovations. She mainly examines the reforms in post-Mao Beijing and Shanghai. Since she regards the *jingju* reform as a very sensitive issue involving too much politics, she does not discuss any complexity and controversy of the specific policies about *jingju* in the post-Mao era; instead, she maintains her analysis strictly at an aesthetic and practical level—how innovations were brought to every aspect of *jingju* performance: costume, scenery, music, etc.[29]

We can see that, though there have been a number of scholars in the west writing on the contemporary Chinese theatre, modern *jingju* history (especially the periods of 1949-1967) is still a rarely studied topic in the English-speaking world despite its complexity and controversy. While study and research of modern *jingju* history is rare in the west, the related scholarship in China is problematic. First, though quite a number of scholars, critics, and artists have been writing and publishing on the genre, before the

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[28] For example, *Listening to Theatre: The Aural Dimension of Beijing Opera*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1991.
[29] Elizabeth Wichmann. "Tradition and Innovation in Contemporary Beijing Opera Performance," *TDR*. Vol. 34, No. 1 (Spring, 1990), 146-178. And "Reform at the Shanghai *Jingju* Company and Its Impact on Creative Authority and Repertory," *TDR*. Vol. 44, No. 4 (Winter, 2000), 96-119.

program of *Jingju* Studies (*jingju xue*) was established at the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts (*zhongguo xiqu xueyuan*) in 2005, *jingju* studies had never appeared as an independent discipline in theatre studies. One main reason is that the Chinese theatrical academic circle has a "tradition" of examining *xiqu* (Chinese traditional theatre) as a whole, since *jingju*, despite its immense popularity, is only one of the over 300 traditional theatrical genres in China. Many state policies were also so formulated as to treat *xiqu* as a whole, thus leading to a generalized inclusion of the *jingju* scholarship in the larger discourse of *xiqu*, i.e. the Chinese traditional theatre. The discussions of *jingju* are normally buried into piles of books and volumes on *xiqu* in terms of its evolution and reforms in both pre-modern and modern times.[30] Similar to the *jingju* scholarship in English, *jingju*, though mentioned in many introductory works, is treated cursorily in a general outline in books about contemporary *xiqu*.[31]

At the first international conference of *jingju* studies in 2005, *Jingju* Studies Program was for the first time established as an independent and specialized discipline. I helped with the event and the establishment of the program at the time. It is still very much a discipline in the process of creating its own institutional form and structures. In

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[30] Some of the most important examples are: Jiang Zhongqi. *Zhongguo Xiqu Yanjin Yu Biange Shi* (*A History of Chinese Xiqu's Evolution and Revolution*). Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1999. Zhang Geng and Guo Hancheng, eds. *Zhongguo Xiqu Tongshi* (*A Complete History of Chinese Traditional Theatre*). Beijing: Zhonguo xiju chubanshe, 2006. Zhongguo Xiqu Yanjiuyuan, ed. *Zhongguo Gudian Xiqu Lunshu Jicheng* (*A Collection of Classical Works and Literary Criticisms on the Traditional Chinese Theatre*), 10 volumes. Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1959. Zhongguo Xiqu Zhi, editorial committee. *Zhongguo Xiqu Zhi* (*The Annals of Chinese Traditional Theatre*), 30 volumes. Beijing: Chinese ISBN press center, 1999.

[31] These include, for example, Fu Jin. *Xinzhongguo Xiju Shi: 1949-2000* (*A History of Chinese Drama: 1949-2000*). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002. Gao Yilong and Li Xiao, eds. *Zhongguo Xiqu Xiandaixi Shi* (*A History of Chinese Xiqu with Contemporary Themes*). Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 1999. Hu Xingliang. *Ershi Shiji Zhongguo Xiju Sichao* (*Trends and Thoughts of the Chinese Theatre in the Twentieth Century*). Yixing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1995. Zhang Geng, ed. *Dangdai Zhongguo Xiqu* (*The Contemporary Chinese Traditional Theatre*). Beijing: Dangdai chubanshe, 1994. Zhu Yinghui. *Dangdai Xiqu Sishi Nian* (*A Forty-year History of Contemporary Xiqu*). Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1993.

my opinion, the establishment of *Jingju* Studies Program is largely due to a changed and still changing global political situation: as *jingju*'s wide adoption outside its country of origin is becoming a matter of pride, a symbol of the continuing presence of China on the world scene, a systematic, diverse and more specialized study of *jingju* becomes particularly urgent in the Chinese theatre circle.

Moreover, to examine the modern *jingju* history means that one unavoidably has to deal with many layers of governmental rhetoric and party politics since the whole contemporary *jingju* history is subject to the changes of political environment and the influences of the governmental policies. The study of modern *jingju* history under the present political regime in China, particularly in terms of the governmental influences in its (re-)creation, is still in many ways sensitive and inconvenient. Current writings which outline the *jingju* reform by the CCP commonly praise it as an unrivaled accomplishment in its history. The orthodox and the most influential work in *jingju* scholarship, *A History of Chinese Jingju*, has actually set the tone for the related study and research of *jingju* by the Chinese theatrical academia by declaring the reform of *jingju* as "one of the CCP's greatest accomplishments…[Mao and Zhou] have brought [*jingju*] from its deathbed to life,"[32] despite the CCP's own admission that in the reform process they met with failures, resistance and chaos. This *jingju* history "Bible" also places the 1950s as the "Golden Age" in the whole *jingju* history, a reinforcement of the political messages that few scholars can challenge. The post-Mao era has been gradually bringing back a relatively liberal environment, and China's pursuit of a "Socialist Democracy" has been

[32] Beijingshi yishu yanjiusuo and Shanghai yishu yanjiusuo, editorial committee. *Zhongguo Jingju Shi* (*A History of Chinese Jingju*), 4 Volumes. (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1999), 1518.

paving the way for more debates, re-assessment and re-definition of those controversial issues of the 1950s. Indeed, scholars have already begun to discuss the controversial issues and to critique the "ultra-leftist" inclination in the reform process, which led to a ruthless treatment of the cultural heritage (traditional *jingju* plays).[33] Nevertheless, study and research of the modern *jingju* history is still under the shadow of the mainstream academic approach to criticism: Marxism-Leninism and Maoism.

Of course, despite these problematic phenomena, those works on the Chinese traditional theatre (*xiqu*) in general and the *jingju* "Bible"—*A History of Chinese Jingju*—still provide many basic and invaluable historical materials, archives and sources.

Chapter Outline

My approach in this dissertation has been to explore the CCP's political initiatives and directives towards *jingju* reforms during 1949-1967 and their ramifications for the creation and performance of *jingju* while the traditional repertoire was revised in accordance with the Party line and new plays were created to meet the needs of political propaganda. Though the CCP's directives were changeable due to the changing political environments and needs, their reforms regarding *jingju* were centered upon three types of plays. Thus, instead of following a chronological narrative, my dissertation chapters are focused on these three types: the discussion of censoring and banning the traditional

[33] Such as Fu Jin's *Xinzhongguo Xiju Shi: 1949-2000* (*A History of Chinese Drama: 1949-2000*). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002.

repertoire, the making of historical plays, and the inventing of plays with contemporary themes.

Chapter one introduces the early 1950s, when Mao and the Chinese Communist Party established the People's Republic of China. As *jingju* had been deliberately chosen as a significant medium of propaganda, the CCP implemented a three-pronged reform of *jingju* repertoire, artists and organization throughout China, roughly in line with Mao's 1942 Talks. On the one hand, it involved the "cleaning-up the stage" project in which some of the stage conventions were done away with. For example, *jianchang*—the "property man," who had been present in the performance, was cleared from the stage; certain habits of actors, such as drinking water, spitting, changing costumes during their performance, were not allowed on stage anymore; the entire orchestra, which had previously been visible on stage, was now seated on the left side behind the curtain; some "cruel" techniques, such as *cai qiao* (lotus feet), were banned. It also engaged in a direct censoring and banning policy from the Reform Bureau on the traditional repertoire. At the upper level, there was a diversity of opinions about the reform with the possibility of real resistance from *jingju* artists like Mei Lanfang. But at the grassroots level and in the local regions, banning and censoring of *jingju* ran wild as a result of the ultra-leftist inclination, which caused a serious shortage of performable plays in the mid 1950s. On the other hand, the government had realized the importance of actors as a class and gave them a definite political function. Celebrities such as Mei Lanfang (1894-1961) and Ma Lianliang (1901-1966), who were invited to participate in the government articulation of reforms, tried to protect what they considered the most important features of their art. They also found themselves awkwardly caught in a process that sought simultaneously to

make use of and to undermine their celebrity position on behalf of more egalitarian social relations within the theatre company. By analyzing Mei Lanfang's revisions on his own classical piece *Guifei Zuijiu* (*Guifei Intoxicated*), along with solutions arrived at by some other artists engaged in the reform, this chapter suggests a classical *jingju* that was not drastically changed, because although Mao's regime may have insisted on the expression of a national ideology, including attitudes toward *jingju*, right from the beginning of his rule, it still favored a reformed tradition rather than its elimination as part of an undesirable past.

Chapter two examines the reformed traditions of the "newly written historical *jingju*" (*xinbian lishixi*), which were adapted to suit the needs of the revolutionary purposes. These new historical plays took themes from the old repertoire, with their traditional conventions in style, but more complex scenography and stage properties. As Mao had enthusiastically applauded one of these newly written historical *jingju*, *Bishang Liangshan* (*Driven Up to the Mountain Liang*), which was based on an account in the sixteenth-century novel *Shuihu Zhuan* (*Water Margin*) about the twelfth-century bandit Song Jiang and his followers who were rebels against imperial authority, "an epoch-making beginning of revolutionizing old traditional theatre"[34] began. One hundred and sixteen historical plays were created by the China Jingju Company alone from 1949 to 1960, including those featuring the most rigid conventions, and frequently performed almost as classical *jingju* on the post-Mao Chinese stage: *San Cha Kou* (*Divergence*), *Baishe Zhuan* (*The Legend of the White Snake*), and Mei Lanfang's last masterpiece *Mu*

[34] Faye Chunfang Fei, ed. *Chinese Theories of Theatre and Performance from Confucius to the Present.* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 142.

Guiying Guashuai (*Mu Guiying Takes Command*). On the one hand, as inseparable parts of the historical and political contexts, *jingju* styles and techniques were not treated merely as formalistic categories; instead, they were determined by the content in these newly written historical plays. On the other hand, however, the *sitanni tixi* (Stanislavski system), which emphasizes a completely realistic performance, achieved through voice and body training, recreation of the situation in terms of the actors' own impressions and memories, and total immersion in the situations and identification with the characters of the plays, was freely adopted into *jingju* practice to represent socialist realism.[35] This chapter first introduces the details of creation of *Driven Up to the Mountain Liang*, examining how the CCP's political ideologies were applied to the historical materials and character formations through numerous revisions. It also pays special attention to the anti-historicism methodology adopted in the process of creating historical plays, particularly in those mythological plays, such as *Niulang Zhinü* (*The New Romance of the Milky Way*) which aroused heated debates within the Party. Although most of the *jingju* newly written by historians rather than by theatre artists turned out to be failures, Mei Lanfang's *Mu Guiying Takes Command*, though created under the director system, became one of Mei's eight masterpieces. This chapter finally analyzes the details of Mei's creation in this historical play, suggesting that even though the historical plays were products driven solely by the political impositions, their artistic essence could still be maintained if the *jingju* artists and professionals played the major role in creating them and could fully display their knowledge and performance techniques.

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[35] Xiaomei Chen. "A Stage in Search of a Tradition: The Dynamics of Form and Content in Post-Maoist Theatre," *Asian Theatre Journal*. Vol. 18, No. 2 (Autumn, 2001), 202.

Despite Mei's acknowledgement that *jingju*, as a unique art of abstraction, could not be used to represent contemporary themes, because the new content and the new form contradict *jingju*'s aesthetic principles and its performance conventions, with the onset of the Great Leap Forward Movement (1958-1961), we find the flowering of a theory of *jingju* that promoted "contemporary themes" that took pride in being propaganda for the CCP, the Chinese revolution, and the revolutionary classes—the workers, peasants, and soldiers. By analyzing one of the new *jingju* with contemporary themes—*Baimao Nü* (*White Haired Girl*) directed by A Jia in 1958—and numerous other plays performed at the Xiandaixi Festival in 1964, chapter three explores how the traditional costumes, role types, and stage properties of *jingju* were thoroughly revolutionized to give play to the heroic nature of the revolution and its proponents. As these plays rely on the Maoist tradition of presenting realistic slices of life and highlighting social problems, they "had specially written music and scripts that rose to a climax and had a dénouement—quite unlike the episodic structure that had prevailed"[36] in *jingju* since its inception. This chapter further explains how the government in 1963 pushed ahead more vigorously with its program to revolutionize the traditional *jingju* and create revolutionary figures, which foreshadowed the heyday of the exclusive model operas and the banning of the whole traditional repertoire and performance in the Cultural Revolution.

This dissertation explores 1949-1967, an early period in the nascent Communist China that has long been neglected and seldom discussed by scholars, east and west alike. However, the importance of 1949-1967 is that it inherited the anti-imperialist and

[36] Colin Mackerras. "Tradition, Change and Continuity in Chinese Theatre in the Last Hundred Years: In Commemoration of the Spoken Drama Centenary," *Asian Theatre Journal*. Vol. 25, No. 1, (Sping, 2008), 4.

paradoxically anti-traditionalist tradition since the May Fourth Movement, and equipped *jingju* well both ideologically and practically for an exclusive model theatre that it prefigured. This study fills a void in *jingju* scholarship in both the English-speaking world and China. The analysis of plays selected from the three categories is based on a wide variety of primary sources, including notes from conferences held in China during the period, newspaper articles, journal criticisms, and other historical documents, as well as personal interviews with *jingju* artists and scholars, to sketch out a concise narrative of a veiled history.

Goldstein argues that *jingju* during 1870-1937 was a modern construction that was affected and shaped by the conditions of colonial modernity. Foreign cultures and modern technologies fashioned in the treaty ports all revolutionized the customs, conventions, and the audiences' receptions in the theatre, including the transformation from the tea-house stage to the proscenium stage.[37] And apparently, "it seems natural to associate change more with outside influence than with indigenous factors."[38] This dissertation focuses on the pressures for change coming from within China, and investigates a paradoxical *jingju* recreated by both reformers and artists during 1949-1967: the paradox of making a modern opera reflecting contemporary history and yet preserving traditional performance features; the contradiction of acting conventions and realistic stage scenography; the confrontation of actors' aesthetic methodologies and the directors' considerations. Through this investigation it argues that, with slogans like

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[37] Joshua Goldstein. *Drama King: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera 1870-1937*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 1-13.
[38] Colin Mackerras. "Tradition, Change and Continuity in Chinese Theatre in the Last Hundred Years: In Commemoration of the Spoken Drama Centenary," *Asian Theatre Journal*. Vol. 25, No. 1, (Sping, 2008), 20.

"down with Confucius and sons!" since 1919, it was the China-induced forces (i.e. the 1949-1967 reforms and their far-reaching influences), rather than the colonial modernization of the pre-1949 period that definitively reshaped *jingju*: its history and its politics.[39]

[39] In Colin Mackerras's paper "Tradition, Change and Continuity in Chinese Theatre in the Last Hundred Years: In Commemoration of the Spoken Drama Centenary," he provides a survey of the Chinese theatre's changes chronologically during the past hundred years and he insists that the forces induced within China played a much more significant role than the western influence. Though he is talking about the Chinese theatre as a whole, the concept can be applied to *jingju*'s changes in the past hundred years as well. Mackerras points out the fact that there were indeed many western techniques adopted in the Chinese theatre during the past hundred years, such as the proscenium stage and the realistic scenography, but actually and ironically, they were results of a tide of anti-imperialism within China, which resulted in these novelties from abroad being brought in by the Chinese intellectuals and artists. To be more specific, in my dissertation, the Soviet realism, too, without the CCP's advocacy would not have been widely adopted and practiced in the drama reforms during the 1950s. Thus, the Soviet realism would not have been influential without the CCP's propaganda and politics. We could also see how the Soviet realism was then criticized when the Sino-Soviet split started in the 1960s. Certainly, I do not deny any of these western influences in this dissertation, such as the Soviet realism and the adoption of the western techniques. What I am arguing is that the China induced forces played a more significant role. Supposing China had kept to its late Qing policy of isolationism for the past century, all of these so-called western influences might have not happened.

Chapter One
Reform of Jingju Old Repertoire in the 1950s

On October 22, 2004, Beijing, a special performance entitled *Mei Yun* (*A Taste of Mei*), which consists of five *zhezixi*[1], was held at Chang'an Grand Theatre in commemoration of the great *jingju* maestro Mei Lanfang for the 110th anniversary of his birth. For this occasion Mei's youngest son and the orthodox successor—the representative figure of the second generation of the Mei School, Mei Baojiu (1934-) would lead his four female apprentices[2] in the performance of its ending piece *Guifei Zuijiu* (*Guifei Intoxicated*), which is one of the most popular and frequently performed plays of Mei Lanfang, a masterpiece of the Mei School.

Sitting in the darkened box on the second floor of the newly modeled Chang'an Grand Theatre, I could hardly see the performers' facial expressions. The orchestra pit, apparently, distanced the proscenium arch from the audience seating. Musicians were hidden on the left side of the stage behind the drape and were invisible to the audience. Obviously, this modern theatre is not what we could conceive of in the late nineteenth or the early decades of the twentieth century, when after *jianchang* (the property man) gracefully lifted the stage entrance curtain, the actor would step elegantly with the rhythm of the orchestra and strike a beautiful pose in front of the carved balustrades; in the tea house theatre during the Republican era (1912-1949). Gentlemen were drinking dragon-

[1] *Zhezixi* are highlights from independent or complete plays.
[2] In *jingju* education and tradition, the meaning of a *tudi* (apprentice) is significantly different from that of a *xuesheng* (student), and their corresponding counterparts of *shifu* (master) and *laoshi* (teacher) are quite different as well. An apprenticeship is a formal acceptance of a student, which involves a discipleship ceremony called *baishi* (kowtow, etc.) It usually takes on a more intimate relationship (i.e. parent/child) rather than a generic respect for skill and knowledge. The master always becomes the benevolent father-figure, as is well depicted in an ancient Chinese axiom "A master for one day becomes the father-figure for one's life."

well or jasmine tea and eating roasted peanuts and sunflower seeds. "*Hao* (Bravo)!" they shouted, with the sunflower seed shells slipping from their lips, while the vendors would hustle around each tea table refilling hot water and tossing warm towels to the guests for them to clean hands and faces. Ladies, seated in the upper side boxes, became so enamored of the actor that they would wipe their sentimental tears with embroidered handkerchiefs and throw their golden rings and pearl necklaces beyond the balcony onto the stage: why cannot Mei's mistress be me?

Moreover, the five pieces exhibited on the stage were also in some ways different from how they were performed by Mei Lanfang during the time in which all of them were revised and recreated by the master himself. For instance, in the first piece, *Tiannü Sanhua* (*The Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers*), Mei designed a new approximately 6-metre long and 38-centimetre wide ribbon made of Indian silk to suggest the demeanor of a transcendent being and an environment of fairyland for the immortals.[3] By adding this ribbon to the old costume, rather than using the traditional prolonged *shuixiu* (water sleeves), Mei created a series of unprecedented ribbon dances and movements. Now, these conventionalized dance steps and body movements created by Mei are sometimes adjusted to the modern performance space, where a piece of much longer ribbon is adopted by the contemporary performers to display their command of skill and strategy. Another piece, *Daiyu Zanghua* (*Daiyu Buried Flowers*) created by Mei, was the first *jingju* play which takes its material from the renowned novel *Honglou Meng* (*A Dream of the Red Mansions*). Mei tried using realistic backdrop and stage properties in its third and

[3] Mei Lanfang. *Yibu Bu Huanxing* (*Changing the Forms Without Harming the Essences*). (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 2000), 72-73.

sixth scenes.[4] It was a play that found favor with the Shanghainese in the early 1920s when Mei was invited to perform it at Shanghai Tianchan Stage. However, it lost its market soon after, and the performance when revived today can only be based on several passed-down arias and compressed into a solo, because the entire script became lost as the play was out of fashion. The other three pieces, *Lian Jinfeng*[5], *Bawang Bieji* (*Farewell My Concubine*), and *Guifei Zuijiu* (*Guifei Intoxicated*), were, without exception, either created and revised throughout Mei's performance life or revived innovatively by his successors and followers in later decades.

This continual process of change is a phenomenon typical not only of Mei's plays, but also of *jingju* traditional repertoire as a whole: it seems, on the one hand, that "there is a powerful impetus to construe *jingju* [Peking Opera] as wholly traditionally and purely Chinese";[6] on the other hand, *jingju*'s constant changes throughout its history formulated an apparent instability of this distinguished genre as of any art form. Actually, Goldstein sees *jingju* history over the period 1870 to 1937 in terms of "colonial modernity," which "highlights how the context of colonial domination compelled the reorganization of institutions, technologies, and practices so as to address and negotiate its threat, resulting in a translation of colonized societies' production and reproduction processes into frameworks interpellated by the dominant powers (in China's case both Western and Japanese)."[7] Thus he adopts the Anglicized term "Peking Opera" to describe the genre, on the grounds that it "bears the traces of colonial modernity, a context of great

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[4] *Ibid.*, 67-70.
[5] Lian Jinfeng is the name of the female protagonist in the play.
[6] Joshua Goldstein. *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 3.
[7] *Ibid.*, 5.

importance in shaping the genre's identity."[8] By introducing a series of new terms such as "hybrid drama" for new types of Peking Opera coming out during the time—*wenming xinxi* (civilized new Peking Opera), *shizhuang xinxi*, *guzhuang xinxi* (new Peking Opera with ancient costumes), and *gailiang xinxi* (reformed Peking Opera), he depicts "the stylistic experimentation [that] swept the Peking Opera stage," as mainly "politically inspired,"[9] and sees most reforming attempts as crises which might "have led to Peking opera's decline."[10] Perhaps these "politically inspired" plays were mostly failures during the early twentieth century and they might have become the early signs of *jungju*'s decline; however, they were still produced largely driven by the artists' and intellectuals' self-motivation.

Different from the rising and continuing nationalism and patriotism during the political entanglements in the context of "colonial modernity," which played a significant role in the creation of *shizhuang xinxi*, politics has had more and, to some extent, exclusive impact on *jingju* since 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party established the People's Republic of China, because the CCP's utilitarian use of *jingju* as political propaganda was indeed unprecedented.[11] The drama reform experiences that the CCP had gained during the Anti-Japanese war and the subsequent civil war set a foundation for the Communist regime's arbitrary directives and initiatives towards *jingju*. As Mao's rhetoric emphasized that art and politics were inseparable and that art should serve political propaganda, the reform of *jinjgu* became a part of this so-called New-democratic

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[8] *Ibid.*, 3.
[9] *Ibid.*, 89-90.
[10] *Ibid.*, 235.
[11] Tung, Constantine, and Colin Mackerras, eds. *Drama in the People's Republic of China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 1.

Revolution to assist the CCP in the establishment of its central power and credibility. Pariticularly during 1949-1957, the Chinese Ministry of Culture set up a series of reform measures to revise the old plays, to regulate theatre activities, and to administer the professionals, so as to make them adjust to a changed social and ideological discourse. A top-down reform "machine" was put together to ensure its success.

This chapter focuses on the analysis of censoring and banning the old *jingju* repertoire during the 1950s, after Mao and the CCP established the PRC. As *jingju* had been deliberately chosen as a significant medium of propaganda,[12] the CCP implemented the three-pronged reform of *jingju* repertoire, artists and organization throughout China, roughly in line with Mao's 1942 Talks. By analyzing Mei Lanfang's revisions on his own classical piece *Guifei Intoxicated,* along with solutions arrived at by some other artists engaged in the reform, this chapter investigates the motifs of the CCP's censorship on *jingju*, and the direct and far-reaching consequences it brought about to *jingju*'s survival.

Banning Jingju Traditional Repertoire and the Lifting of Banning Notices

When referring to the CCP's initial actions in the drama reforms after they seized power, Mackerras mentions briefly in his work that "many plays were either banned or effectively driven from the stage by criticism in the press."[13] Yang also points out about the CCP's banning of plays as early as in 1962 that "these partial changes and revisions are rather mild when compared with some of the more severe measures adopted by the

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[12] For instance, the CCP's demand that drama serve politics was put in practice during the Sino-Japanese war (1937-1945) when numerous new *jingju* plays with contemporary themes were created to stress the army-people relationship, self-defense against the enemy, prevention of sabotage, and fighting behind enemy lines.

[13] Colin Mackerras. *The Chinese Theatre in Modern Times: From 1840 to the Present Day*. (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1975), 166.

reformers. Probably the severest step was the banning of some of the operas."[14] Obviously, the outright banning of old traditions and values from the previous times is always one of the most effective ways to declare the birth of a new regime, to claim the hegemonic control, and to testify to its power. However, I argue that the CCP's two official banning actions of the *jingju* traditional plays in 1949 and 1950 were, in the first place, rather superficial than effective. Moreover, given China's vast geographical territory and the vaguely explained banning policies by the central reform Bureau, the overall banning was swiftly made into a random banning in the local areas which caused a standstill of *jingju* performance in the mid 1950s. Since it was not only a matter of confusion caused by the wording of the decree, but also an outright disagreement about what to do within the government, later came a change in the official policy and ultimately the lifting of the whole ban due to the immediate consequence brought about by the outright banning—a shortage of performable plays.[15]

The Release of the First Official Banning Notice and Aftermath

Obviously, *jingju* has never been free from banning and oppression since its inception. *Jingju* belonged to the category of *huabu* tunes[16], which were generally rejected by the Qing Court. The official banning policy categorized *pihuang* (the tune of *jingju*), *bangzi*, *xiansuo*, *qinqiang*, etc. as vulgar and low entertainments, which offended

[14] Yang, Richard F. S. "The Reform of Peking Opera under the Communists" *The China Quarterly*. Vol. 11, no. 1, 1962: 134.
[15] The shortage of performable plays in the mid 1950s is mentioned in numerous works, articles, and documents, such as Fu Jin's *Xinzhongguo Xiju Shi: 1949-2000* (*A History of Chinese Drama: 1949-2000*). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002, and Siyuan Liu's "Theatre Reform as Censorship: Censoring Traditional Theatre in China in the Early 1950s," *Asian Theatre Journal* 61 (2009), 387-406.
[16] Tunes were categories into *huabu* and *yabu* during the mid Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). *Yabu*, which included *kunqu*, was considered as orthodox music and tunes of the court and the elite, while *huabu*, composed of tunes such as *jingju*, *yiqiang* and *luantan*, was considered as a vulgar art.

the public's sense of decency and corrupted the public morals. Thus, the performance of *pihuang* together with other *huabu* tunes was specifically banned during 1795-1805.[17] Later, because of its popularity, *jingju* gradually found favor with the imperial family. *Shenpingshu* (an organization in charge of the performance activities in the court) in the late Qing Dynasty began to train eunuchs to perform *jingju* for the court entertainment; since then *jingju* troupes and actors were summoned frequently by the emperor to the royal theatre for performance. Although *jingju* was favored by the ruler, it was not freed from banning because of various issues having to do with racial discrimination and the social hierarchy. For example, because *jingju* was basically considered a low entertainment for the common people, with its "vulgar" content, obscene lyrics, decadent songs, lascivious dances, lewd expressions, etc., which constitute a severe offence against decency, Manchu emperors strictly banned the royal family and its descendents from performing *jingju*, and the *jingju* performances were not allowed in the *neicheng*[18] unless they were summoned by the emperor.

During the Republic era (1911-1949), the government of Beiping (another name for Beijing) published a series of policies to regulate plays and performances. The official policies prescribed that such plays as the following should be banned:

> First, those which harm the state system and the diplomatic relations; second, those which harm the state policies and the domestic social order; third, those which popularize superstitions; fourth, those which offend the public sense of decency and corrupt the public morals; fifth, those which propagandize obscenities; sixth, those which employ inappropriate

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[17] Beijingshi yishu yanjiusuo and Shanghai yishu yanjiusuo, editorial committee. *Zhongguo Jingju Shi* (*A History of Chinese Jingju*), 4 vols. (Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1999), Vol. 1, 72.

[18] Beijing was divided as *neicheng* (a district that surrounded the imperial palace—a region inhabited by the royal families, officials, and elite, etc.) and *waicheng* (outside region inhabited by the common people) geographically.

> techniques and skills; seventh, those with inappropriate performance conventions which create uncomfortable feelings among the audiences.[19]

Surprisingly, except for the change of certain terms so as to adapt to the Communist ideology, the CCP's criteria for banning plays and performances were similar in fashion to those of the previous eras, i.e., those plays or performances which contained superstitions and obscenities, offended a sense of decency, corrupted the public morals, or created uncomfortable feelings among audiences should be banned.

The CCP's first official banning notice was released two months after Beiping was liberated on March 25, 1949. The Culture Transfer Committee of the Military Control Commission of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (*zhongguo renmin jiefangju beiping junshi guanzhi weiyuanhui wenhua jieguan weiyunhui*) published a notice in the *Beiping New People Newspaper* (*beiping xinmin bao*), in which fifty-five traditional *jingju* plays were to be banned.[20] These *jingju* titles were categorized according to the formulated criteria that can be seen in Appendix A.

For the CCP, the symbolic meaning of this banning notice, I would argue, was much more important than its practical implementation at the time when the Liberation Army took over Beiping. In fact, in the first few years after Liberation, the country was in an anarchic situation after decades of civil war (roughly from 1927 to 1949), and the state apparatuses and the various regional governments were still under construction. This anarchic situation, partially, led to a deviation in the implementation of the governmental policies in the local regions due to the lack of supervising organs or institutions.

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[19] Geng Zhang, ed., *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama· Beijing Volume*. (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1999), 1312-1313.
[20] *Ibid.*, 1313-1314.

Furthermore, the Party members and those reformers who had the ultra-leftist inclination interpreted the official policies in their own way. Many local and regional reformers were completely unaware of the detailed banning criteria. Due to their ignorance and either willful or unintentional misinterpretation of Mao and the state policies, banning the traditional plays at random became the general practice all over the country despite the explicit statement against this by the CCP.[21]

The most representative case of this random banning took place in Northeastern China.[22] After the release of the first banning notice, the First Conference of Literature and Art Representatives from Northeastern Area was held in December 1949. At this conference, a slogan was proposed by the conferences attendees to "extinguish the poisonous old drama in two or three years!"[23] As a result, traditional plays in Jinzhou City were banned in batches by the local reformers. In Tonghua County, only six plays were allowed to be performed. In the whole Northeastern area, more than 140 *jingju* and *pingju* traditional plays were banned. A similar banning also happened in other areas. For example, in Xuzhou, there were more than 200 plays banned. In Shanxi Province, originally, there were 300 plays; after the banning, only 30 were left. In Hangu County, only 10 *jingju* plays were allowed to be performed. In Linan County, the local reform organ prescribed that all the traditional plays be banned and only those new scripts published on the *Xiqu Newspaper* (*xiqu bao*) be performed.[24]

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[21] Zhu Yinghui. *Dangdai Xiqu Sishi Nian* (*A Forty-year History of Contemporary Xiqu*). (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1993), 112.
[22] *Ibid.*, 112.
[23] *Ibid.*, 112.
[24] *Ibid.*, 112.

According to Zhu's description, as a result of this random banning in the local and regional areas, the number of the traditional plays banned seriously exceeded the number required in the official banning notice. Because almost all the traditional plays were banned in these regions, theatres were closed, actors lost their jobs, and the audiences had no performances to enjoy. For example, in Sheng County, more than 3000 actors lost their jobs. In some other places, the reformers just rushed into the theatre and cut off the show on the stage before the audience. Zhu recorded one violent clash between the reformers and the audience that occurred in Dezhou. Because the local reformer ordered the actors to stop their performance, he was attacked by the furious audience.[25] The reformers' arbitrary and rough attitude towards the traditional plays resulted in clashes between the audience and the local government, and the theatre market slumped. This rough attitude towards the traditional *jingju* plays was well recorded by some of the reformers. One reformer wrote the following in his autobiography:

> There was a time…I held the view that the old drama was an art form of the feudal regime. It contained so many poisonous elements. What was the use of these pieces of trash? They must be all extinguished, and new drama should be created…as for those performance conventions and actors' techniques and martial skills, I never understood them. There were actors "fighting" [presenting martial skills by fighting in their performance] on the stage, I thought they just wanted to make troubles. And as for all those conventionalized dances and movements, I thought they were ridiculous because no one would do that in our daily life. So, I said that all these conventions and regulations in the old performance troupes should be banned completely…at one conference, I submitted a proposal for the plays to be banned. According to the record, first we banned 34, and then we banned 28 more, and then another 3. That's 66 in total, including *Xixiang Ji* (*Romance of the West Chamber*) and *Tianhe Pei* (*The Romance of the Milky Way*).[26]

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[25] *Ibid.*,112.

[26] *Ibid.*, 112. It was originally published with the title "A Self-Criticism on the Mistakes I Have Made in the Play Reform Work" by Dan Fu in *New Drama* (*xin xiqu*), vol. 2, no. 2, 1951.

This play reformer's self-criticism showed that many local reformers had no knowledge of *jingju* and its expertise at all. They simply adopted an administrative and arbitrary approach to regulation of theatre performances and activities, which resulted in the random and excessive banning all over the country. It not only caused a shortage of performable plays, but also many actors did not know how to make a living since they all lost their jobs.

The Release of the Second Official Banning Notice, the "5· 5 Directive", and Aftermath

The chaos caused by random and excessive banning in local reform practice immediately drew attention from the upper-level government. The committee in charge had to hold a conference in May 1950 to reassess the original fifty-five banned plays in order to update its criteria. At this conference, the central reform Bureau revised the criteria for the banning of plays so that only those plays which contained superstition, horrifying things, racial discrimination, national capitulationism, obscenities, rape and murder, and demonization of the working people should be banned. Although the committee seemed to be reiterating the same criteria as before, in the following July, at another conference, the committee in charge decided to reduce the original fifty-five banned plays to twelve only.[27]

[27] Fu Jin. *Xinzhongguo Xiju Shi: 1949-2000* (*A History of Chinese Drama: 1949-2000*). (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002), 10. And the newly banned titles are *Shazi Bao* (*Murder the Son*), *Jiujing Tian* (*The Day of Nine Watches*), *Huayou Shan* (*Huayou Mountain*), *Qiyuan Bao* (*The Wrong is Righted*), *Haihui Si* (*The Haihui Temple*), *Shuangding Ji* (*The Story of the Double-nail*), *Tan Yinshan* (*Visit the Nether Land*), *Daxiang Shan* (*Daxiang Mountain*), *Guangong Xiansheng* (*The God Guan Appears*), *Shuangsha He* (*The Double-sand River*), *Tie Gongji* (*Iron Cock*), and *Huozhuo Sanlang* (*Capture Sanlang Alive*).

The new banning notice was issued by the central Bureau immediately after the conference. They hoped that by reducing the number of banned plays in the state banning notice, they could solve the problem of random and excessive banning in the local regions. To make sure that the ideas of the higher leadership could be well understood by the grass-roots units, after the release of this new banning list of twelve *jingju* plays, the central Bureau sent another note to the governments of thirty-eight big and middle-sized cities, literary and art bureaus, as well as the art divisions of the military commissions. This note further clarified the new banning criteria, explicitly pointing out that banning *jingju* plays recklessly and randomly should not be allowed. However, the new banning notice with fewer plays banned did not solve the over-banning problem in the local regions. As Tian Han[28] described in his report, the ultra-leftist practice was running wild in the local areas, while these banning actions aroused strong opposition and intense resistance from the audiences.[29] For instance, there were riots at the local theatre due to the confrontations between the reformers and the theatergoers. Under this circumstance, the "5· 5 Directive" issued by the State Council, which functioned as a state law, cited a special article to stop the over-banning in the local areas:

> [Reform work] should not simply be based on the administrative decrees or mere banning methods. Even with those plays which must be banned, [we need to] wait until a full and careful assessment of them has been

[28] Tian Han (1898-1968) was one of the founders of the Chinese spoken drama (*huajua*). His most famous legacy probably was the lyrics he wrote for *March of the Volunteers* in 1934, the national anthem for the People's Republic of China.

[29] Tian Han. "Making Efforts to Create New Patriotic Plays for the Masses." *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*). January 21, 1951. Zhang Geng, ed., *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama· Beijing Volume*, (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1999), 1320.

> made by the central Bureau. The various organs in different regions should not ban plays recklessly and randomly.[30]

However, since the reform of the *jingju* plays was a national movement, ranging from the eastern flourishing industrial and commercial cities to the western remote areas, and from the northern "folk arts hometowns" to the southern "fishing villages," the local reformers still banned plays and performances at will, and the random banning was actually out of control even after the issuance of the government "5· 5 Directive."[31] For example, the central government pointed out repeatedly that the *jingju* play *Baishe Zhuan* (*The Legend of the White Snake*) was a mythological play and should not be banned. However, when it was performed at the Dragon Boat Festival in Xuancheng County in Anhui Province, the local government banned the performance because it regarded the play as propagandizing superstition because of the appearance of snake images on the stage. Paying no attention to the governmental "5· 5 Directive," some reformers in the Central China area still pushed ahead with the idea that "all the traditional plays should be banned without consultation."[32] In this situation of random banning, some famous *jingju* artists began to self-ban their own performances. For example, famous *jingju dan* actresses Wu Suqiu (1922-) and Tong Zhiling (1922-1995) self-banned their performances of *Fang Mianhua* (*Spin and Weave the Cotton*), and *jingju laosheng* actor

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[30] Zhou Enlai. "The Directive on Traditional Drama Reform Work." *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*). May, 7, 1951. Zhang Geng, ed., *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama· Beijing Volume*, (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1999), 1328.

[31] Ma Yanxiang. "The Problems in the Traditional Drama Reform Work in 1951." *Renmin Xiju* (*People's Drama*), vol. 3, no. 8, 1951. Zhang Geng, ed., *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama· Beijing Volume*, (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1999), 1341.

[32] *Ibid.*, 1341.

Li Shaochun (1919-1975) and *jing* actor Yuan Shihai (1916-2002) self-banned their representative play *Lianhuan Tao* (*The Chained Strategy*).[33]

The Lifting of All Banning Notices and the Revival of the Banned Plays

Since the banning was still running wild and completely out of control, another editorial article was published in *People's Daily*, which severely criticized the local reformers for their reckless reform activities.[34] In a way, this severe criticism of the deviations in the implementation of the Central Government's policies revealed that, at a time when the "new *jingju* plays with contemporary themes" were not yet the focus of the reform work and the newly created plays had little influence in the market and among the audience, the traditional *jingju* plays were still the only form enjoyed by most of the audience. *Jingju* traditional plays were still extremely popular and were the means of survival for most *jingju* players. The most direct and serious consequence of the excessive banning in the local regions by the reformers that the CCP had to accept was unemployment because most of the *jingju* performers lost their jobs. The State Council spent five million RMB in relief funds to help these *jingju* players, and simultaneously the government altered the rhetoric in its policies and began to consider adopting an "open policy" towards *jingju* traditional plays.[35]

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[33] *Ibid.*, 1338.
[34] Editorial article "Treating Correctly With the Country's Xiqu Heritage," *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*). November 16, 1952. Zhang Geng, ed., *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama· Beijing Volume*, (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1999), 1365-1367.
[35] Editorial article " The Department of Culture's Directive about Helping With the Professional Performances Troupes and Artists," *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*). October 2, 1956. Zhang Geng, ed., *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama· Beijing Volume*, (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1999), 1415-1421. And editorial article "Improving Artists' Living and Working Condition," *Renmin Ribao*

After several years' chaos in the local regions, which resulted in the collapse of the *jingju* market, two conferences on the traditional drama, with a focus on the plays and scripts, were held to assess the gains and losses of the reform work. At the conference, the ultra-leftist practices by the reformers were criticized. Interestingly, the CCP also pointed out that they could not solve all the existing problems simply by banning or oppression. For example, the CCP noticed that even when certain plays were under a ban, such as *Shazi Bao* (*Murdering One's Son*), they were still performed if the players wanted to, because they simply changed the titles of the plays without changing the rest—the same old stuff with a different label. So banning could by no means solve each and every problem in practice.[36]

Based on the discussion and consensus reached at the conference, the editorial article of *People's Daily* on April 27, 1957 used a very conspicuous headline to indicate clearly the government's attitude: "Free our hands and open all plays." Immediately, on May 17, 1957, the Ministry of Culture issued a policy to lift all its previous banning notices:

> The reform Bureau banned twenty-six[37] in total from 1950 to 1952 successively. We had reasons to ban these plays, and basically it was necessary and correct. However, we did not explain and analyze explicitly the reasons for the banning of these plays; hence, deviations and misunderstandings occurred in the process of implementation of our banning policies. And this severely hindered the development of traditional drama…We have made the decision to open all plays to all, and this policy has achieved good results. In order to further promote the

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(*People's Daily*). October 19, 1956. Zhang Geng, ed., *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama· Beijing Volume*, (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1999), 1421-1424.

[36] Liu Zhiming. "We Should Be Brave to Open All the Traditional Plays—A Concluding Speech at the Second Xiqu Plays Work Conference," *Xiju Bao* (*Theatre Newspaper*). Issue 9, 1957. Zhang Geng, ed., *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama· Beijing Volume*. (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1999), 1430.

[37] Banned *jingju* plays were seventeen. Twenty-six included other types of traditional drama.

> development and prosperity of the arts, the Ministry of Culture now decides to lift previous banning notices. Besides the two plays *Wupen Ji* (*A Burned Pot*) and *Tan Yinshan* (*Visit the Nether World*), the banning of which was already lifted on October 5, 1956 and May 10, 1957 respectively, all other plays banned before are now allowed to be performed. All the plays……whether they should be performed, or how they should be performed, should be completely decided by the artists themselves according to the specific situation in their respective regions.[38]

This statement seemingly declared the actors' victory. A series of plays on the official banning list, such as *Tie Gongji* (*Iron Cock*), and *Tan Yinshan* (*Visit the Nether Land*), were performed again immediately by the local *jingju* troupes.[39]

To this point, on the one hand, we might say that most *jingju* traditional plays in the 1950s remained untouched though they were taken through a series of banning policies and a further random banning, because except for a brief standstill of the performance market in the mid 1950s, most performers' plays were well preserved. Once the ban was lifted, the performers could start to perform these plays again.

Additionally, in a relatively closed society during the 1950s, *jingju*, along with many other traditional *xiqu* forms, to a large extent, were the main entertainments for most Chinese people despite their diverse social background and class. *Jingju* was not only extremely popular in the big cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and Hankou, but also one of the primary recreational activities for peasants and farmers who lived in the vast rural areas. It is worth noting that since *jingju* was a popular art rooted in the

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[38] "The Notice to Open All 'Banned Plays' by the Ministry of Culture," May 17, 1957. Zhang Geng, ed., *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama· Beijing Volume*, (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1999), 1439.

[39] "A Report about Performing 'banned plays' and the Audience Reception by the Jilin Bureau of Culture," August 26, 1957. Zhang Geng, ed., *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama· Jilin Volume*, (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1993), 640.

grassroots masses, even the outright banning could barely shake its leading position in the entertainment industry.

On the other hand, we should consider the ramifications of the CCP's banning in the long run. Though its main criteria were similar to those formulated in the previous regimes, it engaged in an evident ideological change roughly in line with Mao's 1942 Talks, a more extensive banning by regional reformers, and inspired a series of self-banning actions. For instance, taking a look at all the plays on the CCP's banning list, we can see that only a few titles are still in performance on the contemporary stage, and apparently after a few decades' gap they are already quite different from how they were performed before 1949. Xiao Cuihua (1900-1967) is a typical example. Though he revived his performance instantly after the ban was rescinded, his performance style was hardly inherited. One of the *hangdang* (types of role)—*cisha dan*—that he represented almost disappeared from *jingju,* and all techniques related to this particular role type were nearly lost.[40]

I contend that the CCP's banning, though largely symbolic at the time, altered *jingju* drastically in at least two aspects in the long run. Firstly, *jingju* gradually became a gender-balanced art instead of a genre mainly enabling men to perform a broad range of images of femininity; *nandan* (female impersonators) declined and gradually faded out from the stage. Secondly, because of the banning, certain types of role and their related plays and performance skills and techniques barely survived.

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[40] Siyuan Liu has talked briefly about Xiao Cuihua's case in his paper "Theatre Reform as Censorship: Censoring Traditional Theatre in China in the Early 1950s," *Asian Theatre Journal*. No. 61 (2009), 387-406.

The Decline of Nandan and Certain Female Role Types

I have mentioned previously that *jingju*, which was considered a vulgar and low entertainment, had been subject to banning since its inception. Among these banning criteria, the most common was with regard to representing obscenities in performance. This was largely due to the gender politics within the late Qing society when women were absent from the theatre and prostitution was strictly forbidden in public. Goldstein points out that the Republican Peking Opera is where "male actors found new agency and mobility in the space opened up by the disjunction between representation and reality, for actresses to assert such a distinction seems to have been all but impossible."[41] Here he pays attention as well to the appearance of a *jingju* in its context of "colonial modernity" in that the male dominated all types of role on the stage. Actually, if we take a look at the whole theatre history, we might not be surprised that during times when women were allowed to perform in public, the chances of men performing women were quite slim. On the contrary, when females were excluded from the theatre, *nandan* simultaneously showed up and rapidly became prosperous.[42]

Evidently, the originality, prosperity and popularity of *jingju* could all be traced back to the Qing Court's banning of public prostitution and female acting, which to some extent had facilitated turning the tea-house theatre into a disguised venue for whoring.[43] Hinsch points out that, "inequality of wealth allows members of one class to purchase the

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[41] Joshua Goldstein. "The Gendering of National Culture, Or, The Only Good Woman Is a Man," *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 238.

[42] Another factor contributed to the prosperity and popularity of *nandan* is the homosexual tradition in historic China, which has long been existent and toleratable but ignored and avoided on purpose. I will discuss homosexuality briefly in this section.

[43] Xu Chengbei. *Jingju and Chinese Culture*. (Beijing: Zhongguo jianzhu gongye chubanshe, 1999), 45.

sexual services of another." And "prostitution exemplifies class-structured homosexuality."[44] As "the acting profession was inextricably linked to homosexual prostititution,"[45] the theatre patrons sought for their sexual roles actors, who were also referred to as *xianggong* (young men, which involved sexual connotations) and was quite prevalent in the Qing theatres. In Xu's exploration of the relationship between *jingju* and Chinese culture, he desctibes how actors normally assumed two professions: on the stage they were performers, while off the stage they became male escorts and gigolos. For instance, one of the old *jingju* performance customs in late Qing was called *zhan tiaozi*. It was a kind of exhibition of all actors dressed up in their costumes on the stage before the entire performance started. The customers—theatergoers—would make frivolous or lascivious remarks about the appearance of each of them. And the actors' "lotus feet," the common performance skill adopted extensively by *nandan* to show femininity, were intended to be associated by the audiences with real women's small and soft feet. Out-calls were quite popular as well; thus at the time, a *nandan*'s performance was often placed in the last piece but one before the ending *wuxi* (a performance mainly featuring fighting and acrobatics). When the *wuxi* was about to finish, the actor in the previous performance had already removed his stage makeup and costume, and probably engaged in some sexual services at the patron's residence or the customer's hotel room.[46]

What is more, before female audiences were allowed in the public theatre, there were a large number of plays involving obscene lyrics, songs, gestures, and performances in order to attract and entertain the male audiences; even when the female audiences

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[44] Bret Hinsch. *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 12.
[45] *Ibid.*, 154.
[46] Xu Chengbei. *Jingju and Chinese Culture*. (Beijing: Zhongguo jianzhu gongye chubanshe, 1999), 45-46.

started to appear in the public theatre and became regular, these obscene performances remained popular and would normally begin in the depth of night after women and children had left the theatre. For instance, all these thirteen *jingju* titles on the CCP's original banning list—*Hongniang* (*The Crimson*), *Hudie Meng* (*The Butterfly's Dream*), *Haihui Si* (*The Haihui Temple*), *Shuangling Ji* (*The Story of the Double-bell*), *Shuangding Ji* (*The Story of the Double-nail*), *Yeshi Zhai* (*The Yeshi Studio*), *Cuichun Jijian* (*Cuichun Sends A Note*), *Guifei Zuijiu* (*Guifei Intoxicated*), *Shazi Bao* (*Murder the Son*), *Yanzhi Pan* (*The Judicial Precedent of Rouge*), *Pansi Dong* (*Pansi Cave*), *Shuangyao Hui* (*Compete for the Husband*), *Guanwang Miao Ji Piaoyuan* (*The Temple of Guanyu and the Brothel*)—without exception contained obscenities. Besides three of them—*The Crimson*, *Pansi Cave*, and *Guifei Intoxicated*—which were revived after certain revisions and are still performed, all the other eleven titles have become quite unfamiliar to contemporary audiences. The scripts and most importantly, the performance skills related to them, were practically lost.

I once asked Liu Zengfu (1914-2012), *jingju* researcher, critic, and a *piaoyou* (amateur) himself, about how these obscenities were represented on stage, and to what extent they could be judged as decadent. He gave me an example. As we know, actors on the *jingju* stage may use a kind of simplified bed-curtain to suggest a specific environment or place, e.g. in the bedroom, or on the bed. After finishing up all their performances and songs on the front stage, the two actors (normally in a scene representing adultery—one performing the married woman, and the other performing the sexual companion who is other than her spouse) would go behind the bed-curtain. With their making of all kinds of sounds along with the musical accompaniment, it soon

became an extended sexual intercourse scene in the audience's imagination. When the music reached its high pitch—which substantially suggested a climax in the sexual intercourse—, the actors behind the bed-curtain would start throwing and tossing out broken eggs, with the egg white all over the stage to fake the ejaculation. Meanwhile, the audiences turned into a mess: shouting, screaming, whistling, spitting, or even masturbating. Essentially, this was why *jingju* actors were generally regarded as a low occupation, and paradoxically, why celebrities such as Mei Lanfang and Cheng Yanqiu[47] strongly resented the theatrical environment and initiated a series of innovations in their own performances to guard actors' sanctity and enhance their social position.[48]

As Mackerras points out exactly the fact that "the most important social message throughout the twentieth century was the need to improve the treatment of woman and raise their status within society,"[49] Mei had already severely condemned the evils of prostitution in his 1914 performance *Niehai Bolan* (*Waves of the Sea of Sin*). After the CCP came to power, it emphasized equality for females in its revolutionary agenda and strived for a stage clearance project so as to get rid of obscene elements, imperial ideologies, and the so-called backward customs. The banning effectively terminated the performances containing "unhealthy" elements, particularly those associated with obscenities. Though *nandan* did not fade out of the stage completely until the late 1960s, actresses performing female roles became a cardinal principle due to the CCP's campaign

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[47] Cheng Yanqiu (1904-1958), one of the Four Great Female Impersonators, the creator of Cheng School.
[48] Both Mei and Cheng are the pioneers in terms of interacting with western theatre, Mei introduced *jingju* onto the world stage during his performance trips to Japan, the United States, and the Soviet Union, while Cheng adored European theatre and wrote a report to recount his experiencing of the theatres in the west after his one and two months' traveling in Moscow, Paris, Nice, Berlin, Geneva, etc. As a result of these experiences, he was striving for an innovated Chinese theatre.
[49] Colin Mackerras. "Tradition, Change, and Continuity in Chinese Theatre in the Last Hundred Years: In Commemoration of the Spoken Drama Centenary." *Asian Theatre Journal*, Vol.25.No.1 (Spring 2008), 7.

for a socialist realism originated from the Soviet Union, in which women were not only given prominent roles but also should be performing these roles by themselves. Obviously, on the one hand, with the rise of women performing the female characters in the play, new plays and performance styles were emerging; however, on the other hand, the art of *nandan* declined, with certain types of role and their related performance skills and techniques extinguished.

In the category of female impersonation—*dan*, there are four general subtypes: *qingyi* (virtuous and elite women), *huadan* (vivacious women), *wudan* (martial women), and *laodan* (old women). In a particular play, the role might become further specified. For example, the main female role Mu Guiying in *Muke Zhai* can only be cast by a *daoma dan* (a special type of martial women) rather than a *wudan* though she is a martial woman, because she needs to wear a *kao* (a kind of armor with military flags on its back) throughout the performance. There is also a *cisha dan* (bayonet fighting) akin to *wudan*, and a *pola dan* (rude and shrewish) akin to *huadan*. The CCP's banning list included many titles involving the representation of these subtype roles, as it eliminated scenes of murdering and killing such as those in *Shazi Bao* (*Murdering One's Son*). With the banning of these performances containing obscenities, rape and murder etc., role types like *pola dan* declined, and *cisha dan* almost disappeared.

Even when the same role type was maintained, its performance was already quite different from what it was on the pre-1949 stage. For example, in one of Chen Yongling's (1929-2006) representative plays *Zhan Wancheng* (*Attacking and Occupying Wan City*), he needs to portray Zoushi—a married woman yearning for a man in her bedroom. In the traditional performance, there would emerge two small stage

properties—two mice. When Zoushi notices that the two mice are engaged in sexual intercourse, she begins to sing obscene lyrics and pose with different gestures to suggest her longing for a man and the desire for sexual activities. Since these songs and movements were considered a severe offence against decency, later actresses, such as Song Danju (1942-), completely turned it into a scene of catching butterflies.[50] Evidently, it was firstly due to Mao's teaching, that both the original theme and the performance style were not suited to a contemporary audience, which consisted mainly of workers, peasants, and soldiers, and secondly, the fact that Zoushi was performed by a female actor as it has been ever since.

In sum, we can see that though banning was rather symbolic during the 1950s, its consequence was not only limited to these few explicitly banned titles. It caused the loss of certain types of plays and their related performance skills. It was also inevitably linked to the decline of *nandan*, as the "cleaning-up the stage" project was undertaken during which (homosexual) prostiutition was severely condemned. Performing "healthily" was a new principle exercised by the banning and accepted through common practice ever since by the performers themselves. Later, even those plays which were not on the CCP's

[50] After Mei Lanfang (1894-1961), Shang Xiaoyun (1900-1976), Cheng Yanqiu (1904-1958), and Xun Huisheng (1900-1968) were voted as Four Great Dan in 1927, the *Liyan Bao* (*Liyan Newspaper*) organized another public voting for the "Minor" Great Dan in 1936. The selected four "minor" Great Dan were: Li Shifang (1921-1947), Mao Shilai (1921-1994), Zhang Junqiu (1920-1997), and Song Dezhu (1018-1984). Besides Li turned out to be one of the best successors of Mei (Lanfang) school, both Zhang and Song developed and established their own performance styles—Zhang (Junqiu) School and Song (Dezhu) School. Song Danju (1942-) is Song Dezhu's daughter and a successor of Song School. While I was pursuing my M.A. in Theatre Studies at the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts in Beijing, Song Danju herself served as my acting teacher, who has taught me to perform a couple of representative *dan* plays as part of my M.A. curriculum, such as *Bawang Bieji* (*The Hegemon-King Bids Farewell to His Concubine*). She also showed me videos of a series of her performances at her home, told me stories and anecdotes about the ancestral artists and her own performance experiences. She showed me her own performance video of *Zhan Wancheng* (*Attacking and Occupying Wan City*), and explained to me why she changed it into a scene of catching butterflies.

original banning list, but somehow similar to those themes or contents, were without exception revised during their performances, such as *Yutangchun*—the story of the wronged courtesan Su San—one of the most popular plays performed by all the four most famous *dan*: Mei Lanfang, Cheng Yanqiu, Shang Xiaoyun (1900-1976) and Xun Huisheng (1900-1968), in which four distinct performance styles were developed in portraying the same role. Nevertheless, since the CCP's banning, a male dominated *jingju* got ready to step down from the stage of history and *jingju* performance entered a path that it had barely encountered before—reflecting the revolution and class struggle, and making way for the more realistic representation of women by actresses.

Censoring and Revising the Jingju Traditional Plays

During the 1950s, besides the outright banning, a series of policies were formulated and measures carried out under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture to reform the *jingju* classical plays and regulate their performance in terms of what should be performed, what should be revised for performance, what should be completely gotten rid of, and what kinds of new plays should be created. Liu argues, "while the measure appears less harsh than outright proscription, its [censoring] effect was greater because it placed the burden on *xiqu* plays to either pass an examination before being allowed performance or else to undertake a successful revision."[51] However, before we can assess the weight of this "burden," we should carefully examine the actual process of policy-making and its implementation: Who constituted the body of censors? Who were the

[51] Siyuan Liu. "Theatre Reform as Censorship: Censoring Traditional Theatre in China in the Early 1950s," *Asian Theatre Journal*. No. 61 (2009), 394.

executors of the policies? How were these policies formulated, by whom and in what way? What were the detailed play reform policies about? What was the general consensus and were there opposing opinions? What were the differences between the CCP's censoring of the plays and that of previous eras? Was *jingju* under a "radical" reform and altered "drastically" as Yang argues,[52] or is Mackerras correct when he states that, "the stage conventions and plots of the classical theatre were not radically changed"?[53] We might need to start with Mao's thought on literature and art, which was the basic impetus and stimulus for the *jingju* play reform.

The Ideological Basis for Censoring the Traditional Jingju Plays

Yang pointed out that *jingju* reform took place under Mao Zedong's call "let a hundred flowers bloom," and "to push out the old and produce the new."[54] Indeed, Mao's view on literature and art is the sole theoretical and ideological basis for the *jingju* play reform in that it was a time when all contemporary Chinese standards were based on Mao's thought. His view was outlined in 1942 when he gave his "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art."

> All culture, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. There is in fact no such a thing as art for art's sake, art that stands above classes or art that is detached from or independent of politics. Proletarian literature and art are part of the whole proletarian revolutionary cause; they are, as Lenin said, cogs and wheels in the whole revolutionary machine. Therefore, the Party's work in literature and art occupies a definite and assigned position in the Party's

[52] Yang, Richard F. S. "The Reform of Peking Opera under the Communists" *The China Quarterly*. Vol. 11, no. 1, 1962: 126.
[53] Colin Mackerras *The Chinese Theatre in Moden Times: From 1840 to the Present Day*. (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1975), 167.
[54] Yang, Richard F. S. "The Reform of Peking Opera under the Communists" *The China Quarterly*. Vol. 11, no. 1, 1962: 126.

> revolutionary work as a whole and is subordinated to the revolutionary tasks set by the Party in a given revolutionary period.[55]

First of all, Mao adopts a materialist schema and positions art as part of the superstructure of society. Since art is affected by the economic infrastructure and can influence it in return, he contends that art can never be divorced from politics and that art should serve political propaganda. "Art for art's sake" is pure nonsense. Literature and art (e.g. *jingju*) must express the correct Party line on all political matters. Artists' responsibility is to ensure that their work benefits the broad masses of the people but not the bourgeoisie. However, this does not mean that Mao denies the aesthetic aspect of the art or puts art into an inferior position to politics. The most important message delivered in the talk is that art and politics are indivisible. That is, Mao would like to see those artistic works created that can achieve "the highest possible perfection," which is, in his opinion, "the unity of politics and art," because he recognizes that "works of art which lack artistic quality have no force, however progressive they are politically."[56] Thus, the ideal artistic form should be both "stimulating aesthetically and correct politically."[57] This became a doctrine to which the *jingju* reform must adhere.

Second, in terms of the attitude towards the cultural heritage of past regimes, Mao's thought is "to push out the old and produce the new." On the one hand, as Marx contends that "men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances

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[55] "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art," trans. Colin Mackerras. *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*. (Beijng: Foreign Languauges Press, 1965), vol. 3, 86.
[56] *Ibid.*, 90.
[57] Colin Mackerras, eds. *The Chinese Theatre in Modern Times: From 1840 to the Present Day*. (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1975), 165.

directly found, given and transmitted from the past,"[58] Mao admits that the new Proletarian culture must be established not only on contemporary cultural products but also on the cultural heritages created in the past. However, on the other hand, he insists that the Proletariat must adopt a critical attitude and inherit the culture of the past with discrimination. Although art as political propaganda carries much weight in Mao's thought, it does not mean that Mao considers the culture of the past to be bad. He writes:

> A splendid old culture was created in the long period of Chinese feudal society. To study the development of this old culture, to get rid of its feudal dross and to assimilate its democratic essence is a necessary condition for developing our new national culture and increasing our national self-confidence, but we should never swallow anything uncritically. It is imperative to separate the fine part of the old culture of the people which has some democratic or revolutionary elements from those of the culture which are full of decadence and evil of the old feudal ruling class.[59]

In this speech, Mao sets the tone for the work of censoring *jingju* plays, i.e., the reformers should not deny the merits of old plays and get rid of them all, but rather, try to differentiate the "good" from the "bad," so that "good" plays could still be preserved and performed. According to Mao's rhetoric, the old drama is a self-contradictory and complicated heritage, which consists of not only "democratic essence" but also "feudal dross." *Jingju* had its "democratic essence," because, although it was born in a feudal era, it was created and enjoyed by the masses of the people, and many *jingju* plays represented the virtues of the Chinese people, such as diligence, courage, wisdom, honesty and kindness. Certain plays reflected Chinese people's desires for freedom, happiness and social well-being. However, since *jingju* was sponsored by the Qing court

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[58] Karl Marx. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. (New York: International Publisher), N.D., 13.
[59] "On New Democracy," trans. Colin Mackerras. *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, vol. 2, 381.

and became gradually popular among the aristocrats and the elites, it became a tool for the court and the ruling class to ride roughshod over the masses of the people, according to the Communist doctrine. Hence, in the *jingju* reform, the CCP needed to "push out the old," abandoning those elements of "feudal dross," and "produce the new," creating new *jingju* plays by inheriting those elements of "democratic essence" and developing them, so that *jingju* could better suit the new socialist country and serve the working class.

Responding to Mao's thought on inheriting the culture from the past, an editorial article in *People's Daily* noted:

> ……there are plenty of plays; we should first of all collect and collate them in an orderly and methodical way. Many of these traditional plays were handed down and passed on by oral instruction. They were preserved in artists' minds and hearts—we should record these traditions and techniques, study them, and then learn how to make revisions and modifications. It is very significant to explore our heritage and legacy in our new drama reform and reconstruction work.[60]

This article defined the fundamental task for the reform work as preserving the old with modification; that is, in order to be able to revise these plays effectively and critically, reformers needed first to collect the traditional plays and learn them from the artists; and then, efforts should be made to decide which plays were reactionary and which were progressive so that the "unhealthy elements" could be removed and the "democratic essence" could be preserved and developed. Despite this essential contradiction between the nature of *jingju* and the Maoist standards for removing the "unhealthy" part, the work of reform was seemingly going on in an orderly way at the upper level. Reformers and artists were called together, and numerous conferences on

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[60] "To Reform Old Drama in a Planned Way," *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*). November 13, 1948. Zhang Geng, ed., *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama· Beijing Volume*, (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1999), 1322.

reform work were held to discuss the making of concrete policies for the reform. A reform "machine" was put together to ensure its success and the detailed composition of this "machine" can be viewed in the Appendix B.

Play Reform Organs and Censors

The reform organs consisted of not one but three types of institutions under the command of the Ministry of Culture: administrative, consultative, and research and experimental.

The Bureau of the Traditional Drama Reform (*xiqu gaijin ju*) founded in November 1949 was the administrative institution of the reform at the highest level. Tian Han was appointed as director of the Bureau, and the playwrights Yang Shaoxuan[61] and Ma Yanxiang[62] were associate directors. As the leading organ for the macro part of the reform, it aimed to ensure a good formulation of reform policies by undertaking research in the traditional plays, conducting investigation in box office revenues, drawing up the censoring criteria for the traditional plays, calling conferences and organizing committees to discuss the collection and revision of the traditional plays, etc.

The consultative organ for the reform at the highest level, the Committee of the Traditional Drama Reform (*xiqu gaijin weiyuanhui*), was formed in July 1950. It was mainly composed of prestigious artists, theatre scholars and researchers, educators, and

[61] Yang Shaoxuan (1893-1971) was a playwright and the vise president of the reform Bureau. He was the author of *Bishang Liangshan* (*Driven Up to the Mountain Liang*), which was a newly-created historical play praised by Mao.
[62] Ma Yanxiang (1907-1988) was a veteran director and a playwright of spoken drama.

critics. Zhou Yang[63] was appointed chair of the Committee, and there were 42 committee members, including the performers Ouyang Yuqian[64], Mei Lanfang (1894-1961), and playwrights such as Tian Han and Lao She[65]. The mission of the Committee was to discuss and evaluate the censoring criteria and the plays to be censored as proposed by the Bureau of the Traditional Drama Reform, and to offer suggestions about the reform proposals after debates and discussions to the Bureau and the Ministry of Culture before they were issued as official policies by the Ministry of Culture or the State Council.

In order to assist the Bureau and the Committee in their reform work, a special research and experimental institution, The Chinese Traditional Drama Research Institute (*zhongguo xiqu yanjiuyuan*), was established in April 1951. Mei Lanfang was appointed president of the institute, and Cheng Yanqiu, Luo Heru[66], Ma Shaobo[67] were vice presidents.[68] Mei Lanfang, speaking at the founding ceremony of the institute, indicated that the task of the institute was to collect and revise the traditional plays, to create new plays, dialogues and arias, and in the meantime, to train actors and educate reformers.[69]

The purpose for the establishment of the three reform organs was to have an adequate assessment and evaluation of the proposals for censoring criteria before they

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[63] Zhou Yang (1908-1989) was a Chinese literary theorist and Marxist thinker. His report *On the Military Tasks of Philosophy and Social Science Workers*, delivered to Mao Zedong in 1963, was one of the catalysts for the Cultural Revolution.

[64] Ouyang Yuqian (1889-1962) specialized in *dan* (female impersonation), and created a series of new *jingju*. He was also one of the founders of the Chinese *huaju* (spoken drama) due to his experience in Japan where he joined in the "Spring Willow Society" (*chunliushe*).

[65] Lao She (1899-1966) was one of the most significant figures of twentieth-century Chinese literature. As a notable dramatist, he was perhaps best known for his play *Teahouse*.

[66] Luo Heru (1899-1980), the deputy director and party secretary of the Chinese Traditional Theatre Research Institute.

[67] Ma Shaobo (1918-) was a cadre and drama critic who was appointed deputy-director of the Chinese Academy of Beijing Opera.

[68] Later, Zhang Geng (1911-2003) and Yan Yong (1916-2008) also joined in the Institute as vice president. Both of them were drama (*jingju*) scholar, director, and critic, etc.

[69] Gao Yilong and Li Xiao, eds. *Zhongguo Xiqu Xiandaixi Shi* (*A History of Chinese Xiqu with Contemporary Themes*). (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 1999), 128.

became the official policies. The administrative staff at the Bureau drew up the censoring criteria and proposed the plays to be censored. Then they called the Committee to discuss and evaluate these criteria and proposals. After debates and discussions at the Committee conferences, the committee members gave their feedback to the Bureau and offered their suggestions to the Ministry of Culture on the proposals. The Ministry of Culture or the State Council finally issued the official policies according to these suggestions. Although the whole reform was under the guidance of Mao's thought in general, the practical policy-making was nevertheless very much influenced by the censors' own political and aesthetic beliefs.

In general, the body of censors consisted of both performance professionals and non-performers. Among the professional performers were *jingju* artists and actors, such as Ouyang Yuqian, *dan* actor Wang Yaoqing (1881-1954), *wusheng* actor Shang Heyu (1873-1957), Xiao Changhua, *laosheng* Wang Fengqing (1883-1956), *wusheng* Ma Decheng (1882-1953), Mei Lanfang, *laosheng* Zhou Xinfang (1895-1975), Cheng Yanqiu, Shang Xiaoyun, Xun Huisheng,[70] *laosheng* Tan Xiaopei (1883-1953), *xiaosheng* Jin Zhongren (1886-1950), *laosheng* Bao Jixiang (1883-195?), and *laosheng* Gao Baisui (1902-1969). Non-performers were playwrights (such as Tian Han and Lao She), scholars and researchers (such as Zhou Yibai), critics (such as Ma Shaobo), and educators (such as Hong Shen), as well as others like Yang Shaoxuan.[71] Some non-performers, who came from Yan'an, the centre of the Chinese communist revolution from 1937-1948 and were

[70] Mei Lanfang, Cheng Yanqiu, Shang Xiaoyun and Xun Huisheng were regarded as the Four Great Female Impersonators.

[71] An interesting phenomenon I want to mention here briefly is that after this long-term collaboration with the *jingju* performers in this reform process, many non-performer reformers at the time turned into prestigious scholars and experts later in the Chinese theatre education, criticism, playwriting, and directing, etc.

nurtured by Mao's thought on literature and art, emphasized the political function of art; they contended that *jingju* plays needed to be changed in both their content and stage performing styles and skills so as to serve the changed audience. Other censors, influenced by the official acting school of the Soviet Union, the "socialist realism" of Stanislavsky at the time, argued from an aesthetic viewpoint that the most important feature of *jingju* is its realism. On the other hand, theater scholars or playwrights insisted that *jingju*'s essence lies in its abstraction and imagination, and that the reform of the play should not affect its stage performance. Although there was a general consensus among the reformers that attention should be paid to the traditional *jingju* plays' content and efforts should be directed to removal of those "unhealthy" elements, opinions about the reform details with regard to other aspects of *jingju* varied. Since most of the suggestions and opinions were discussed before policies were adopted by the Bureau, a thorough examination of the different perspectives as shown in these discussions is in order here.

General Consensus and Different Perspectives

"*Jingju* traditional plays" means all the plays, either in their written version, oral version, or their stage performance version, produced and performed before1949, when the People's Republic of China was founded. Under the guidance of Mao's thought on literature and art, numerous meetings and conferences were held during the time to discuss the details of reform measures for these plays. Not only were issues debated at these meetings and conferences and notes taken of the opinions, but also articles were written and published in the aftermath. These conference notes and articles remain available as a source for understanding the issues at stake. Although the general

consensus was that reform of *jingju* plays was necessary, partly because of Mao's directive of "pushing out the old and producing the new," and partly because of both social and economic changes since the Liberation, censors' attitudes differed on the scope of the reform and the concrete measures that should be taken. The main debate was about whether the reform should focus on *jingju*'s content (such as dialogues and plots) or its forms (such as music, dance, technical skills, and stage conventions), or both, and, this having been settled, to what extent *jingju* should be reformed, moderately or drastically.[72]

Zhang Menggeng, who had actively participated in theatre activities since 1938, was once the secretary of the Yan'an *Pingju* Research Institute (*yan'an pingju yanjiuyuan*). He was one of the so-called New Literature and Art Workers (*xinwenyi gongzuozhe*) and represented the group of reformers who started their theatre career in Yan'an, the base of the Chinese communist revolution. As he was a staunch and firm believer and follower of Mao and the Chinese communist revolution, his attitude towards *jingju* reform bore a marked imprint of Mao, and represented a radical interpretation of Mao's thought. He suggested that the reform should be carried out in a radical way because he thought most *jingju* artists still held the view that the old was good and maintained their artistic creation simply and only at an aesthetic and technical level, which was certainly a standard not high enough to meet the requirements of a changed social and economic environment. In his opinion, more efforts should be made not only to remove the "feudal dross" of the *jingju* traditional plays, but also to create new *jingju* plays, especially *xinbian lishiju* (new plays with historical themes), because this was

[72] See the detailed discussion in Richard F. S. Yang's "The Reform of Peking Opera under the Communists," *The China Quarterly*, No. 11 (Jul.- Sep., 1962), 124-139.

something highly praised and very much appreciated by Mao after he saw one of the plays, *Bishang Liangshan* (*Driven Up to the Mountain Liang*).

Tian Han, as a drama activist, became a leader in the revolutionary music and films, and in the work of the CCP's *jingju* reform as well. At the National Conference on the Traditional Drama Work, he was the first to admit the necessity of reform and called on the reformers to unite all the *jingju* artists to participate actively in this reform movement. On the censoring of the *jingju* traditional plays, he adopted a relatively conservative attitude, suggesting that the reform should be undertaken in a careful and gradual way. He pointed out that the focus at the time should be on the content of the plays, that is, decisions should be made as to what was "feudal dross" and what was "democratic essence," but he also implied that the reform might be shifted gradually from the content to the form.[73]

Richard Yang has mentioned the stand of Ma Shaobo, another reformer, that "new reformed opera should be dedicated to service of the people and thus be regarded as a means of recording the history of the people…[the artists] should be awakened and convinced of the need of such a reform."[74] To this I can add more about Ma's detailed opinions on the reforms of *jingju* stage performance and representation. On the issue of reforming the content or form of *jingju* plays, he contended that both should be revised. Different from Zhang Menggeng's emphasis on the creation of new *jingju* plays and Tian Han's caution and suggestion of reforming the content of *jingju* plays first, Ma believed that both the content and the form have to be reformed because they are a unity. He

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[73] Zhang Geng, ed., *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama· Beijing Volume*. (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1999), 1318-1325.
[74] Yang, Richard F. S. "The Reform of Peking Opera under the Communists" *The China Quarterly*. Vol. 11, no. 1, 1962: 127.

especially advocated what the reformers had called the "cleaning-up the stage" project, i.e., to get rid of those "bad" (traditional) stage conventions, such as the appearance of the property man (*jianchang*) in the performance. He also urged that some technical skills and role-type (*hangdang*) related props and skills be either changed or banned completely, such as the "lotus feet" (*cai qiao*), a pair of wooden stilts made into the form of feet and worn by performers to symbolize women's bound feet.[75]

Ma Yanxiang, another important reformer and censor, shared his view with Zhang Menggeng that the reform work should focus on creating new characters and new *jingju* plays, but his reasoning was slightly different. He noted:

> As a stage art, Peking Opera has developed over the past century into a perfect art. Except for some undesirable stage phenomena such as certain ugly, terrifying, vulgar, obscene scenes which should undoubtedly be removed from the plays, Peking Opera as a whole should be left as it is now. I am all for the principle of retaining the good and removing the bad…the main hindrance which has prevented the Opera from making further progress lies in the fact that as a product of a feudal society it has developed into an art with its fixed and rigid patterns. Its tunes, dancing and acting forms, plots and costumes are all restricted and limited to a few fixed patterns. The key to reform, in my opinion, lies not so much in the modification of old plays, but in the creation of new plays. In this way, the old, traditional stereotypes in characterization would be done away with, and the creation of new characters according to modern principles would be achieved.[76]

What Ma Yangxiang was saying is that *jingju* had developed into a "perfect" and "rigid" art form, which is hard to change, so the reform work should leave old *jingju* as it was and focus on the creation of new plays.

To sum up, at this time most reformers and censors agreed that both *jingju*'s content and form need to be reformed, but some emphasized its content, while others

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[75] *Ibid.*, 127.
[76] "What is obstructing the further development of the stage art of Peking Opera," trans. Richard Yang. *Xiju Bao* (*Theatre Newspaper*), November, 1954, 21-22.

emphasized both the content and the form; some suggested a gradual reform, while others a radical one; some put more weight on reforming the old repertory while others thought the old was unchangeable and that the business should be to create the new. But the most important opinion I need to present here was that of Mei Lanfang, because he was one of the most respected of the *jingju* professionals.

He expressed his great concern for the reform and brought up more concrete issues related to *jingju* aesthetics and its performance. His argumen is worth quoting at length:

> In the system of *jingju* performance, its arias, dances, movements and gestures are all closely related to its other features, such as broad-sleeved gowns, painted faces, long-beards, water-sleeves, thick-soled boots, whips, and oars. All these, combined together, have made *jingju* a unique art. Before we take any actions in reform, we must first study its origin and its development, and when we make the reforms, we must be cautious.
>
> Since Liberation, we have already banned some role type related skills, such as the "lotus feet," and we have also cleared the property men from the stage. I think we have already achieved something by doing these. But we cannot remove painted faces from *jingju*. *Jingju* characters have a convention to first introduce themselves when they enter the stage. Some characters have their fixed painted faces once they appear on the stage and even though they do not speak nor sing, the audience already knows who they are…This convention is completely different from those of the spoken drama…and it's a unique aesthetic characteristic of the drama of the East. What we have to do today is not to remove these characteristics; instead, we should collect and collate the traditional plays, and sift our traditions, and put them together in an orderly way.
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> With regard to the use of scenic settings on stage, there are many different viewpoints. Speaking from my own experiences, scenic settings cannot be used in most of the traditional plays. This is because the uniqueness of *jingju* performance lies in its abstraction. The stage is empty before the actors enter. When the actors enter the stage, they use their gestures, dances, and other movements with the support of certain props to signify the changes of time and place in the play. Actors themselves are the living scenic settings on stage. When he swings a whip, it means riding a horse; when he moves an oar, it suggests a ride in a boat; when he walks around the stage for a few steps, it suggests a traveling over several blocks or a distance of several miles. When there is a beating of the drum, it

> indicates that the time is evening or dawn. What shall we do when there is a quick passing of the time and change of place in the play? If we use fixed scenic settings on the stage, actors will not know how to perform, and all their technical skills and body movements will be useless. So, if we use scenic settings in traditional plays, the actors' performance will be limited and hindered.
>
> As to whether *jingju* can be used to represent contemporary themes and characters, I think we need more careful study and research. I have tried new plays before. That is, I put on contemporary costumes in my new plays. Later, I ceased to create these plays because I felt strongly that *jingju*, as an abstract art, is not suitable for representation of contemporary themes and characters. For example, in one new play I tried before, when I was in the contemporary costume, I felt my performance and technical representation were restricted. I could not dance well on the stage. What is more, in these new plays, there are many more dialogues than arias. I could not use *manban* (a kind of musical pattern) in these plays; I had to use other musical patterns, such as *yaoban* and *kuaiban*. I felt more and more uncomfortable when I sang these arias, because they sounded very unharmonious and strange. When I was in contemporary costumes, my gestures, my stage steps, my facial expressions and my dialogues were all changed—I could not make use of my traditional skills. Especially when we used *jingju* to represent the contemporary life on stage, sometimes music became useless. In a word, it is totally removed from the traditional performance system. Because the charm of *jingju*'s performance lies in its abstraction and exaggeration, it emphasizes both singing and dancing. If we want to use *jingju* to represent contemporary themes, we have to consider adopting new forms, which, however, contradict the old *jingju* forms in style. That's why I do not create any more new plays because of my failures in my past experiments.[77]

Mei's remarks on *jingju* reform show that, although he agreed that some of the "unhealthy elements" in both the content and the form should be removed, he opposed many concrete measures that were proposed by other censors and reformers. He pointed out that *jingju*, as a unique art of abstraction, could not be used to represent contemporary themes, because the new content and the new form contradict *jingju*'s aesthetic principles and its performance conventions. In spite of the fact that he argued for some mild

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[77] "My Experiences about *Jingju* Performance," *Xiju Bao* (*Theatre Newspaper*), vol. 1, 1955. Trans. Richard F. S. Yang. "The Reform of Peking Opera Under the Communists." *The China Quarterly*. No. 11 (Jul.-Sep., 1962), 129-130.

changes in certain arias, plots, or dialogues which might be inappropriate for the changed audience, he felt, on the whole, that *jingju* should be left as it was, and that the focus of the reform should be neither on creation of new plays, nor on change of the old.

Of the many different opinions, Mei's ideas were generally shared by theatre professionals and even by most of the other reformers. It seemed at first that Mei's ideas won or got the upper hand in the policy-making process, because the "5· 5 Directive," the official policy issued by the State Council, while pointing out that certain old plays had to be revised before they were performed and urging creation of new plays, nevertheless agreed that most efforts should focus on preservation of old plays and that in the process of the reform artists' collaboration and their expertise should be relied on:

> …those "good" plays should be preserved, or modified so that they can still be performed. We should encourage the performance of these old plays because they represent traditions of our nation……we must mainly depend on the artists for their collaboration and their expertise in revising and creating new plays. We also need newspapers and other press organs for theatrical critiques and debates, and these should be encouraged.[78]

From this documented official policy, it seemed that the CCP adopted a completely open policy towards inheritance of the cultural traditions and showed great respect to the *jingju* artists for their knowledge, expertise, and performance experience. However, the impact of censoring ultimately caused much more radical change because the reform had already uprooted *jingju* from its market-oriented and actor-centered system.

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[78] Zhou Enlai. "The Directive on Traditional Drama Reform Work." *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*). May 7, 1951. Zhang Geng, ed., *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama· Beijing Volume*, (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1999), 1328.

First, as Mei would generally prefer not to have a confrontation with the CCP leadership and other reformers, he had often to compromise his artistic principles to political considerations. In the past, as the leading character of his own performance troupe, Mei was the main one to make the final decisions as to what to perform and whether changes should be made in his performances, though he needed support and suggestions from other people, such as musicians, scholars, writers, or educators. The work of the official reform forced him to be involved in a process he had never experienced before, and made him join in a project that he had initially rejected. In his speech above he made it very clear that he would not like to see any reforms or changes in either plays or their performances. Some of the reformers expressed the same idea that since the content and the form are a unity, any change made in its content might more or less affect its form, and vice versa. For *jingju*, which was so rigid and conventionalized in its performance style, any change, made either in its content or form, meant a certain sacrifice of its unique charm or a violation of its aesthetic principles, in the way of performance skills or techniques, the audience's interest and tastes, and customs of appreciation shared between the stage and the audience. As *jingju* was a systematic art in terms of its stylized movements, conventionalized arias, regulated musical accompaniments, etc., and there existed a tacit tradition, understanding and collaboration among actors, musicians and the audiences, any micro changes, once made, would inevitably affect its macro whole as a system.

Second, when the reform organs—administrative, consultative and experimental—brought this cadre of reformers and professionals to a roundtable debate, seemingly they aimed to hear different opinions before the final policies could be made,

but actually they shifted the power in terms of control of *jingju* from the hands of *jingju* artists alone to more and other hands so that the power was diffused. These other "hands," whether they were governmental officials, New Literature and Art Workers, scholars, critics, educators, or playwrights, and whether their viewpoints towards reform of *jingju* plays were from a political or aesthetic angle, were characterized by a lack of *jingju* expertise and experience, particularly in stage performance of *jingju*. As they all wanted to leave their imprint on the reform, they led the practical reform work into deviancy from Mei's view.

For example, from an aesthetic point of view, some of the reformers, who had studied in the Soviet Union and had been trained in and influenced by the Stanislavski acting methodology, emphasized psychological realism, and tried to apply this methodology in training *jingju* performers and their performances. Although Stanislavski's interpretation of acting changed throughout his career, his basic method was to produce realistic characters, and he required his actors to undertake a deep analysis of the motivations of their roles (i.e. psychological causes). However, in *jingju* acting, as I know in part from my own performance experience, although actors might have certain moments in which to analyze their characters to produce more "convincing" roles on the stage, since *jingju* requires specially trained and produced voices, techniques and skills such as martial arts, actors' attention in most cases is focused on presenting and performing these difficult vocal and physical skills. They cannot very well consider the motivations of their roles during acting, for they will be distracted if they do. In fact, most of the traditional *jingju* plays are characterized by songs and dances. This is not to say that *jingju* does not have characterization or psychological depth. In singing some of

the arias, *jingju* performers also need to use certain gestures or movements to signify or suggest the characters' emotional struggles. But these gestures are codified and learned. This is why *jingju* performers have often characterized their pattern of acting as performing both the "first self" (the actor) and the "second self" (the character). They constantly change between these two roles so that they are always aware of their performing of their role type and its related skills, and at the same time, they are also conscious of the characters in the play they are performing.

Furthermore, the method of producing so-called "realistic characters" in Stanislavski's system is largely based on mimesis and developed in a certain period or as a particular mode of European theatre. In *jingju*, "realism" lies not in its resemblance to the real, but in its abstraction, its symbolism, its appeal to the imagination, and its reliance on a shared understanding of a special culture, custom, and knowledge between the stage and the audience. As long as the audience understands or acknowledges it as "real," the performance is successful and the goal of theatrical entertainment is reached. The adoption and application of Stanislavski's system in *jingju* performance, which was very controversial and caused heated debates for decades, did "revolutionize" performing and acting in *jingju*. Those plays which were created under the influence of this methodology inevitably brought in further changes, for example, as I will discuss in a later chapter, the use of directors to "direct" a show instead of the traditional way of actors deciding everything themselves.

From an aesthetic point of view, worse things happened to these traditional plays and their performances because some reformers adopted a solely political approach or showed an ultra-leftists' inclination in reform of *jingju*. In their practice, censoring of the

plays became a process of political education. Totally removed from the aesthetic or artistic principles, they did not depend upon the *jingju* actors for their expertise and knowledge in reform of the traditional *jingju* plays. Thus, these seemingly "democratic" discussions and debates at the roundtable diffused the power of control over *jingju*, and helped to shift *jingju* gradually from an actor-centered art to an art controlled by the state, party members, central and local reformers, or other non-performers. Later, when the relatively liberal phase had passed and there was a political shift in the government, the ultra-leftists began to seize the political power by rejecting and destroying all cultural heritages, and as a result, these *jingju* professionals were kicked out of the roundtable room altogether and became voiceless and powerless.

Censoring Criteria and the Censored

As I have argued, Mao still favored a reformed tradition during the 1950s, and although Mei lost his absolute control over *jingju*, at least he won in a partial way in that following Mei's speech a great deal of attention was devoted to exploration, preservation, and revision of the traditional plays, rather than to the creation of new plays, which was resolutely rejected by Mei. Moreover, as Mei had hoped, the major task during that time was largely concerned with the content and the texts of the plays rather than with their forms of performance. Although in the "cleaning-up the stage" project some of the stage conventions were done away with, most forms pertaining to actors' performance skills and techniques remained unchanged. The most important thing is that *jingju* was accepted as an art of abstraction, so that its aesthetic principles were largely not affected or changed during these reforms.

With regard to the content of traditional plays, censoring criteria were formulated by the CCP, and an official directive was issued to guide the work:

> First, top priority should be given to popularizing patriotism in traditional drama. It should encourage and eulogize the heroism of the masses of the people in their revolutionary fights against the ruling class and in their contemporary daily work. Those plays portraying anti-invasion, anti-oppression, and love for the country, freedom, labor and righteousness should be preserved and their performance encouraged; on the contrary, those plays promoting feudal thought, terrors, obscenities, demonizing and humiliating the working class should be rejected…Second, the focus of the reform work is to censor those popular old plays, eliminate their inappropriate elements and their improper performance techniques. Those "poisonous" things, such as the uncivilized, terror, obscenity, slavishness, anti-patriotism, etc. should be deleted from the plays.[79]

Specifically speaking, plays containing things that advocate feudal moralities (e.g. slave ideology in *Yipengxue*) and superstition (e.g. ghost images in *Tan Yinshan*), presenting obscenities, adulteries, and murders, or using vulgar language and techniques should be revised. Changes were made according to these criteria mainly in certain arias, dialogues and plots of the traditional plays.

Although the aesthetic principles of *jingju* were not seriously affected and changes were made mainly in its content, the practical work of reform was still problematic. For instance, who were the executors of those policies? How did they make the practical changes in the arias, dialogues and plots? And what did these reformed plays look like after certain changes? Let me compare the plays revised by *jingju* professional performers with those revised by a non-performer.

A good example to show the professional "reform" of the plays is Mei Lanfang's revision of *Guifei Intoxicated*. Since it is a play of songs and dances, the plot is quite

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[79] *Ibid.*, 1328.

simple. Lady Yang, the highest-ranking imperial concubine, invites the Emperor to dinner. While she is drinking and waiting for the Emperor, news comes that the Emperor has gone to another concubine's palace. With a feeling of jealousy, anger and disappointment, Lady Yang returns to her own palace after she has had a drop too much. It is a traditional play passed down from the past and performed for decades by numerous actors and artists. When we enjoy the performance, great attention should be paid to the actors' facial expressions, body movements, arias, and techniques with which the actor is portraying drunkenness. Since it is a "court" drama mainly portraying the "decadent" life of the Emperor and his concubines, and the "philistine" lyrics tend to corrupt and poison the people's minds according to the Communist doctrine, Mei, in 1952, edited some lyrics that contain erotic messages. Zhu Yinghui's *A Forty-year History of Contemporary Xiqu* depicts how Mei Lanfang carefully and skillfully revised certain lines. Mei did not change the musical pattern of the play. The format of the lyric was also unchanged. He only changed some key words in the lyrics so that the new ones could convey a different meaning. Though the poetry might be lost in the translation, one example of the original lyrics is presented here, which were used to express Lady Yang's eroticism:

> This is what people say—only we ourselves can make ourselves drunk and we do not get drunk with wine; it is a feeling we stir up ourselves in the thoughts of making love and we do not have it by watching pornographic scenes.

Since the image of love-making and intercourse was condemned as a poisonous and decadent element which tends to corrupt the people, Mei changed some key words in the lyrics so that it read:

> This is how I get drunk when I drink too much; why did my beloved man go to another concubine's palace?

The changed lyric does not contain messages suggesting eroticism. Moreover, by changing the original declarative sentence into a rhetorical question, Mei created a meaning that could be interpreted as an oppressed concubine's indictment against the Emperor and what was considered according to Communist doctrine the unreasonable polygamy at court so that the new lyrics would be politically correct. But at the same time, Mei kept the original musical format and its rhyme and rhythm so that the poetry and beauty were preserved.

> In another aria, the original version of Lady Yang's song was as follows:
>
> Where are you, Anlushan? How nicely did I treat you when you first came? How much love have I devoted to you? However, you abandoned me. You are so ungrateful. From now on, I will say goodbye to you forever.

These lines suggest Lady Yang's adulteries with Anlushan, an official appointed by the Emperor at court, which should be revised according to the censoring criteria. By using the same editing method, Mei changed this aria into Lady Yang's soliloquy:

> I, Lady Yang, am living in a dream. Think about it. When I first came to the imperial palace, how the emperor loved and spoilt me! However, he is so heartless now, acting one way in public and another in private. Does it mean that we have to separate from now on?

The improved version shifts the emphasis from a suggestion of adulteries to Lady Yang's complaints about the Emperor, but the basic performance conventions, the female role type skills and techniques, the musical pattern and the poetry of lyrics remain unchanged.[80]

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[80] Zhu Yinghui. *Dangdai Xiqu Sishi Nian* (*A Forty-year History of Contemporary Xiqu*). (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1993), 147-149.

A better concealed skill used by *jingju* professionals to reform the traditional plays according to the censoring criteria was altering the status of characters in the play instead of making any significant changes in the plot, aria or dialogue. Thus they managed to make the play "politically correct" without bringing about any changes in the performance itself. For example, *Sanchakou* (*Crossroads*) is a well-known traditional play which well illustrates *jingju*'s aesthetic principles: abstraction, symbolism, signification and exaggeration. The most important and interesting part of the acting in the performance is the scene where two actors signify how the characters in the story are fighting in the dark while they are actually performing on a lighted stage. The background story is that an innocent general named Jiao Zan was framed and exiled to a distant place for penal servitude. A chivalrous man, called Ren Tanghui, follows Jiao to protect him in secret. On his way, Jiao puts up at an inn for the night. The whole performance is a portrayal of the night these characters spend in the inn. The famous fighting between the inn-keeper Liu Lihua and the chivalrous man Ren Tanghui is a presentation of *jingju* traditional performance conventions, role-type related techniques and martial skills. In the old version of the play, the identity of the inn-keeper is a brigand; in order to steal Jiao's property he sneaks into Jiao's room in the night. Unexpectedly, he comes across Ren, who is sleeping in Jiao's room. The two characters, without knowing each other's identity, start fighting in the dark room. Since the inn-keeper's identity as a brigand is an "ugly" stage image according to the Communist doctrine and the censoring criteria, professionals changed Liu's identity to another chivalrous man who keeps the inn. Liu's fighting with Ren is not out of his greed for Jiao's property but because of a misunderstanding. Although the cause for the fighting is

changed in the plot, the actors' original acting and performance is not affected at all, because this whole identity issue is just part of the background which does not matter too much but merely offers an occasion for the presentation of performance skills and techniques.[81]

Jingju professionals' caution and conservative attitude played a decisive role in leaving the traditional *jingju* plays as they were. Only mild changes were made in the arias, dialogues, and plots of some plays so as to adjust to the new criteria. The professionals' caution was in sharp contrast to the careless attitude and the rough practice of some reformers. Many cases demonstrate that the view of these reformers was narrow and that they misinterpreted the political doctrines of the Communist Party. Some reformers appealed to Stalin's doctrine that the superstructure of the society must change since the Chinese economic infrastructure had already changed. They even went so far as to propose that *jingju*, as an art of the past regime's superstructure, must be entirely done away with like the feudal society. In order to bring this "decadent" art to serve the working class, they tried to improve these traditional plays in terms of their ideological quality by forcing political themes into these plays. Changes made by them were also focused on the content of the play, mainly in the plot, aria and dialogue, but the effects of the changes were quite different from those of the changes made by *jingju* professionals.[82]

In the well-known *dan* play, *Susan qijie* (*Susan Being Sent under Escort*), one of the original arias is "Susan is leaving Hongdong County, and now I'm here on the street."

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[81] *Ibid.*, 153-154.
[82] *Ibid.*, 37.

Since Susan is a prostitute in the play, in order to help her become a member of the working class, the reformers changed the aria into "Susan is leaving Hongdong County, and I'm going hurriedly because I'm now working in a new society."[83] The change focused completely on a political consideration without considering its poetic context, and so the original mood of the lyrics was completely lost.

In another traditional play, *Pinggui Bieyao* (*Pinggui Leaves His Wife*), the young Pinggui has to leave his wife in order to join the army. The whole plot and performance is traditionally set in a sad and dreary mood, which is meant to represent the profound sorrow of the husband and the wife for their separation. In the corresponding arias and dialogues, the wife expresses her great care and concern for Pinggui's safety and her reluctance to separate from her husband. However, this was considered as "backward" by the reformers. They changed the whole tone of the play by turning the wife into a Communist comrade of her husband. She passionately encourages Pinggui to join the army and to serve and fight for the country, since patriotism was very much emphasized by the CCP leadership. It ultimately resulted in an odd disjunction between new text and old song.[84]

A similar change was also made in the *Qiujiang* (*River in the Autumn*). The play is about a nun called Chen Miaochang, who elopes with her lover Pan Bizheng. In the original play, after her lover Pan has left the Buddhist nunnery, Chen feels extremely uneasy and hesitates as to whether to follow her passion or morality. Finally she jumps into a boat, catches up with Pan with the help of a fisherman, and follows her lover

[83] *Ibid.*
[84] *Ibid.*

forever. In the reformer's new version, after Chen catches up with Pan, she says to him, "Please do not worry about me. You should go and fight for this country." And then, she returns to the nunnery in the fisherman's boat.[85]

What is more, by explicitly pointing out that plays containing or promoting superstitions should be edited and revised, the censoring criteria caused chaos in the reform practice as there were a large number of mythological and supernatural plays about immortals, demons and ghosts. These plays, which the *jingju* professionals considered "harmless," actually became a headache for the reformers who were non-performers because they did not know how to differentiate mythological plays from plays "popularizing superstition." Some of them arbitrarily decided that any play including ghost images was to be considered superstition-popularizing, and therefore should be revised or banned. Some other reformers, in order to get rid of those superstitious images from the original play, simply tried to turn all the supernatural and immortal characters into human characters. For example, in order to revise the mythological play *Niulang and Zhinü*, a very popular love story between a mortal and a fairy, the reformers reset the plot in the Han Dynasty in Chinese history, beginning this love story with the Peasant Revolt and ending it with the failure of the rich and the landlord. The mood of the original art was completely lost in the revision.[86] There were similar problems with plays about love and romance. Many reformers simply regarded the plots of these plays and performances as obscene for dealing with love at all.

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[85] *Ibid.*, 164.
[86] *Ibid.*, 131.

All these changes made in the content of the traditional plays, which are regarded as ridiculous nowadays, were the result of the reformers' wishful thinking. Their carelessness and rough attitude towards the reform of the plays aroused opposition and resistance from *jingju* professionals and threw the practical reform work into chaos. Actually, neither the traditional audience nor the socialist working class enjoyed these revised plays. Ironically, performances of the original versions of the plays, as Mackerras points out, "remained extremely popular."[87] The ultra-leftist inclination and practice and the misinterpretation of Mao and the official policies among the reformers drew great attention from the reform Bureau and the upper-level government. Ma Yanxiang wrote,

> The "Directive" has told us to cooperate with the artists, but some of our reform administrators refused to follow it. They would rather like to carry out the reform on their own…they started with those most popular plays, and caused huge resentment and resistance from the *jingju* artists. [We should admit that] we are not professional enough in *jingju*. That is why our work was generally resisted by most *jingju* players.[88]

As a result of the careless, rough and poor revision of the traditional plays by the reformers who were non-performers, which aroused opposition, resistance and complaints from both *jingju* professional and the audience, the Bureau had to issue follow-up policies to rectify the mistakes and set the course of the reform in the right direction. Once again, it seems that the main tension was not so much between government and artists as between central and local governments.

Conclusion

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[87] Colin Mackerras. *The Chinese Theatre in Modern Times: from 1840 to the Present Day*. (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1975), 166.

[88] Ma Yanxiang. "The Problems in the Traditional Drama Reform Work in 1951" Geng Zhang, ed., *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama·Beijing Volume*, (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1999), 1338.

Indeed, the process of reforming the old *jingju* repertoire during the 1950s underwent great chaos and turmoil, with resistance and opposition throughout. The reform was of great importance to the CCP because it symbolized the Communist hegemony of the country and helped establish its credibility at the time. As anti-traditional modernists and class-conscious Marxists who were well aware of *jingju*'s mass appeal, a cadre of reformers with different backgrounds and from different institutions was built up for the top-down reform, from outright banning to the detailed play revision. The CCP meant to have more opinions heard, more resources and wits pooled, so that the policy and decision making and implementation would be democratic, but unexpectedly and unfortunately, the result was that the absolute control over the plays and their performances by *jingju* performers was gradually lost, i.e., power in terms of control over *jingju* was diffused. And as time went on, most of the state policies were ignored and abused in their implementation by the local reformers. Despite the fact that the traditional theatre remained extremely popular at the time, the reformers censored and banned plays and performances at will and at random in the local regions, which caused clashes between the executors and the audiences. In the process of the reform, most *jingju* performers had to play "tricks" in their revision of the traditional plays so that their performances could retain their original quality and spirit and convey the shared "secrets" between the actors and the audience. Partly out of fear, and partly under the influence of the over-banning in the local regions, many *jingju* performers self-banned their performances, which, together with the random banning, resulted in the loss of their jobs and a severe slump of the theatre. It ultimately caused the CCP to issue a series of statements during this period to stop the over-banning practice, to rectify the deviation

from the right course of the reform in the local regions, and to correct the mistakes by the reformers in their reform work. Many *jingju* artists felt grateful for the CCP's liberal attitude and open policies despite their belief that the reform work should not have been started in the first place.

Obviously, there was an intrinsic contradiction between the classic texts (traditional *jingju* plays) and the changed ideological discourse (the CCP's rhetoric and politics). In this period of reform, the aim of the CCP was a transformation of these traditional texts, and ultimately an adaptation of the actors and the audiences from an existing social discourse to another emerging one, along the correct political line. Moreover, as the result of the loss of control of *jingju* by the *jingju* players and the ultra-leftist interference, *jingju* quickly moved away from an actor-centered art. Although most of the plays and performances were initially preserved, some of the changes that were made in *jingju* during the 1950s' reform, (i.e. the removal of some stage conventions, technical skills, and theatre customs,) actually destroyed a culture that had once been shared by the theatre and the audience. *Nandan* declined gradually, and certain types of role, particular those closely associated with diverse female impersonations, faded out from the stage. Later, when the ultra-leftists seized the power of the country, and "creating new *jingju* with contemporary themes" became the only mission by the reformers, most of the traditional plays were abandoned and completely banned during the Cultural Revolution.

Chapter Two
Making History: the Creation of New Jingju Historical Plays

From the Creation of Xinbian Lishixi (New Jingju Historical Plays) about Hai Rui

On the November 10, 1965, *Wenhuibao* (*Wenhui News*) in Shanghai published Yao Wenyuan's[1] article titled "A Criticism of the Newly Created *Jingju* Historical Play *Hai Rui Baguan* (*Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*)," in which he claimed that the play's author Wu Han (1909-1969) had used the Ming-Dynasty official Hai Rui's dismissal to satirize Chairman Mao and the Great Leap Forward[2] campaign that Mao had led in the present. In Yao's view, the play's protagonist Hai Rui represented the Minister of the National Defense Peng Dehuai (1898-1974), who had been dismissed by Mao at the Lushan Plenum[3] because of his attacks on Mao's campaign and policies. Obviously, to examine whether Wu's real motive was to use the past to satirize the present is to throw oneself "into a battle in which the entire leadership of the country seems to have joined," and there are more likely "misinformation, falsification, and suppression of information"[4]

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[1] Yao Wenyuan (1931-2005) was a Chinese literary critic, politician, and the member of the "Gang of Four"—Jiang Qing (1914-1991), Zhang Chunqiao (1917-2005), Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Hongwen (1935-1992)—during China's Cultural Revolution.

[2] The Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) was an economic and social campaign of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It aimed to use China's vast population to rapidly transform the country from an agrarian economy into a modern communist society through the process of rapid industrialization and collectivization. In fact, the years of the Great Leap Forward witnessed an economic regression, and the campaign resulted in the Great Chinese Famine and tens of millions of deaths.

[3] The Lushan Conference, officially known as the 8th Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, began on July 2, 1959. The conference name was derived from the conference place Lushan (Mountain Lu) in Jiangxi Province, southeastern China. During the conference, Peng Dehuai—the Minister of the National Defense, wrote a private letter to Mao to criticize some elements of the Great Leap Forward such as the over-reporting of grain production and the establishment of commune militia. Due to this, Mao extended the conference for more than ten days. On July 23, Mao made the letter known to the conference members, and soon afterwards, Peng was accused of having "rightist tendencies" and was subsequently dismissed.

[4] Rudolf G. Wagner. *The Contemporary Chinese Historical Drama: Four Studies*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), "Introduction," x.

in such endless fierce debate; however, it is widely seen that the publication of this critique became an incident that touched off the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Since the newly created *jingju* historical play *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* remained notable during the Cultural Revolution and sustainably controversial for its alleged political involvement, it is a good place to start a full discussion on the creation of new *jingju* historical plays.

In fact, how *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* became so politically involved remained suspicious. It was originally a commissioned play written for the famous *jingju laosheng* actor Ma Lianliang (1901-1966), and performed by the Beijing Jingju Company with Ma as Hai Rui in 1961 and again in 1965. Furthermore, Hai Rui, the Ming-Dynasty official, whether or not intentionally chosen by the author Wu Han, was actually a quite popular stage character around the time because from 1959 to 1962, there were more than fifty plays about Hai Rui created all over China.[5] For instance, on April 11, 1959, at a round-table meeting held in Shanghai, Zhou Yang[6] suggested that *jingju laosheng* actor Zhou Xinfang (1895-1975) create and perform a new play about Hai Rui in preparation for the celebration of the tenth National Day (10/1/1949—10/1/1959) of the People's Republic of China (PRC). In Zhou's opinion, the main purpose for creating such a play was that after the Anti-Rightist Movement[7], because of the extensively exercised self-censorship within the Party and abroad, Hai Rui, a model of honesty and integrity, who

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[5] Wang Xinmin. *Zhongguo Dangdai Xijushi Gang* (*The Outline of the Contemporary Chinese Theatre History*). (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 1997), 171-172.

[6] Zhou Yang (1908-1989), the Vice Minister of the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China, formerly known as the Propaganda Department, was a literary theorist and a Marxist thinker.

[7] The Anti-Rightist Movement in the 1950s and early 1960s was a series of campaigns in China to purge alleged "rightists"—a term normally referring to those intellectuals who appeared to favor capitalism and class division and to oppose collectivization—within the CCP and abroad. These campaigns were instigated by Mao and involved appalling political persecution.

was bold enough to speak bluntly at the court and even curse the emperor, was much needed as an artistic figure to propagandize the importance and urgency of free speech. After this meeting, some *xiqu* troupes in Shanghai began to create various plays focused on the stories of Hai Rui, among which the most prominent one was Zhou Xinfang's *Hai Rui Shangshu* (*Hai Rui Submits a Memorial to the Emperor*).[8]

Though Wu Han himself claimed on many occasions that "he was a historian, not a dramatist, and this was his first play…[and] his only one,"[9] his peculiar position as the deputy Mayor of Beijing in 1966 and the loyal political assistant to Peng Zhen[10] easily explained why Wu, rather than the other numerous authors writing on Hai Rui, was under suspicion, singled out and targeted by Yao in his Mao-endorsed newspaper article. It said:

> Starting from the June 1959, comrade Wu Han has written a series of articles to praise Hai Rui, such as "Hai Rui Remonstrates With the Emperor" and "On Hai Rui," in order to repeatedly emphasize the immediate significance of learning from Hai Rui. In 1961, after a seventh revision, he completed the script of *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*. In the preface which he added to the play, again he requested that we should model ourselves on Hai Rui and emulate Hai's "moral character." The published play and its performance won widespread acclaim: some articles praised that "it was pregnant with meaning" and "giving full play to the audiences' imagination," which advocated Hai Rui's action of "being a courageous Judge Bao." Some spoke highly that comrade Wu Han "was a historian who dealt well with historical research in the light of specific conditions;" "he successfully made the historical research useful by adopting a method of using the past to serve the present;" And this play set up a new way of how we can make better use of historical research to

[8] Geng Zhang, ed., *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama • Shanghai Volume*. (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1996), 79.
[9] Colin Mackerras. *Chinese Drama: A Historical Survey*. (Beijing: New World Press, 1990), 161.
[10] Peng Zhen (1902-1997) was a member of the CCP Central Committee from 1944, the Mayor of Beijing in 1951 and the Politburo member during 1956-1966. Peng was appointed head of the Five Man Group (the fifth most senior member of the Politburo) in charge of preparing of the Cultural Revolution. However, not long after he attacked Mao's belief that all literature should support the state in April 1966, he was accused of being an associate of Wu Han's counter-revolutionary clique and deposed at a May conference at the very start of the Cultural Revolution.

serve our Socialist society and our people. Others added that, 'the honest and incorruptible official praised in the play…attempted to warn and educate the contemporary authorities, which was as effective as "*dazibao*" (big-character posters).[11]

…….

So what is the immediate significance of this big-character poster—*Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*? What does it mean to our people in a time of Socialism? In order to answer all these questions, we need to examine the context in which the play was written. We know that the year of 1961 was exactly the time when we had an economic recession after the three-year's natural disaster[12]. Even at the high tide of the Anti-Chinese Movement repeatedly campaigned by the imperialist countries, the reactionaries and the modern revisionists [i.e. rightists, who favored Capitalism and Individualism, etc.] attempted to "reverse a verdict," and advocate individualism. They claimed that individualism was superior to collectivization and that therefore private business should be revived and the state-confiscated farmlands should be returned to the peasants (*tuitian*). This was a complete opposition to the People's Commune[13], and a request for the reactionary rule by rich landlords. However, those imperialists, rightists, and rich landlords in the old society, who had made innumerable unjust charges and wronged countless laborers, felt that they themselves were wronged after being deprived of their power. They requested rehabilitation and hoped that there would be somebody standing up to represent their class and work for their interests, against the proletariat government, so that they could be at the helm of the state again. "Returning fields to the peasants," and 'requesting rehabilitations" were the core concerns in this battle fought between the capitalists and the proletariat. Since the class struggle was an objective phenomenon, it was inevitably reflected in various ideological forms [in Marx's term, superstructure], and in different authors' writings whether or not they were aware of it. It is an objective law that is independent of man's will. *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* was exactly one of these forms reflecting the class struggle. If comrade Wu Han does not agree with my analysis, I would like to ask him to answer this question directly: in 1961, what did

[11] *Dazibao*, the Big-character posters, are hand-written, wall-mounted posters using large-size Chinese characters, used as means of protest, propaganda, and popular communication.

[12] In Yao's term, the Great Chinese Famine (1958-1961) was a "three-year natural disaster." Though it was another popular usage besides "Famine," it certainly contained less political connotation and implication, as it substantially suggested that the disaster was caused by natural forces rather than human.

[13] The People's Commune was the highest administrative level in rural areas of the PRC from 1958 to around 1985 until it was replaced by township. It was born in support of the Great Leap Forward, and in the communes, everything was shared. Due to the poor management and the governmental control over the resources (land and labour, etc.) and the bad weather in 1958, 1960 and 1961 famine was widespread over countryside China.

> our people learn from his *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, in which the historical facts were totally distorted?[14]

The article concluded that *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* "was not a fragrant flower but a poisonous grass…it needed discussions."[15] Obviously, the oft-repeated phrase "return the land (*tuitian*)" in this article was not limited to Wu's play only. Another new *jingju* historical play *Xie Yaohuan* written by Tian Han, which depicted how a woman official Xie Yaohuan during the late reign of Empress Wu Zetian (624-705) posed as a spokesperson for the farmers by returning to them the farmlands arbitrarily occupied by the rich and by tyrants, was similarly severely condemned during the time. However, different from the situation that *Hai Rui Dismissed form Office* had encountered, *Xie Yaohuan* was soon revived in the post-Mao era and became one of the most popular and frequently performed pieces on the contemporary *jingju* stage. By contrast, Wu Han and his *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* were far less fortunate. Firstly, the play might be too politically sensitive to be revived. It completely stepped down from the performance stage since the banning due to its direct association with the Cultural Revolution. Secondly, despite the fact that the CCP rehabilitated Wu's reputation in 1979 and "lauded him as a model intellectual for post-Cultural Revolution China," he had died in October 1969, "apparently the victim of a savage beating administered in a Beijing prison."[16]

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[14] Geng Zhang, ed., *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama • Beijing Volume*. (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1996), 1543-1554. These were two small parts I quoted and translated from Yao's article "A Criticism of the New Jingju Historical Play *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*" originally published on *Wenhui News*, November 10, 1965.
[15] *Ibid.*, 1554.
[16] Jonathan Unger, ed. *Using the Past to Serve the Present: Historiography and Politics in Contemporary China*. "The Play's the Thing: Wu Han and Hai Rui Revisited." Tom Fisher. (New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, Inc. 1993), 9.

Despite the heated debates on Wu's true purpose for creating the play[17], it was a fact that the general plot coincidentally matched with the historical events of the establishment of the People's Commune after the Great Leap Forward. Since in reality the act of nationalizing peasants' lands and the establishment of the People's Commune brought about severe agrarian recession, at this point, when the slogan "return the land" appeared repeatedly in the play, it was hard not to judge it as an allusion to Mao's failed policies and the communes' deficiencies. Since its publication in *Wenhui News*, Yao's article was extensively reprinted due to the political pressure at the time. By contrast, on the so-called reactionaries' side, in order not to get the play politically involved in the way Yao had suggested, that was, to use a class struggle attitude to analyze the text, Peng Zhen deliberately wrote a *Report Outline* so as to shift the discussion focus from political to academic. Especially, he strongly resisted the idea of relating Hai Rui's dismissal to the Lushan Plenum in which Peng Dehuai was dismissed by Mao, arguing that the play should be viewed as a historical story and not as an allegory for the present. However, despite Peng Zhen's efforts and wishes, newspapers widespread began to criticize another play about Hai Rui which I have mentioned above—*Hai Rui Submits a Memorial to the Emperor*. Following Ding Xuelei's critical essay "*Hai Rui Submits a Memorial to the Emperor* served for whom?" published in the *Jiefang Ribao* (*Liberation Daily*) on

[17] As Fisher pointed out that "most Western literature on the Cultural Revolution generally gave the impression that Wu Han was an 'anti-Maoist satirist' who seized on the symbol of Hai Rui to write allegorical historical polemics against specific policies of the contemporary CCP," he insisted that "Wu's creation of a play about Hai Rui was but one aspect of his deep-seated and wide-ranging interest in the pre-modern past and its utility in the contemporary world of the Chinese society." See Jonathan Unger, ed. *Using the Past to Serve the Present: Historiography and Politics in Contemporary China*. "The Play's the Thing: Wu Han and Hai Rui Revisited." Tom Fisher. (New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, Inc. 1993), 10 and 45. For more information about the intention of Wu Han, see "The Last Chapter: From Politics to History," in Mary G. Mazur's *Wu Han, Historian: Son of China's Times*. (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth, and UK: Lexington Books), 2009.

February 12, 1966, Fang Zesheng wrote a follow-up article on May 26, 1966: "We must continue criticizing *Hai Rui Submits a Memorial to the Emperor*," in which another famous *jingju laosheng* actor Zhou Xinfang in Shanghai, who performed Hai Rui in this play, was accused of being against the CCP leadership and Socialism.[18] Immediately afterwards, the Bureau of Culture in Hunan Province issued a notice that "all cultural institutions, performance troupes, and all affiliated departments should stop purchasing the anti-CCP and anti-Socialist Zhou Xinfang's gramophone records. Those who have already purchased Zhou's records need to be reported and all phonograph records containing propaganda for feudalism and capitalism should be reported as well."[19] Simultaneously, a large number of historical plays created during the time were likewise dragged into this political battle and barely survived in the Cultural Revolution afterwards.

Nevertheless, due to its alleged association with the CCP politics, *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* has been considered as a political core piece and fiercely debated in both Western and Chinese scholarship, particularly on whether it had any implications or connotations reflecting the rise and fall of political powers within the CCP and, if it had, how it had reflected these contemporary political incidents and policies. The mass political persecution afterwards further imposed a heavy impression that this historical play was constructed exclusively as a political piece and without any artistic or aesthetic considerations. Even in Wagner's monograph of "four studies" on *jingju* historical plays,

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[18] Fu Jin. *Xinzhongguo Xiju Shi: 1949-2000* (*A History of Chinese Drama: 1949-2000*). (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002), 117.

[19] Geng Zhang, ed., *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama • Hunan Volume*, (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1996), 710. "The Cultural Bureau of Hunan Province: The Urgent Notice about Stopping Purchasing and Using Zhou Xinfang and Others' Tape Recordings and All recordings Containing Propaganda of Feudalism and Capitalism."

the titles he had selected and called "fringe" rather than central pieces of the genre—*Sun Wukong Sanda Baiguijing* (*Monkey King Subdues the White-Bone Demon*), as well as Tian Han's *Guan Hanqing* and *Xie Yaohuan*—, though banned simultaneously during the Cultural Revolution along with other historical plays and the entire traditional repertoire, were mainly investigated by Wagner for their political aspects. More elaborations on why these historical plays were revived soon after the fall of the "Gang of Four" and remained popular were completely lacking. Additionally, little assessment has been made of their aesthetic value.

However, the rash conclusion that Ma Lianliang's performance of Hai Rui was completely a failure is quite doubtful because Ma was one of the *jingju* stars leading the Beijing Jingju Troupe, whose performance reputation had a strong market appeal. Secondly, it is also worth noting that the creation of historical plays had started since Mao's Talks at the Yan'an Forum in 1942. In approximately a decade (1949-1960), one hundred and sixty new *jingju* plays—including all adaptations, revisions and particularly historical plays—were created by only a single performance company—China National Peking Opera Company in Beijing.[20] Besides *Hai Rui* and *Xie Yaohuan*, which were constantly questioned as allegorical interpretations of the CCP's politics, there were a large number of historical plays emerging in the tide of creation, which were not only popular at the time, but also turned into the China National Jingju Company's reserved plays and most frequently performed on the contemporary stage all over China in the

[20] Beijingshi yishu yanjiusuo and Shanghai yishu yanjiusuo, editorial committee. *Zhongguo Jingju Shi* (*A History of Chinese Jingju*), (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1999), Volume 3, 1557-1558. It was a concluding document made by the China National Peking Opera Company in 1960 according to their performance history during 1949-1960. One hundred and sixty was a rough number of the new plays the company had created and performed during the time. Those plays still in creation or rehearsals at the time were not included in calculation.

post-Cultural Revolution era. In this sense, the plays which Wagner had selected and named as "fringe" were exactly belonging to the central core of the historical plays due to their successful revival and popularity. For instance, *Xie Yaohuan* was not only a representative play of famous *jingju* actress Du Jinfang (1932-), but also taught as an educational masterpiece for its successfully invented arias and well-adapted stage techniques and performance skills.

Furthermore, the definition of *xinbian lishixi* (new jingju historical plays) remained quite ambiguous and unclear. In a narrow sense, only those plays drawing materials from historical materials and created after 1949—such as *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, *Xie Yaohuan*, and *Yezhu Lin* (*Wild Boar Forest*)—were counted as new historical plays. However, even within this sphere there has been a certain confusion. For example, while *jingju* master Mei Lanfang's *Muguiying Guashuai* (*Muguiying Takes Command*), drawing its material from legends and historical accounts about General Yang's family in the Song Dynasty, was generally regarded as a *traditional* masterpiece, few realized that the play was created in the very late 1950s, and performed by Mei and his troupe as a contribution to the celebration of the tenth National Day of the PRC. Even fewer realized that it was actually a historical play newly constructed under a director system, despite its gaining extensive popularity and becoming one of the Eight Mei Masterpieces[21] whereas the other seven are indeed from the traditional repertoire. Why was a historical play

[21] The so-called "Eight Mei Masterpieces" refer to eight Mei's representative plays. They not only best illustrate Mei's art style, but also were most frequently performed by Mei himself and as educational plays taught to Mei's successors and followers. Besides *Muguiying Guashuai* (*Muguiying Takes Command*), the other seven titles including five *jingju* plays and two pieces of *kunqu*: *Bawang Bieji* (*The Hegemon-King Bids Farewell to His Concubine*), *Guifei Zuijiu* (*Guifei Intoxicated*), *Yuzhoufeng* (*Beauty Defies Tyranny*), *Feng Huanchao* (*The Phoenix Returns to Her Nest*), *Shengsi Hen* (*Regrets of Life and Death*), as well as *Kunqu Youyuan Jingmeng* (*Awakened From a Dream in the Garden*), and *Kang Jinbing* (*Resisting Jin Invaders*).

newly created by Mei mistaken by the vast majority as coming from the traditional repertoire? Does it suggest that this new historical play was substantially a continuity of *jingju* traditional repertoire, and the creation made was a repetition of traditions from the old plays because a large number of historical plays resembled the traditional performance styles and won wide reputation for their aesthetic and artistic achievements; or, was it only for the politics' sake, as most scholarship suggested?

In a broader sense, should those plays drawing their materials from ancient mythologies and folktales also be considered as historical plays, such as *Baishe Zhuan* (*The Legend of the White Snake*)? Does "historical" mean that the play is about real history rather than legend, or only that it deals with materials of the kind dealt with by traditional *jingju*? If historical plays were created under political pressure because they were considered as the best tool for educating the people, why were plays such as Mei's *Muguiying Takes Command*, Li Shaochun (1919-1975)'s *Wild Boar Forest*, and the Monkey King Play that Wagner had mentioned, revived soon? They re-gained popularity not because of their alleged political connotations but because of their outstanding artistic demonstrations. Why were those newly created arias passed down and extensively practiced among amateurs who might not even be conscious of the political background in which these plays had been created? In order to investigate the mystery of creating new *jingju* historical plays, we need to begin with how they originated.

Driven Up to the Mountain Liang and the Birth of New Jingju Historical Plays

I have mentioned in the first chapter that, after Mao Zedong's famous "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" in May 1942, the CCP directed that drama was one

of the most effective weapons to mobilize and educate the masses and it should be developed first among all literature and art forms. Under Mao's directive of "*tuichen chuxin* (push out the old and create the new)," and his calling for the arts to reflect class struggle and to serve the interests of the masses rather than those of the ruling class or the elites, a significant play, as the first major work belonging to the genre *xinbian lishixi* (new historical *jingju* plays), *Bishang Liangshan* (*Driven Up to the Mountain Liang*) was written by Yang Shaoxuan (1893-1971) in Yan'an to meet the CCP's political demands of art for utilitarian purposes. The plot was mainly based on an incident in the renowned sixteenth-century novel *Shuihu Zhuan* (*Outlaws of the Marsh*) about the bandit Song Jiang and his followers, who were rebels against imperial authority. The story was set into a turbulent time period—960-1127—the end of the Northern Song Dynasty, and depicted how a low-level official Lin Chong joined the Mountain Liang rebels. The play, first performed in 1943, was created by the Mass Arts Research Association, an amateur group of the Central Party School's teachers and students. But what pushed *Driven Up to the Mountain Liang* into a more significant position in the making of historical plays was a letter Mao, after seeing a performance, wrote on January 9, 1944, to the playwright Yang Shaoxuan and its director Qi Yanming (1907-1978), highly praising the play:

> History was created by the people. However, in the past, lords and ladies, old and young, ruled the stage. Now, you have reversed this reversal of history by putting the masses back to control the stage. I need to congratulate you because you have restored the true face of history and opened a new path for creating plays. Guo Moruo[22] has done lots of good work on writing historical plays…yours is an epoch-making beginning of

[22] Guo Moruo (1892-1978) was an author, poet, historian and archaeologist. Guo was a prolific writer of poetry, fiction, plays, autobiographies, translations, and historical and philosophical treaties. He was also the first President of both the Chinese Academy of Sciences and University of Science & Technology of China. During the Cultural Revolution in 1996, he was one of the first to be attacked due to the works he had written.

> revolutionizing old traditional theatre. I strongly encourage you to create and perform more plays like this![23]

Mao's enthusiasm for *Driven Up to the Mountain Liang* made the real "epoch-beginning" of creating historical plays, especially in the form of *jingju*.[24] It was also worth noting that in his "Talks," Mao had emphasized both the utilitarian use of the arts and the aesthetic and artistic qualities, whereas in practice, apparently much more attention was given to the political considerations and the subsequent debates as well were focused on their political aspects. In order to comprehend the motive for creating new *jingju* historical plays, to explain why later plays on historical figures such as Hai Rui and Xie Yaohuan were criticized for their alleged political involvements, and to explore why successful aesthetic and artistic creations in these new *jingju* historical plays were to a large extent ignored by scholars in both west and China, we need to carefully examine the creation of *Driven Up to the Mountain Liang* and investigate how political ideologies gradually and thoroughly permeated the play and the formation of its characters.

Individualistic Heroism vs. Mass Movement

Since Yang finished the first draft of *Driven Up to the Mountain Liang*, it underwent numerous revisions focused on the issue of whether the emphasis should be put on portraying the protagonist Lin Chong's individual heroic actions or the suppressed

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[23] Mao Zedong. "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on the Literature and Arts" and "A Letter after Seeing *Bishang Liangshan*." In *Chinese Theories of Theatre and Performance from Confucius to the Present*, ed. and trans. by Faye Chunfang Fei. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 129-142.

[24] Historical Drama was the general name given to the genre the CCP created specifically on its own and in various dramatic forms. Since this dissertation focuses on *jingju*, it only examines those plays created in *jingju* form, thus it has the name "new *jingju* historical plays."

masses' rebellions against the ruling class. Those who supported the former argued that Lin Chong, as the lead character of the play, was the main one that joined forces with the rebels in the Mountain Liang. A series of significant incidents were centered upon Lin Chong, such as "White Tiger Hall," "Wild Boar Forest," and "Burning of the Fodder Depot," so his individual and heroic actions should be emphasized. On the contrary, others contended that the play's theme should reflect class struggle rather than individualistic heroism. Lin Chong, as the protagonist, was merely one representative of the vast suppressed majority. The play should highlight the importance of the Mass Movement, without which Lin Chong could not have successfully joined the rebels. He was a hero driven by the collective strength of the masses to the Mountain Liang (revolutionary road), during which process he learned how to differentiate enemies and friends, how to eventually unite those who had the potential to be united and defeat their enemies.

While much weight has been given to the play's ideological construction and, in particular, the power of the mass movement, the author totally re-framed the original draft. For instance, a new scene "Promotion" was added in its second draft to reflect the court officials' and the ruling class's indulgence in luxury and extravagance. Later, because wallowing in luxury was not considered a sufficient a wrongdoing of the ruling class, in a third revision, a scene of depicting the calamity-ridden civilians was added in the beginning of "Promotion," and by the end of the scene, innocent civilians were beaten to death by the influential officials to show their heartlessness and cruelty. These new revisions were aimed to give prominence to the conflicts between the ruling class and the suppressed masses, so that the realization of revolution as the only means to protect the

interests of the working class (peasants and laborers) was further stressed and justified. In sum, before the real protagonist Lin Chong appeared on stage, there were already four scenes performed to reflect a conflict that might break out at any moment.[25]

Romantic Love vs. Brotherhood

Practically, in both the original novel and the play, the incidents causing Lin Chong's disobedience against the court actually resulted most directly from his wife's unfortunate experiences while the couple was worshiping gods in a temple. In the scene of "Offering Incense in a Temple," after Lin accompanied his wife Madame Lin to offer incense in the temple, they decided to take a tour of the temple. During the tour, Madame Lin caught the eyes of Gao Yanei, the lecherous foster son of Grand Marshal Gao Qiu. Impressed by Madame Lin's beauty, Gao Yanei tried to molest her, but Lin showed up in time and stopped Gao. Since Gao became obsessed by Madame Lin, he enlisted Lin Chong's friend Lu Qian and asked him to distract Lin Chong by asking Lin out for drinks. Then Gao tricked Madame Lin to a house and tried to rape her there. Due to the just-in-time alert from Lin Chong's servant, Lin rushed there and saved his wife from Gao's sexual advances. Though frustrated in frenzy, Gao swore to get Lin's wife. He turned to his foster father for help. Through a weapon seller, Gao Qiu sold Lin Chong a precious saber. Then he requested Lin Chong's presence in his residence under the pretext of seeing Lin's new weapon. Lin was tricked into the trap Gao Qiu had set up for him, and entered the White Tiger Hall while carrying his weapon. He did not expect that

[25] See Liu Zhiming. "From the Publication of '*Bishang Liangshan*' to a Series of Problems in *Pingju* [*Jingju*] Reforms," in *Bishang Liangshan* (*Driven Up to the Mountain Liang*), Jin Ziguang ed., (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1980), 112-16. Liu's article was originally a preface to the first edition of *Bishang Liangshang* published by the Guanghua Bookstore of Yan'an in 1944.

important meetings were held there and weapons were not permitted inside the hall. Lin was caught carrying a weapon and was arrested. He was then accused of attempting to assassinate a grand marshal, thus was sentenced to face-tattooing and immediately afterwards transported under escort to a distant place (Cang Zhou) for penal servitude.

In the original scene "Long Pavilion," Madame Lin saw her wrongly accused husband Lin Chong for a farewell at the long pavilion before he headed off to Cang Zhou for his penal servitude. In deep sorrow, Lin divorced his wife before leaving. However, Madame Lin remained faithful to her husband and hanged herself after Gao Qiu repeatedly pressured her to marry his foster son Gao Yanei. Since the love between Lin and his wife was considered as exceedingly sentimental and inappropriate for the growth of Lin's revolutionary determination, more roles were added in this departing scene, such as retired workers and acquaintances from Lin's neighborhood, so as to make Lin feel the love and care he needed from his comrade masses during the difficult times. In this sense, the friendship among comrades and brothers substituted for the romantic love between a husband and his wife, and became in the CCP's view a more justified motive driving Lin onto a revolutionary road. Furthermore, the author added a couple of small scenes, such as "Slaughterhouse" and "Wine-shop," in which more civilians like Lin appeared and foreshadowed their joining with Lin as his fellows in the following plot. Lin's dedication to revolution and the masses' high consciousness of class struggle now were highlighted in these revisions.[26]

A Docile Civilian vs. The Revolutionary Leader

[26] *Ibid.*, 112-116. The following discussion on play revisions is also drawn from this work.

Lin Chong's personality in the original draft was criticized as well. Some questioned why Lin kept silence at the time when he was accused of a fabricated charge, and why he remained inactive on his way to Cang Zhou even when he suffered from the guards' beating and attempt to murder him. According to critics, this showed that Lin had not been freed from his innate ideology of slavishness and that Lin still placed great hopes on the government and the ruling class. Compared to Lin Chong's continuous compromise with the court, another character in the play, Lu Zhishen, was applauded enthusiastically due to his loyal commitment to his sworn brothers and his initiative in taking revolutionary actions. For instance, when Lin was framed and exiled to Cang Zhou, Lu Zhishen secretly followed him along the way and protected him from the guards who had been bribed to murder him in the Wild Boar Forest. Although, fearful for their lives, the guards escorted Lin to the destination Cang Zhou without causing further problems, Lin's persuasion of Lu not to kill the guards and his statements about obedience and following orders in the scene "Wild Boar Forest" were condemned.

In addition, the original plot showed that in Cang Zhou, Lin Chong met and befriended Chai Jin, who provided him with silver so that he could bribe the jailer in Cangzhou Prison to make his stay there more comfortable. However, Gao Qiu was not satisfied with Lin's fate and sent Lu Qian to Cang Zhou to kill Lin. In the scene "Burning the Fodder Depot," Lu Qian arrived at Cang Zhou and bribed the chief warden to assign Lin Chong to oversee a fodder depot. Later, Lu Qian and the warden set fire to the depot in an attempt to murder Lin. However, due to Lin's poor living condition, his hut had collapsed under the heavy snowfall, and he had taken shelter earlier in a nearby temple, thus avoiding the committed arson. When he heard voices outside the temple, he

immediately recognized Lu Qian's voice and, having learned that his wife was dead, without any more toleration, he rushed out from the temple and killed Lu and his accomplices.

Obviously, Lin Chong's long tolerant silence and individualistic motivations later in the burning scene did not meet the CCP's demands for the mass movement campaign. In the CCP's view, since the power of the masses should be crucial in winning this battle—i.e. killing Lu Qian, the warden and their accomplices—the complete absence of the peasants was not allowed. Thus, Yang and Qi added another two scenes before Lin Chong was escorted to Cang Zhou, which portrayed how the frontier military and officials corrupted and savagely oppressed the local peasants. When Lin Cong arrived in Cang Zhou, whereas in the original plot he tried to settle down, in the new version, after he met the local peasants, he finally realized, "I came to the frontier to do services for my country, but how could I serve my country well unless I first get rid of these villains and save my fellow peasants?"[27] From this point, his personal hatred for Gao Qiu was transformed into a great hostility to the ruling class. Lin's ideological transformation was fulfilled in these added scenes during which he became quite conscious that it was time to take up arms and overthrow the decayed court. Thus, a following scene "Sworn Brothers" was added before "Burning the Fodder Depot." In this scene, Lin befriended the local peasants and united them to be sworn brothers. With the masses' support in the revised "Burning the Fodder Depot," Lin Chong successfully killed his enemies. It was then that he finally decided to become an outlaw (revolutionary) and lead his sworn brothers (fellow comrades) to the mountain Liang. In conclusion, it was only when Lin Chong's

[27] *Ibid.*, 116.

individualistic actions became a part of the mass movement that he could be a representative of the peasants and turn into a real revolutionary leader.

Now, to a certain point, it was understandable why new *jingju* historical plays were constantly scrutinized for their political involvement; since its inception, *Driven Up to the Mountain Liang* undertook numerous revisions and re-framings so as to be going along with the CCP's political campaign and directive. From the analysis above, we get a sense of how a new ideology was successfully installed into an artistic work, how a political idea reflecting the contemporary CCP's policies influenced the process of play creation and revision—the addition and deletion of certain characters and scenes—, and how many political suggestions had been given and accordingly how many drafts had been written before it was eventually highly praised by Mao. Similarly, we could also see that many historical plays were created during the same time or later on under such circumstances. And it is easier to answer why their aesthetic and artistic aspects were, if not completely, largely absent in discussion in such a heavily political context.

The New Jingju Historical Plays: The Genre

The creation of *xianbian lishixi* (new *jingju* historical plays) as one of the CCP's political demands in drama did not appear in its official directive until April 1960 when the Department of Culture held a *xiqu* festival to exhibit all newly created plays reflecting contemporary or revolutionary themes. After the festival, on May 3, as the representative of the Department of Culture, Qi Yanming pointed out that "we should emphasize equally three types of plays—those reflecting contemporary and revolutionary themes,

plays from the traditional repertoire, and the newly written historical plays."[28] In November 1960, Zhou Yang held a conference to call for all historians writing plays drawing materials from histories. He even invited Wu Han to draft a list of new historical plays that should be written and performed.[29] Since the birth of *Driven Up to the Mountain Liang* and during a long time afterwards, Chinese historians such as Wu Han, served as playwrights for these newly written plays, and "historical play" was subsequently applied to define the genre. However, the title itself remained as a rather ambiguous concept, and here I sum up some causes that might result in this confusion:

A. *Time*. There is no exact date for what constitutes a "new" play. For instance, though it was generally agreed that the new *jingju* historical play mainly referred to those plays created after the establishment of the PRC (1949), in practice, the Yan'an time (1930s and 40s) had already witnessed the birth of a series of these newly written plays, including some major works as significant as *Driven Up to the Mountain Liang* and *Sanda Zhujiazhuang* (*Occupy Family Zhu's Village by Three Attacks*) which both drew their materials from the novel *Outlaws of the Marsh*. What is more, there was an acceleration of the process during the late 1950s due to the CCP's emphasis on creating more historical plays, and immediately later in 1960, a directive to campaign for the importance of making three types of plays—the old repertoire, newly-written historical plays, and the new plays reflecting contemporary (revolutionary) themes.

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[28] Zhu Yinghui. *Dangdai Xiqu Sishinian* (*Forty Years of the Contemporary Chinese Traditional Theatre*). (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1993), 243. "On the New Written Historical Plays," originally published on *Fujian Xiju* (*Fujian Drama*), 1986, Issue 3.
[29] *Ibid.*

B. *Contents*. Newly created *jingju* historical plays drew their materials from Chinese history, which specifically referred to all materials reflecting histories from antiquity to the May Fourth Movement in 1919. However, historical plays not only included those plays written on historical incidents and stories from the ancient time to 1919, but also contained those written on various legends, folktales, myths, and mythologies, despite the fact that the latter might differ significantly from the former—from characters and plots to their stage representations (costumes, etc.). For example, it was more or less awkward to call these mythological plays newly created after 1949, such as the new *Baishe Zhuan* (*The Legend of the White Snake*) and the new *Tianhe Pei* (*A Love Story of Niulang and Zhinü* or *Romance of the Milky Way*), "historical" plays.

C. *Forms*. Even within the genre, these newly written historical plays varied from one to another in their conception of dramatic form. A large number of plays appeared similar to the traditional *jingju* plays in their stage presentations; for instance, the most representative one might be Mei Lanfang's *Muguiying Takes Command*, which, although created in the late 1950s under the director system, was totally a performance in the form of the old repertoire. Others such as *San Daoling* (*Three Attempts to Steal the Arrow-Shaped Token of Authority*) were a demonstration of traditional skills and techniques typically used in *jingju wuxi* (martial plays). Similarly, *Yangmen Nüjiang* (*The Female Generals of Yang Family*) was considered a masterpiece due to its full demonstration of almost all traditional *jingju* role types, both in its songs and dances. On the other hand, there were also some other newly written *jingju* historical plays of which the structure

followed a more Ibsenian style—beginning, climax and ending—rather than the traditional episodic structure. Moreover, as Mackarras has pointed out, "in addition to be written now by authors whose identities are known, they often have elaborate setting, in contrast to the bare stage of Chinese traditional theatre."[30]

D. *Variations.* Besides its contents and forms, there were a certain number of newly written *jingju* historical plays that were actually adaptations of other forms of *xiqu*. For instance, Mei's *Muguiying Takes Command*, which I have mentioned above, drew great inspiration from famous *yuju*[31] artist Ma Jinfeng (1922-)'s performance with the same title. Another play created and performed in 1963, *Chun Cao Chuangtang* (*Chun Cao Breaks in at the Court*), was a play adapted from *puxian xi* from Fujian Province. These plays' plots and characters, in a sense, were heavily based on other forms of Chinese traditional theatre, but eventually became *jingju* masterpieces due to their successfully assimilating various local tunes and performance elements.

We can see that to give the new *jingju* historical plays an accurate definition would evidently throw us into another battle. Though assorted within the same genre, the individual (re-) presentations of historical plays varied from one to another. There were plays created during Yan'an time and performed continuously after 1949; there were a number of historical plays made after 1949 but in a more traditional form; there were plays which, rather than drawing materials from historical incidents, based their plots on

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[30] Gabrielle H. Cody and Evert Sprinchorn, eds. *The Columbia Encyclopedia of Modern Drama*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), Volume 1, 465. I do not in any way suggest that Mackarras' conclusion about historical dramas was wrong, but he was certainly talking about all forms of historical dramas, including spoken drama. That is why, in his opinion, historical dramas are significantly different from the traditional repertoire.

[31] *Yuju*, one form of the Chinese traditional theatre, was a local opera/drama popular in Henan province.

ancient myths and legends; there were some which, completely for political considerations, were revised repeatedly to meet the Party's demands during their creation, while others, involving artists and musicians' creation, turned into masterpieces.

What is more, similar to Yao Wenyuan's attack on Wu Han that Hai Rui was a historical figure implemented to satirize Mao's policies, using historical figures or incidents to interpret the contemporary political context had become a practical strategy, originated in the creation of *Driven Up to the Mountain Liang*; I have analyzed above how political ideologies were applied to the reformulation of a historical event in order to reflect class struggle and the power of mass movement. Since this strategy, extensively adopted during the early phase of making historical plays, caused a series of problematical issues and heated debates, the Chinese historians and critics named it the "anti-historicism" inclination, which specifically referred to the methodology of allegorical interpretations in the creation of new *jingju* historical plays. In these plays, it had become basically impossible to present a historical subject without its being interpreted as an allegory for contemporary situations.

The New Romance of the Milky Way and the Criticism of Anti-Historicism

During the early 1950s, the CCP's demands for correct representation of contemporary life in drama created anxiety on the part of the playwrights who wrote on historical themes as the CCP turned them without exception into political references. Besides the inclination of CCP politics to apply allegorical interpretation in plays such as *Driven Up to the Mountain Liang* and *Occupy Family Zhu's Village by Three Attacks*, this method was now exercised extensively in both the reform of traditional repertoire

and the creation of historical plays, particularly in the newly created plays drawing materials from ancient myths and legend. For instance, in the reformation of traditional plays, fairies and gods in heaven were turned into real human beings and set into a certain historical time period, such as the Han or Ming Dynasty. And almost without exception, they all ended up in a peasants' rebellion. In a play titled *Jiang Ziya and Nezha*, which drew its plot from *Fengshen Bang* (*The Investiture of Gods*)—one of the major vernacular Chinese epic novels written in the Ming Dynasty, intertwining numerous mythological elements of deities, immortals, and spirits—in its final scene, as Jiang Ziya was fighting against his enemy Shen Gongbao, a prop tiger made of paper suddenly appeared on the stage during their fighting. The performers punched holes into the paper tiger; thus it could be interpreted allegorically as referring to the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid North Korea (1950-1953) because Mao had said that all imperialists and reactionaries were paper tigers.[32]

A similar allegory appeared also in a new historical play *Jiatu Mieguo* (*Occupy the State of Guo Via the State of Yu*). The original plot was based on the historical incident occurring during the early Spring and Autumn period, when the State of Jin prepared to occupy the State of Guo. Since there was a State of Yu between the two States, Jin requested Yu's permission to cross so that it could occupy Guo by way of Yu. However, after occupying the State of Guo, on the way back, Jin's military suddenly attacked Yu; thus, it became a famous strategy of using one stone to kill two birds—occupying both Yu and Guo by borrowing a path from Yu. In the newly written play, the author turned

[32] Zhu Yinghui. *Dangdai Xiqu Sishinian* (*Forty Years of the Contemporary Chinese Traditional Theatre*). (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1993), 131-132.

the State of Guo into mainland China, and the State of Yu into North Korea. Under the attacks of Jin, simultaneously turned into the imperialistic U.S., soldiers in Guo (China) were even anachronistically singing *Three Rules of Discipline and Eight Points for Attention*, a song reflecting the Chinese Red Army's military doctrine.[33]

In these newly written historical plays (including those drawing materials from mythology), the love story between Niulang and Zhinü was most frequently adopted. For instance, during the single month of August 1951, many versions of *Niulang and Zhinü* were performed, among which Yang Shaoxuan's[34] newly written *Tianhe Pei* (*Romance of the Milky Way*) aroused most heated debate, and his anti-historicism methodology used in playwriting was severely criticized.[35]

The new *Romance of the Milky Way* was based on a myth depicting the love between Zhinü Star (Vega), a beautiful fairy in Heaven, and Qianniu Star (Altair), a handsome young man. According to the myth, since the love between gods was forbidden in Heaven, Niulang was punished by having to fall down to the earth after their love was found out by the Empress, while Zhinü was penalized to do the non-stop work of weaving a brocade day and night. One day, some fairies begged the Empress to allow their trip to the Bilian Pool on earth. Since the Empress was in a very good mood that day, Zhinü was also permitted to go with the other fairies on the condition that they must go and come back as soon as they could. While on the earth, the Qianniu Star was re-born

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[33] *Ibid.*, 132.

[34] Yang, the author of *Driven Up to the Mountain Liang*, as I have mentioned in the above section, taught at the Peking University and Beijing Normal University. He had participated the anti-Japanese movements in both Hankou and Xi'an during the Second World War. As a member of the editorial committee of Marxism-Leninism Institute, a researcher at the Party School of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, he had also served as the President of the Pingju (Jingju) Research Institute set up in Yan'an.

[35] Fu Jin. *Xinzhongguo Xiju Shi: 1949-2000* (*A History of Chinese Drama: 1949-2000*). (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002), 25.

into a farmer's family and was named Niulang. He led a life of ploughing with an ox and a wheelbarrow without knowing that the ox was also a god from Heaven—the Gold-Ox Star. One day, the ox suddenly spoke and told Niulang to go to the Bilian Pool where some fairies were bathing. He asked Niulang to take away the red clothes because the fairy wearing the red would be his wife. Niulang went there and hid in the reeds of Bilian Pool. In a short time, these fairies flew down and took their clothes off to have a bath in the pool. Niulang quickly came out and took the red clothes away. When the fairies saw him, they suddenly put on their clothes and flew away except the one without her clothes—Zhinü. Then Niulang appeared and Zhinü found happily that this young man was indeed her Qianniu Star. Hence, she became Niulang's wife. After marriage, the couple loved each other very much and soon they had a son and a daughter. However, the Empress was furious about this and sent the heavenly army to catch Zhinü and bring her back. On this day, Niulang cried sadly to Zhinü that the ox was dead. Before death, the ox told Niulang to take the ox's skin because some day it would be needed for flying. They did what the ox told them and buried him well. Suddenly, the heavenly army arrived and snatched Zhinü away. Zhinü was sad, but soon she heard Niulang's voice calling, "Wait for me!" In the sky, Zhinü turned around and saw Niulang shouldering two baskets where their son and daughter sat. Niulang was wearing the ox skin and flew after her with their little children crying aloud. When Niulang almost reached Zhinü, the Empress came by clouds. She pulled out a hairpin from her hair and drew a line between them. A huge heavenly river (Milky Way) appeared between the couple. They could not go across any more, and the family was separated. Zhinü was crying on one side and Niulang together with their children were crying on the other side. All the fairies and

gods present were deeply touched, even including the Empress herself. Thus the Empress agreed that Niulang and his children could come and meet Zhinü once a year on the day of July 7 (in the Chinese lunar calendar). Since then, they lived on the both sides of the heavenly river and looked at each other from afar. In autumn's night, people on earth could find two bright stars lying on both sides of the Milky Way. They were Zhinü and Niulang. And beside Niulang, there were two little stars—they were their son and daughter. On the evening of July 7, a large number of magpies built a temporary bridge with their bodies for the couple to meet. So the day, July 7, became the Chinese Saint Valentine's Day.

Compared to the original story, in the author's new revision, the entire plot was set to go along with the CCP campaign for Land Reform and the War to Resist U.S. and Aid North Korea. In the play, the playwright created a new character—an old man named "Truth," who had a huge abacus named "Science," with which he could calculate what had happened in the past and what would occur in the future. He lived in the mountains and made agricultural tools from a smelting furnace—hammer and sickle—obviously a part of the Communist symbolism, which stood for the industrial proletariat and peasantry. The old man "Truth" gave hammers and sickles to Niulang and Zhinü, and taught them how to use these tools to revolutionize the world. In this play, every single detail had its contemporary allegory. For instance, the ox represented a tractor, and the magpies were birds symbolizing peace. There were "Green Leaf Island" and "Red Cloud Island" in Heaven, which respectively represented Taiwan and North Korea. And the then U.S. President Truman became the evil Empress, whose heavenly army was equipped with bedbugs (tanks) and owls (fighter-bombers). There were also other representations

by means of these deities and fairies: the snake referred to education, and the fox meant diplomacy. And in the end of the play, all the reactionary fairies were wiped out by the united masses (Zhinü and Niulang), who now knew how to take advantage of their agricultural tools as weapons.[36]

Since there were already eleven troupes and groups in Beijing having *Romance of the Milky Way* performed in various versions, immediately after the performance of Yang's version, the publisher of *Renmin Xiju* (*People's Drama*) organized a seminar to discuss "how we could *correctly* adapt these outstanding myths and mythologies which had been passed down for hundreds and thousands of years,"[37] due to the numerous mistakes found in Yang's adaptation. It was agreed at the seminar that "the correct adaptation should keep these myths' and mythologies' original plot. Besides the emphasis on the themes of love and labor, we should give free rein to the playwright's imagination as long as the depiction of the working masses is healthy and beautiful."[38] If this critique had not mentioned Yang's mistakes directly, a couple of days later, on August 31, 1951, *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*) published Ai Qing's[39] article titled "On *Niulang and Zhinü*," which publicly criticized Yang's play. In this article Ai argued that "art is for art's sake and literature is for literature's sake," so that the playwrights should not impose their political views onto the play. This article obviously aroused Yang's anger; he immediately argued back and wrote three letters intensely to condemn the *People's*

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[36] Zhu Yinghui. *Dangdai Xiqu Sishi Nian* (*Forty Years of the Contemporary Chinese Traditional Theatre*). (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1993), 132.
[37] "About the Seminar On *Romance of the Milky Way* Organized by Our Publisher ," *Renmin Xiju* (*People's Drama*). Volume 3, Issue 5. Fu Jin. *Xinzhongguo Xiju Shi: 1949-2000* (*A History of Chinese Drama: 1949-2000*). (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002), 26.
[38] See footnote 37.
[39] Ai Qing (1910-1996) was regarded as one of the finest Chinese modern poets.

Daily. Thus, the *People's Daily* on November 3, published Yang's rebuttal to Ai's criticism, "The Harmful Aspects of 'Art for Art's Sake and Literature for Literature's Sake'—A Criticism Of Ai Qing's '*On Romance of the Milky Way*'," but the consequence of this article's publication was completely out of Yang's expectation: it sparked a heated debate on the anti-historicism tendency and methodology in the creation of historical plays, which involved not only attacks from Ai Qing but also a series of other important writers and influential critics.[40]

Previously, Yang had compared different versions of *Romance of the Milky Way*, and particularly praised *jingju* artist Wang Yaoqing (1881-1954)'s performance of it. However, despite any description of Wang's artistic creations or demonstrations, he wrote, "Wang had well outlined a basic story of Niulang and Zhinü in his performance though he did not give a thorough understanding of the theme." What he appreciated most about Wang's version was that Wang used an *old* ox and a *broken* wheelbarrow as props in the play, which, in Yang's interpretation, illustrated well the life of poverty-stricken peasants. What is more, if without the old ox's skin, it is impossible for Niulang to catch up with Zhinü, then the ox's skin could also be considered as a tool for the laborers, which symbolized the significant role that these tools had played for the peasantry. Since the original myth did not suggest that the ox was "old" and the wheelbarrow was "broken," Yang argued that, "this was a creation. You see, the old ox was the means of production, whereas the broken wheelbarrow was the tool of production; however, the old ox could not be harnessed automatically onto the

[40] Fu Jin. *Xinzhongguo Xiju Shi: 1949-2000* (*A History of Chinese Drama: 1949-2000*). (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002), 26.

wheelbarrow without the effort of labor…only when the people got the wheelbarrow ready, could the old ox enter the phase of production…it reflected the basic measure of human life, so this creation was great."[41] Responding to Ai Qing's attacks on his *Romance of the Milky Way*, Yang further argued that Ai's point of "art for art's sake and literature for literature's sake" threatened the CCP's *xiqu* reform. Particularly to Ai's criticism that "Yang's play adopted mythologies to reflect the reality extensively from domestic to foreign: Agrarian Reform, the War to Resist the U.S. Aggression and Aid North Korea, the Fight Against the Despotic Landlords, the Movement to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries (1950-1952), and the work of peacekeeping," Yang responded

> You can see the "facts" Ai has used to accuse me—four lines he quoted from my play: "Niulang was grazing the old ox at the hillside, and Zhinü was so good at weaving the brocade; She wove a net of Heaven that owls could never escape." According to Ai Qing's logic, these were all "barbarians" actions. Why? Because he contended that here "owls" referred to that "Truman" in his article. Obviously, Mr. Ai Qing was too sensitive about what I've written in the play. In fact, I only used "owls" as a metaphor for those saboteurs—who disrupted others' marriages, or sabotaged production, and favored feudalism. Of course, it might also be referring to that imperialistic "Truman," but why was Ai so hostile to the use of allegories? In Ai's own words, it was to preserve so-called "beautiful myths," but in my opinion, he was such a staunch guard for his imperialistic "Truman."
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> ……
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> "It was completely turned into something else"—You were so absolutely right, Mr. Ai Qing. I could not say that I have already turned it "completely" into something else, but my intention was completely to turn it into something else…neither history nor revolution would be merciful to your ideal of "art for art's sake and literature for literature's sake." No matter whether their authors were willing or not, literature itself has been changing all the time. I knew too well about this. I knew that such kind of change in literature would have caused complaints and criticisms from those writers who favored feudalism and capitalism. They considered

[41] Yang Shaoxuan. "The Problems of Historical Dramas in Xiqu Reform—From the *Romance of the Milky Way* Performed This Year," *Renmin Xiju* (*People's Drama*). Volume 3, Issue 6. Fu Jin. *Xinzhongguo Xiju Shi: 1949-2000* (*A History of Chinese Drama: 1949-2000*). (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002), 26.

> these changes "naïve" and "simple," and they called these "barbarian actions." However, no force could arrest the process of these changes. What could they do? They felt so pitiful and sad that they simply had to criticize these changes.[42]

In Yang's opinion, Ai Qing's article was a relentless attack on the CCP's revolution and an advocate for capitalism (Truman), which was way beyond the meaning of a normal literary critique or correspondence.

In order to hear different voices regarding Yang's play and his opinion, *People's Drama* published Yang's previous article "The Problems of Historical Dramas in *Xiqu* Reform—From the *Romance of the Milky Way* Performed This Year." The editor's notes said, "Comrade Yang Shaoxuan's article involved a series of issues in the *xiqu* reform. Yang's theses about historical plays and mythological plays, such as that we could ignore the historical context in the creation of new historical plays (including mythological plays), revealed his anti-historicist inclination."[43] Obviously, in this discussion on the newly written historical plays, *People's Drama* set Yang's article as a negative example, which might serve as a lesson. In the following years, Yang's political life was like his play—a flash in the pan; he was dismissed from the Department of Culture in 1952 and transferred to a teaching post at the Beijing Normal University in 1954. But ironically, as an example of anti-historicism, he was appointed as a professor in History instead of Chinese literature.

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[42] Yang Shaoxuan. "The Harmful Aspects of 'For the Sake of Pure Art and Literature'—A Criticism On Ai Qing's '*On Romance of the Milky Way*'," *People's Daily*, November 3, 1951. Fu Jin. *Xinzhongguo Xiju Shi: 1949-2000* (*A History of Chinese Drama: 1949-2000*), 26.

[43] Editor's notes for Yang Shaoxuan's "The Problems of Historical Dramas in Xiqu Reform—From the *Romance of the Milky Way* Performed This Year," *Renmin Xiju* (*People's Drama*). Volume 3, Issue 6. Fu Jin. *Xinzhongguo Xiju Shi: 1949-2000* (*A History of Chinese Drama: 1949-2000*), 26.

Now, when we were looking back at this history, we found that such histories were surprisingly repeating themselves as authors and intellectuals became victims of the turbulent politics during their times. What Mao had previously praised in 1944 was Yang Shaoxuan's *Driven Up to the Mountain Liang* in which he used the historical figure Lin Chong and a series of historical incidents to reflect the contemporary class struggle and the strength of mass movement. Nearly a decade later, in 1952-54, the exactly same Yang was criticized for his anti-historicist inclination—using the historical figures and incidents to reflect contemporary themes despite their historical context—in his writing of historical and mythological plays and was fired from the Department of Culture. After another decade, in 1965, Wu Han's *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* was criticized by Yao Wenyuan for its supposed use of historical figures to satirize Mao's contemporary policies, and Wu was persecuted during the Cultural Revolution. In Wu Han's case, whether or not this political reference was his intent, it was assumed by the rising leftists within the CCP leadership to attack their political opponents; the CCP was insisting on applying the same kind of "anti-historicism" allegorical reading for which it had condemned Yang Shaoxuan.

Whether or not the playwright should use historical figures and incidents to reflect contemporary themes was neither a recent nor a black-and-white question. Firstly, "using the past to reflect the present" was a traditional methodology in Chinese and Western literature alike. Secondly, how much the playwrights could create a more accurate history by relying on historical sources was still a question since it was obvious that Chinese dramas were mostly derived not from the orthodox historical texts but from novels, legends and folktales, with various distortions and problematic issues. The point here is

that "new *jingju* historical play" was an outcome of the CCP's political campaign and its policies on drama reform. Under such political pressures, the playwrights could hardly refrain from imposing on themselves the intention of writing plays politically. We should also be aware of the fact that some authors were from the Yan'an base, cultivated in the revolution, and some of them even took important roles in the CCP's leadership and were substantially experienced and sophisticated politicians. Furthermore, given that most playwrights were actually historians, it is easy to see why these plays were, to a large extent, lacking in artistic considerations and were focused instead on the message.

Goldstein has asked, "Was this not what it meant to be an active participant in one's own culture, history, and nation," because all *jingju* professionals (artists in particular) were perfectly aware that "they were constructing Peking Opera, (re) interpreting it, and shaping it into a tradition; and they seemed remarkably comfortable with the paradox of inventing tradition."[44] This issue of the conscious shaping of "tradition" is what I would like to investigate in the following section.

The Continuity of Traditions Or the Tradition (Re-) invented

Chinese traditional *jingju* remained one of the main entertainments during the nascent PRC, and *jingju* companies and performance troupes were widespread in China; only new *jingju* historical plays created in Beijing are being examined here. Obviously, this is not to say that *jingju* professionals in other cities—such as *jingju* troupes and performance groups in those traditional *jingju* bases, Shanghai, Tianjian and Wuhan,

[44] Joshua Goldstein. *Drama Kings: Player and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), "Introduction," 5.

etc.—were not participating in making historical plays. However, they could not compete with *jingju* troupes and groups in Beijing either in quantity or in quality. By saying "quantity," I am suggesting that most new *jingju* historical plays produced during 1949-1966 were performed in Beijing and mainly by two *jingju* companies, *Guojia jingju yuan* (China National Peking Opera Company) and Beijing Jingju Company, which gathered a large number of the most renowned and influential professionals and performers. By saying "quality," despite the fact that these plays were products of a particular social environment and political consideration, I refer to their aesthetic and artistic accomplishments, because in my opinion, without this aesthetic quality some of the titles would not have revived so swiftly immediately after the fall of the "Gang of Four," and would have not survived in such a competitive entertainment market as that of twenty-first century China, remaining popular among both professionals and amateurs.

My intention here is certainly not to question whether these plays could all be interpreted according to their alleged social and political analysis of the state of the nation at the time, because much debate, whether friendly or hostile, has already taken place with regard to a series of historical plays focusing on their texts. Many more plays within the genre never appeared in such debate, let alone receiving a discussion on their aesthetic or artistic aspects. Nor is my intent here to deny what past scholarship in both China and the West has contributed to the field. Rather, I would like to call attention to the fact that, unlike many *yuan* plays, which had become solely readable, *jingju* historical plays had all been *performed* at the time and many of them were *revived* on the contemporary stage. It would be unfair to do an exclusively *dramatic* interpretation without a *theatrical* consideration, because besides authors, directors and performers

played significant roles in turning a text into a performance, and audiences' reviews and feedbacks should never be neglected. Evidently, it would be also impossible to do a comprehensive evaluation of the entire historical repertoire. However, if my analysis here would allow more artists' and performers' voices to be heard, and their practical performances to be introduced and further explored—i.e. what was lost and what was at stake along with their accomplishments, what compromises the artists had to make and what they insisted on—I think it would be an invaluable addition to the existing interpretations of plays which were termed "political core pieces."

The New Jingju Historical Plays Created: A Survey

Before I can investigate more about the artistic details, so as to give an overview of its "quantity," I have made a chart for the newly created *jingju* historical plays *performed* by the China National Peking Opera Company during 1949-1964. They are assorted mainly according to the historical periods these plays reflected or were set into, and the complete list can be viewed in Appendix C.

Besides these new *jingju* historical plays created and performed by the China National Peking Opera Company, there were still many other influential titles produced by other *jingju* companies in Beijing. For instance, *Hai Rui Baguan* (*Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*), *Zhaoshi Guer* (*The Orphan of Zhao*), *Chen Sanliang Patang* (*Chen Sanliang at Court*), and *Guandu Zhizhan* (*The Battle of Guandu*) by the Beijing Jingju Company; and *Chufeng Lingkong* (*The Legend of Yang Paifeng*) by the Experimental Jingju Troupe at the Beijing Xiqu School.

From the chart, we can get a general sense of the number of historical plays reflecting various historical time periods created or performed during 1949-1964 by the main *jingju* companies and performance groups in Beijing. Many of these plays remain popular to this day: if we take a glance at the list of plays the China National Peking Opera Company performs on the contemporary Beijing stage, we easily find many titles from the historical repertoire. For instance, *Xie Yaohuan*, which was staged in 1961 by the famous *dan* actress of the Mei School, Du Jinfang, was soon revived in the post-Cultural Revolution era and became one of her representative plays. In another play, *Wild Boar Forest*, *laosheng* actor Li Shaochun (1919-1975) along with his performance team adapted conventional skills and techniques perfectly into the newly written arias and combat scenes, which all turned into highlighted performances and masterpieces extensively imitated and learned by both professionals and amateurs .

The Female Generals of Yang Family, which demonstrated comprehensively *jingju* traditional conventions, from the affiliated skills of various role types to different performance styles, remained extremely popular both during the 1960s and after its revival. It even created a series of new traditions. For example, in a scene portraying the General Mu Guiying and her military troupe lost in the thickly forested mountains, they encounter an old man who was living in the mountains and collecting herbs. When the old man learns that it is Mu Guiying from Family Yang, he volunteers to show them a plank roadway built along perpendicular rock-faces by means of wooden brackets stuck into the cliff, so that Mu and her army can reach their targeted destination. Due to Bi Yingqi (1936-1974)'s successful performance of the old man by using Yan Jupeng

(1890-1942) style, from then on, this character always cast a *yanpai* (Yan school or Yan style) *laosheng*.

Some titles in this chart, adapted from local tunes or other forms of traditional dramas, such as *Chu Cao Breaks into the Court* and *Selling Water*, even became representative plays for a certain role type: *huadan*—which normally referred to those lively, vivacious young female characters. For instance, *huadan* actress Liu Changyu (1942-), who had first performed the character Chun Cao and the cute little maiden respectively in these plays, even established and developed her own performance style due to her outstanding practices and inventions in these newly created plays.

Of course, there were also a large number of historical plays created at the time and never revived. The reasons varied, involving both political and aesthetic aspects. On the one hand, some plays might be too politically sensitive to be revived, such as those plays focused on Hai Rui. On the other hand, some plays, written by historians, were generally lacking in artistic appeal. While we are aware that the new director system had been applied in the course of this period of creating historical plays, we find that it is those plays for which the artists or *jingju* stars played the major roles that remained exceptionally successful and popular. That is, what made these plays successful was not the result of the newly introduced director but rather the continuing popularity of the performing artists. Of these, the most significant performance I would like to introduce and analyze was Mei Lanfang's *Mu Guiying Guashuai (Mu Guiying Takes Command*). It is worth noting that this historical play, focused on the legendary heroine Mu Guiying, was the last new play created by Mei in 1959 before his unexpected death from myocardial infarction two years later in 1961. It was also the only play created by Mei

after the Liberation, under the changed political environment, as a historical play directed by Zheng Yiqiu but substantially considered a traditional masterpiece belonging to the eight most renowned and frequently performed plays representing the Mei school. We can ask why, among many historical plays bearing a marked brand of the times, Mei's play stood out as orthodox and surprisingly traditional.

Mei Lanfang and Mu Guiying Takes Command

1. Plays On The Yang Clan

The chart in Appendix C already shows that many newly written historical plays were set in the Song Dynasty, especially focused on the many legends about the Yang clan. These stories mainly recount how the four generations of Yang clan during the Northern Song Dynasty defended the Song borders from foreign invaders by their unflinching loyalty. While limited details had been provided in the historical text (*History of Song*), the stories of the Yang clan were retold in various novels, legends and folktales, and popularized in various *xiqu* forms. There were already a series of popular *jingju* traditional plays representing legendary figures and stories of the Yang clan.

For example, the *jingju* play *The Fourth Son Visits His Mother* told that three oldest sons of Yang Ye—the patriarch of the Yang clan—were killed in the battle of Golden Beach when they escaped from a city besieged by Liao forces, while the fourth son Yang Yanhui was captured by the enemy and brought back to the Liao regent Empress Dowager Xiao (932-1009). Yang Yanhui lied that his name was Mu Yi. Since the Empress favored him very much, she married her daughter Princess Qiong'e to him.

Thus Mu Yi (Yang Yanhui) became the prince consort of Liao. Yang Yanhui found a chance to return to Song's territory to reunite with his mother.

Another *jingju* play *The Generals of Yang* depicted how, in a later battle at the Mountain Two Wolves, Yang Ye became outnumbered when he was fighting against the Liao forces at the frontline. He sent his seventh son Yang Yansi to break out of the encirclement and request reinforcements from Pan Renmei, who was commanding the main army. However, Pan, who was against the Yang clan, took the opportunity to take revenge. Pan killed Yang Yansi because Yang had killed his son in a previous incident, and he refused to send aid to Yang Ye at the Mountain Two Wolves. The helpless Yang Ye in the end committed suicide by knocking his head on a stone tablet bearing a Han general Li Ning's name.

Besides these plays featuring the heroic actions of the Yang's male generals, there were also many pieces focused on the legend of Mu Guiying—the female general from the Yang clan. In *jingju* play *Muke Fort* and *Yang Yanzhao Beheaded His Son at the Gate of Military Camp*, Yang Ye's grandson Yang Zongbao had two subordinates, Meng Liang and Jiao Zan. In a later battle between Song and Liao, Liao set up a Heaven Gate Formation to prevent Song's army from advancing. Thus, Meng Liang was sent to Wutai Mountain to seek help from Yang Yande, who had become a monk. Simultaneously, Yang Zongbao traveled to Muke Fort to find the Dragon Subduing Wood, with which the Heaven Gate Formation could be broken into. It was in Muke Fort that Yang Zongbao first met My Guiying, who eventually became his wife. Yang Zongbao and Mu Guiying had one daughter named Yang Jinhua and a son named Yang Wenguang, who appeared in both Mei's *Muguiying Takes Command* and another new historical play *The Female*

Generals of Yang Family, which told that when Yang Yanzhao died, there were already very few males left in the Yang clan. Unfortunately, Yang Zongbao was also killed in the action of Western Xia's invasion. His grandmother, She Saihua, also known as She Taijun, at the age of 100, led the twelve women in the Yang clan to participate in the battle against Western Xia, and proved that they were not inferior to their male counterparts.

Besides the members of Yang clan, there were also a series of famous supporting characters in these stories, such as Zhao Defang (the Eighth Virtuous Prince), Kou Zhun, Bao Zheng (Judge Bao), and Pan Renmei. It is worth noting that, before Mei Lanfang created a new play on Mu Guiying, there were already many traditional *jingju* plays existent featuring various characters from the Yang clan and their dealings with the Song court and the Liao and Western Xia kingdoms, which all remained quite popular with audiences.

2. The Synopsis

Obviously, it was generally known that *Mu Guiying Takes Command* was created to celebrate the tenth National Day of New China in 1959, yet despite this apparent political motive, Mei claimed:

> It was actually part of my job to create new plays when I was young. I remembered that I was busiest from April 1915 to September 1916, during which I created and performed eleven completely new plays, including four *shizhuang xi* [plays using contemporary costumes], three *guzhuang xi* [plays using old costumes], and four *kuqu* traditional pieces…I completely stepped down from the stage during the Anti-Japanese War [1937-1945, i.e. Second World War—Asian Battlefield] until after 1945 I resumed my performance. Since I was busy traveling and performing in widespread provinces and cities, I did not have time to create any more new plays

> until 1959—this *Muguiying Take Command* was the first new play I wanted to create since Liberation…I was actually very familiar with Mu Guiying—this character. As early as forty years ago, I had performed a young Mu Guiying focused on her love tales, such as *Muke Zhai* (*Muke Fort*) and *Qiaotiao Mu Tianwang* (*Yang Zongbao Competes with Mu Guiying in a Spear-Combat*). Though these plays were centered on her love stories, they reflected her wisdom, courage and patriotism. I love this character very much, so I performed these two plays a lot at the time.[45]

Besides Mei's passion for the character Mu Guiying, actually his first performance as a *daomadan*[46] was in *Muke Fort*, where he learned to take good command of a series of conventions associated with this specific role type, for instance, how to pose when holding a spear, and how to ride horse and fight on horseback with a spear. What is more, the *yuju* version with the same title performed by the famous *yuju* artist Ma Jinfeng (1922-) obviously became Mei's most direct inspiration. After seeing Ma's performance of her *Mu Guiying Takes Command*, Mei was deeply touched since he had not realized previously that at such an old age Mu could still take the command. He was inspired and encouraged by both the character Mu Guiying and its performer Ma Jinfeng, and decided to adapt this character into a *jingju*.

The background for the play is that the Song Emperor has favored treacherous court officials despite the fact that almost all the males in the Yang clan had died in battles against foreign invasions. She Taijun and her grand-daughter-in-law Mu Guiying are so disappointed by the Song court that they live in the countryside withdrawing from the court society. After twenty years, the Western Xia forces have invaded the western

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[45] Mei Lanfang. *Mei Lanfang Quanji* (*The Complete Works of Mei Lanfang*). Volume 3. "How I created and Performed *Mu Guiying Guashuai*." (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000), 88-89.

[46] *Daomadan* literally means sword and horse *dan*, which refers to a type of female roles featuring woman warriors involving horse riding with a spear. They differ from *wudan* because they fight less. *Daomadan* normally has its own conventional dances and stunts associated with the skills of spears and other weapons.

border again. However, there is not even a competent general to take the command at court. The Emperor is so worried that he holds a fighting competition at the drill ground to select an outstanding general in person. Mu Guiying's daughter Yang Jinhua and son Yang Wenguang join the competition. In the combat, Yang Wenguang kills the treacherous official Wang Qiang's son Wang Lun and wins the seal of the commander in chief. However, since Yang Wenguang is too young to be a chief commander, the Song Emperor requests his mother Mu Guiying to take the command. When the two siblings arrive at home with the chief commander's seal, it reminds Mu Guying of how most of her family members have all died in previous battles; with many complaints about the Emperor and the court, she refuses to take the command. In the end, She Taijun successfully persuades Mu to accept the seal and prepare for the expedition.

The complete performance consisted of eight scenes. In the first scene—"The Front-line Signalled for Help"—the honest court official Kou Zhun reports the news of foreign invasions to the emperor. Since the military reinforcements are much needed while nobody is capable of taking the command, after a discussion with Kou Zhun and a treacherous official Wang Qiang, the Song emperor decides to hold a competition to select a chief commander. Second scene—"Living in the Countryside"—depicts when the news comes that the kingdom of Western Xia is again invading the Song's western borders, She Taijun cares so much about how the frontline units will proceed that she sends her great grand-daughter and son Yang Jinhua and Yang Wenguang to the capital city (Kai Feng) to inquire about the court's reactions. In the third scene "Go to the Capital city," Yang Jinhua and Yang Wenguang arrive at Kai Feng. They visit the Yang clan's old residence—Tianbo Mansion. When they find that the Mansion has turned into

the treacherous court official Wang Qiang's property, they feel so sentimental and indignant that they determine to carry forward their family traditions and bring back the honor of their ancestors. In the following scene "Combat Competition," Yang Wenguang demonstrates his courage and good martial skills by killing his competitor Wang Lun (Wang Qiang's son). Kou Zhun is happy to find out Yang Wenguang's true identity while Wang Qiang is angered by his son's death. Since Yang Wenguang is too young to be the chief commander, Kou Zhun suggests that the emperor request Mu Guiying to take the command. The fifth scene "Accept the Seal of a Chief-Commander," portrays Mu Guiying's entire psychological transformation from refusing the appointment in the beginning to eventually accepting it, which is the most significant scene in the whole play because of Mei's many unprecedented artistic creations in performing this. Since Mu is finally persuaded successfully to take the command, in the following scene "Recall the Old Times," at the drill ground Yang Zongbao tells his children about the militant bearing of their mother in old times, and about how military orders are unalterable and must be obeyed. The last two scenes, "Muster Troops for Inspection" and "Dispatch Troops" end with Mu's readiness for expedition as the chief commander.

3. Representations of Mu Guiying

Although Mei had performed Mu Guiying since his youth, and the new *Mu Guiying Takes Command*'s plot was rather simple, the course of creation reflected how Mei Lanfang managed to construct a brand new play using existent conventions and (re-) invented traditions. It is worth noting that though the script was written by Lu Jingyan and Yuan Yunyi (1920-2004) with a director Zheng Yiqiu (1914-1994), Mei Lanfang still

developed and played the major role, which can be considered the main reason why this new historical play, to a large extent, remained both traditional and Mei.

Though the entire play consisted of eight scenes, Mu Guiying actually appeared in only three scenes with the second one (originally fifth in the play) as the most significant since "Accepting the Seal of a Chief-commander" became one of Mei's masterpieces, and a must-learn piece for the followers of the Mei School. Here I introduce the details during the course of Mei's creation from his own accounts[47] so as to demonstrate how *jingju* traditions were smoothly transformed into new inventions, or how new forms of representation were successfully adapted from the traditional conventions.

A. Living in the Countryside

Mu Guiying's first appearance in the play comes in the second scene "Living in the Conntryside" when She Tiajun, leading the other members of theYang clan living in the peaceful countryside, does not want to interfere with the court affairs. Because almost all male members of the family had sacrificed their lives in the previous battles against foreign invasions, the entire family felt both psychologically and physically exhausted. However, despite the meritorious military service of theYang clan and their loyalty to the court, the fatuous and self-indulgent Song Emperor was especially fond of treacherous court officials, who had squeezed the Yang clan out of the court.

When She Tiajun had just asked her two great-grand children Yang Jinhua and Yang Wenguang to go to the capital city (Kai Feng) to inquire about how the court was prepared to deal with the invasion, at this moment Mu Guiying entered the stage. She

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[47] Mei Lanfang. *Mei Lanfang Quanji* (*The Complete Works of Mei Lanfang*). Volume 3. "How I created and Performed *Mu Guiying Guashuai*." (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000), 88-101.

wore a blue *pi* (overcoat)[48] to indicate both that she was at home rather than on a formal occasion and that her status right now was a mistress of the household rather than a military general. In her singing of four lines of *xipi yuanban*[49], she contended that the capital city was a place full of gossips and troubles so that Jinhua and Wenguang should not be allowed to go since they were too young and had scanty experience of life. But her husband Yang Zongbao and their children continuously persuaded her. Therefore, she was convinced and let her children go. Mu's presence in this scene was not long. The main purpose was to express her complaints about the court so as to foreshadow the later plot—why Mu did not want to accept the seal and take the command. Mu was set into a traditional *qingyi* (i.e. housewife) figure with gentle steps and gestures in this scene, thus making a sharp contrast to her later presence when she was in a warrior's costume and moving as a commander.

B. Accept the Seal of a Chief-Commander

The fifth scene of the play was a major scene for Mu Guiying, which consisted in a large number of songs and movements newly designed by Mei to suggest Mu's psychological transformation. Upon Mu's entrance on the stage, she sang four lines of

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[48] *Pi*, one of the traditional *jingju* costumes, is an overcoat. It is buttoned only at the waist, for the collar is very low and the whole dress reaches to the knees. It may be plain or embroidered with birds, flowers, dragon, phoenix or any other design. It was to be worn as a daily or party dress on less formal occasions. It may cover another type of overcoat "*xuezi*" inside.

[49] The basic *jingju* tunes/melodies were *xipi* and *erhuang*, while there were different *banshi* (modes) developed from these basic tunes but varying in beat, rhythm and melody. The tune of *xipi* was a relatively vivacious, bright and powerful aria, intensive in rhythm, which manifested the mood of firm and pleasant. The varied modes for *xipi* include *yuanban* (original mode), *manban* (largo), *kuai sanyan* (allegro), *sanban* (lyrical and loose mode), *yaoban* (swing mode), *erliu* (two and six), *liushui* (flowing water), *kuaiban* (allegro), *huilong* and so on. Erhuang was used to express the lyric mood, such as mild, placid and gentle. On the other hand, *erhuang* was smooth in rhythm, a fluent aria, which was able to express dolorous grief and pensive emotion. Therefore, it was widely used in tragedies. The different modes for *erhuang* include *yuanban* (original mode), *manban* (largo), *kuai sanyan* (allegro), *sanban* (lyrical and loose mode), *yaoban* (swing mode), and so on.

xipi manban. In these slow arias, she expressed her deep longing for her children who had gone to the capital city in a previous scene. She worried that Yang Jinhua and Yang Wenguang might fall into some dangerous situations and hoped that they could return home sooner. However, the "longing" turned into "anger" after Jinhua and Wenguang came back and showed her the seal of the chief-commander they won from the combat-competition held by the emperor at the drill ground. The seal reminded Mu of those fierce battles in which Yang clan ancestors and members had sacrificed their blood and lives. She was in such fury and sorrow that she blamed her son: he should not have caused the trouble and brought the seal home. She decided to send her son to the court to return the seal. At this time, She Taijun entered and asked Mu why she did not want to take the command. Here Mu had a series of arias in *xipi erliu* to express her complaints about the court. She argued that the Song Emperor was very credulous to slanderous talk, and it was only at this urgent time that he could remember the loyal Yang clan. She was so disappointed that she was not willing to serve such a fatuous emperor again. However, She Taijun told Mu that at this time they should put the borders' safety into priority instead of taking issue personally. Mu accepted She's suggestion but rather grudgingly.

After She exited and Mu was left alone on the stage, Mei Lanfang designed a series of songs and movements to show Mu's psychological struggles and transformations, and has left a description of his thinking about this process:

> This scene aimed to reflect Mu Guiying's patriotism. But Mu had undertaken a series of psychological transformations, from refusal in the beginning to her final acceptance. However, since Mu just accepted She's suggestion, it was too soon for her to hear the beating of the military drums and get ready for the expedition. Therefore, there should be something here to indicate her inner struggle and the complete transformation in the end. But I didn't know what form might be

> appropriate here: to use a monologue or something else? Since there would be lines of arias following, I should not sing here too. I stuck here.
>
> One day, I saw a version of *Mu Guiying Takes Command* by a young *hebei bangzi* actress. In her scene of "accepting the seal," she had a special movement that drew my attention. It reminded me of scenes in two traditional plays—Jiang Wei looked up to see the stars in *Tielong Shan* (*Tielong Mountain*), and Shi Wengong returned to his military camp after a battle in *Yijian Chou* (*Grudge Originated From An Arrow*)—both characters shared a body movement with their hands rolling and rubbing in front of their stomach. I thought why not adapt this traditional movement into my performance. So I adopted a series of conventional patterns of *luogu* [*jiuchui ban*][50] with my mime performance to suggest Mu Guiying's inner thoughts and struggles during this time.[51]

The *luogu* pattern [*jiuchui ban*] was a very typical *jingju* musical pattern used while a general or a warrior was planning how to deal with the situation before leading or sending the army out for battle. There was a sharp distinction between the strong beats and the weak beats in this musical pattern in order to suggest the repeated rises and falls of a man's inner struggle. In particular, it was a pattern normally applied to *wuxi* (martial plays) but seldom in *wenxi* (civil plays). Since *qingyi* is one of *jingju* female role types—mainly referring to the virtuous and elite woman, this might be the first attempt Mei made to adopt *luogu* pattern in a *qingyi* play.[52]

What is more, Mei Lanfang also made changes to its following arias. Originally, there were six lines written by the authors:

> I haven't worn my armour for twenty years and my double-edged sword has become covered all over with dust; All of a sudden I am preparing the saddle for my horse and getting ready for battle again. If it was for the Song Emperor, I should have returned the chief-commander's seal; but my kind grandmother gave me earnest exhortations. All other family members

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[50] *Luogu* was the percussion ensemble composed of a variety of instruments, including cymbals, bells, and woodblocks, in addition to an assortment of gongs and drums. It also had different patterns to suggest a specific environment or situation.

[51] Mei Lanfang. *Mei Lanfang Quanji* (*The Complete Works of Mei Lanfang*). Volume 3. "How I created and Performed *Mu Guiying Guashuai*." (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000), 91.

[52] *Ibid.*

> competed and volunteered to go to the frontline when they heard the news. How should I Mu Guiying not have a loyal heart for the sovereign and my people?

Since the musical pattern *sanban* was already a relatively slow melody here, and six-line arias were considered too many before Mu made up her mind to go to the battle, Mei Lanfang cut them into four and slightly changed the words:

> I haven't worn my armour and left the battlefields for twenty years; Today I am going on the expedition for the sovereign of my country. The entire family was excited and got ready to go into battle when they heard the news; how could I Mu Guiying not have a loyal heart for my country and people?

However, when Mei tried to sing these four lines while making movements and gestures, he found that these arias contradicted his performance. Mei aimed to insert the mime performance he had designed after he finished singing line three. Therefore, he could use the fourth line to conclude his previous mime performance because after finishing singing the fourth line, the *luogu* pattern would have been switched to *jiji feng*, which involved a series of much intensified beats. Since the pattern of the previous *jiuchui ban* was so similar to *jiji feng*, they should not be placed too close to each other. Rather, there should be a line sung between them, so as to separate these two *luogu* patterns. In order to make the arias fit into his performance, he revised these four lines again:

> The entire family was excited when they heard the news from the frontline borders; I, Mu Guiying, am going on the expedition for the sovereign of my country. For twenty years I haven't worn my armour and have left the battlefields; who said that I do not have a loyal heart for my country and people?

The former two lines represented Mu Guiying's determination to go to the frontline borders; after finishing the third line, Mei Lanfang started the mime performance he had already designed. Accompanied by the music of *jiuchui ban*, Mei

threw the water sleeves forcefully outward from his body, and then held the two sleeves together behind his back to suggest that Mu reached a decision. Mei adopted a series of exaggerated large stage steps, which were scarcely used by *qingyi*, to run from the upper stage entrance to the upper stage exit. At the upper stage exit, Mei posed as if holding a spear to suggest Mu's fighting with the enemies. Then Mei threw the water sleeves upward and outward and hung them from the extended fingers of his supine hands. He raised his two hands with water sleeves to the level of his eyebrows to suggest that Mu was looking at herself in a mirror, which substantially denoted that Mu felt she was getting old and could not be compared to her past self. Then, Mei stepped quickly from the upper stage exit back to the upper stage entrance. He pointed to his left and right one time each to suggest that almost all male family members died from previous battles, and she was lacking in assistance. At this moment, the beating of gongs and drums was intensified to reflect Mu's great care for the sovereign and the country. In fact, these previous mime gestures had suggested that Mu Guiying could not find an answer from all her considerations; therefore, Mei Lanfang turned back to the stage center, and spoke a word "ai—," which served as a warning to the orchestral director that he was ready for a change—to sing the fourth line of the arias. Thus, the *luogu* pattern was changed and *huqin* music started accompanying Mei as he finishing up his last line "who said that I do not have a loyal heart for my country and people?"

In the next moments, Mei Lanfang put his hands behind his back while he faced the backdrop. When the orchestra played the horn, Mei moved back two steps and then ran to the upper stage entrance. He threw his two water sleeves forcefully out and turned around to face the audience, which denoted that Mu Guiying had now been filled with

enthusiasms and felt the same energy she had had twenty years ago. Then Mei advanced in quick and short steps around half of the stage to the upper stage exit, turned, held the water sleeves backward and posed in that motion. Now the orchestra made the sounds to suggest that the war-horses were neighing. Mei stepped quickly to grab the seal in his hands, and sang proudly, "Nobody else could take the command unless I take it; nobody else could lead the troops unless I lead. I am asking the servants to prepare my armour, so that I can use my seal to muster troops at the drill ground." While singing the last word, Mei stepped around another half of the stage and back to the center. He moved one step forward, and posed by holding the seal. Accompanied by the *luogu* music, he gradually and smoothly turned back and moved towards the exit at the back of the stage; thus he finished his performance of "accepting the seal."

Mei admitted that it was difficult to perform Mu in this scene because Mu Guiying was wearing *pi* in the first scene in which she appeared and wearing a *kao* (armour) in the last scene, which substantially indicated Mu's status of *qingyi* and *daomadan* and their affiliated role type skills and techniques. However, in the scene of "accepting the seal," though Mu Guiying was in a *qingyi*'s costume, she had in many movements and gestures to show that she was a general and commander. So Mei had to combine both *qingyi* and *daomadan* skills, while making sure that *daomadan*'s exaggerated movements would still fit into *qingyi*'s costumes. He not only knew how to appropriately adopt skills from other performances into his own creation of Mu Guying, but also made unprecedented changes to these conventions so that they were more suitable for the character.

C. Dispatch Troops

The last scene "Dispatch Troops" depicted how, before Mu Guiying went on the expedition, she mustered the troops for inspection and taught her son that the military orders should be always obeyed. We could see from this scene a full demonstration of the traditions and conventions for combat displays. After Mei finished singing a *xipi daoban* behind the backstage curtain, eight male warriors, eight female warriors, four generals wearing *kao*, and an official holding the chief-commander's seal entered the stage accompanied in the *luogu* pattern *jiji feng*, to symbolize an army consisting of hundreds and thousands. After these supporting roles settled and stood in three lines at the upper stage exit, Mu Guiying entered the stage wearing *mang* (the overcoat used on a formal occasion and suggesting a higher status) and covered with *kao* (armour). She wore the general's helmet with the pheasant feathers on the top of the headdress, and held a flag of command and a double-edged sword. While raising and waving the whip, which practically denoted Mu's riding on a horse, Mu Guiying sang three lines of *xipi yuanban* to praise the disciplined appearance and bearing of the troops. While Mei was singing, the supporting roles were also moving gradually to the upper stage entrance. After Mei finished singing, Yang Zongbao with Yang Jinhua and Yang Wenguang entered from the stage exit and posed there. As Mu Guiying rode to the stage center and looked at her husband and children all armed with weapons, she felt it was like twenty years ago when she was still young. Mei started to sing six-line arias, "I see my husband standing impressively in front, who is still the bravest of the brave in the army. My daughter Jinghua in her armour looks exactly like a young Mu Guiying; the little Wenguang is holding his spear and waiting for the order valiantly and spiritedly; he is such a spoilt and willful kid." Mei used the musical pattern *nanbangzi* for the first four-line to express her

excitement whereas he went back to use *xipi yuanban* for the last two lines in which Mu pointed out her son's shortcomings where *nanbangzi* was not suitable to the changed tone. Mei Lanfang commented on this tune change, which well illustrated how he made something new out of the traditions while sticking to their principles:

> The audience would have a new and fresh experience when I changed the patterns of melodies in my singing. However, this was not to say that I could change it at will, or just want to make something unconventional or unorthodox in order to be different. We needed to follow the basic principles and applied them well to the characters' emotions. [53]

In the following plot, after Mu Guiying entered the drill ground, inspected the troops, paid respect to the seal, and sat down in front of the army, the official Kou Zhun entered the stage. He highly praised Wenguang for his courage and good martial skills. Wenguang grew dizzy with Kou Zhun's compliments, and boasted that he did not even take his enemies seriously. Mu Guiying wanted to take the opportunity to teach her son how to guard against arrogance and rashness, so she ordered Wenguag to be executed by decapitation. Then all the generals and soldiers interceded for Wenguang. According to the traditional performance, at this moment the two feathers were held between the index and the middle fingers so that when the actor's hands turned, they followed in curves while the actor looked at the generals and soldiers. Here, Mei Lanfang made a slight change. Mu Guying held the feathers and stared at Kou Zhun to see whether he had understood her tactic. When Mu saw that Kou sat there calmly as if nothing had happened, she knew that the sophisticated Kou Zhun had understood her intention and would finally beg her on Wenguang's behalf. So she pretended to refuse all other generals' pleas, so that Wenguang could really take his situation seriously. As expected,

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[53] *Ibid.*, 96.

Kou Zhun eventually acted as a mediator and begged for mercy on Wenguang's behalf. Since Wenguang had learned the lesson, Mu Guying took the order back and forgave him. She Taijun arrived next at the drill ground in person to encourage the army. The entire performance ended with Mu Guiying departing with She Taijun and leading the troops to the frontline at the borders.

4. Other Considerations and Revisions

The play was originally designed with a "battlefield" scene used to portray how Mu Guying and her troops arrived at the border frontline and defeated the Western Xia's forces. The director Zheng Yiqiu suggested that this battle scene was not necessary because the play had reached its own climax in the fifth scene when Mu "accepted the seal." If there was an additional scene, it was useful only to tell the audiences that the Song army won the battle. However, Yang clan's capability of winning the battle had already been demonstrated, and the audience should have definite confidence in Yang's reputation. Therefore, such a scene particularly focused on combat and fighting was not necessary. Though after repeated discussion Mei Lanfang agreed with Zheng's opinion and gave up the final battle scene, he also pointed out:

> The director of course should have his views and opinions because he needed to do the performance design for the entire play. However, the director's subjectivities should not get involved too deeply. It's the best if the director himself could be familiar with the traditions and conventions; even if not, it's better if he could respect the traditional and conventional principles and allow the actors to give full play to their professional knowledge and skills. Sometimes, the actors did a better job when they didn't do what the director had told them; so I suggested the director to

> give up his original attempts so that the director and the actors could learn from and inspire each other mutually.[54]

As we can see from Mei Lanfang's comments on the director's function, by compromising himself to accept some of the director's suggestions, he still emphasized the importance of traditions and conventions during the course of creating new historical plays and gave the actor the major and central role in the creation work. The detailed analysis above of how *Mu Guying Takes Command* was created by Mei himself, even while under a director system in 1959, further proved the significant role Mei had played in the course of its formation. He had demonstrated all the affiliated skills and techniques of certain role types, and created new forms of representation adapted from various conventions and traditions. In his own words, he aimed to make the audience "have a new and fresh experience" based on and from the old forms. That is why *Mu Guying Takes Command* bore all the markings of tradition while simultaneously appearing as new. The new arias he created and revised in this play became so popular that they were learned extensively among both professionals and amateurs. In particular, the scene "Accept the Seal of a Chief-commander" was turned into a highlighted performance and one of the masterpieces representing the Mei School.

Conclusion

As I have pointed out that a play should sustain a very close reading of not only its text but also its performance, in the above analysis, I have been concerned with the artistic creations, revisions and considerations Mei Lanfang brought to the creation of *Mu*

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[54] *Ibid.*,100.

Guiying Takes Command. Besides Mei's play, there were numerous other historical plays that were created with many actors and actresses on full display. Hobsbawm was right that "adaptation took place for old uses in new conditions and by using old models for new purposes."[55] These historical plays, if not completely new due to their using of old materials, were indeed the completely new products formed in response to political demands. However, their fates largely differed. Some engaged more in allegorical interpretations and turned out to be heavily politically involved; some were authored by historians with few aesthetic considerations; some were performed shortly after their creation but died during the Cultural Revolution and never revived since then; some, by contrast, remained popular throughout and widely performed on the contemporary stage.

When the political turmoil had passed and seemingly those alleged political implications were forgotten by most contemporaries, those plays which bore well the brand of traditions remained and were passed down. Though many of the new historical plays written and performed at the time were never revived, a new tradition of "creating historical plays" was firmly established. As we could see from the list of new *jingju* historical plays created in the post-Mao era, a series of titles had unprecedented success by their continuing invented traditions, such as *Cao Cao Yu Yang Xiu*. These plays, by continuously drawing their materials from history—for instance, the Three Kingdom Period—, adapted traditional conventions well into both the newly written texts and their stage representation. They might look somehow different from most of the new historical plays written pre-Cultural Revolution, but they still inherited the essence of *jingju*.

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[55] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," 5.

Chapter Three
Inventing Traditions: The Creation of New Jingju Plays with Contemporary Themes

Early Roots of the Monopoly Yangbanxi (Model Works)

Creating and performing *geming xiandaixi* (new plays reflecting revolutionary and contemporary themes) reached its heyday when certain plays turned into the *yangbanxi* and became "models" extensively practiced all over the mainland China during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). On November 28, 1966, a few months after the Cultural Revolution started, Kang Sheng (1898-1975), the advisor of the Cultural Revolution Group (CRG), announced at the first Literature and Art Circles' Proletarian Cultural Revolution Conference that eight works, including five modernized *jingju*, two ballets, and one symphony, were given a name as *yangbanxi* (model works), and those performance troupes performing these eight *yangbanxi* were named as *yangbantuan* (model troupes). These five *jingju* models works are: *Shajiabang*, *The Legend of the Red Lantern* (*Hongdeng Ji*), *On the Docks* (*Haigang*), *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (*Zhiqu Weihushan*), and *Raid on White Tiger Regiment* (*Qixi Baihutuan*). Two ballets are *The White-haired Girl* (*Baimao Nü*) and *The Red Detachment of Women* (*Hongse Niangzijun*), and the one symphonic suite is *Shajibang*. Since then, the eight model works became the exclusive entertainment for the extensive masses across the country for a long dark decade.[1]

[1] The *yangbanxi* (model works) actually were not limited to only eight works. It appeared as eight model works because these eight titles were originally approved by the Vice-president of the Cultural Revolution Group, Madame Mao—Jiangqing, and announced by the Group advisor Kang Sheng at the conference as "eight works" officially together. Since then the eight model works were always mentioned as a whole, despite the fact that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there were a series of other model works

During the entire Cultural Revolution, these *jingju* works were not only performed as models by both central and local *jingju* troupes, but also adapted into other *xiqu* forms and widely practiced. While at the time all traditional dramas and historical plays were banned along with other artistic and literary classics, the *yangbanxi* became a fashion because of the heavily politically controlled discourse. As Roberts argues, "The emergence of the *yangbanxi* can be traced back to multiple sources including long-term literary and cultural trends, short-term policy initiatives, political contingency, ideological convictions and even the personal tastes and background of Chairman Mao Zedong and his wife Jiang Qing who were both lovers of traditional opera."[2] Although the *yangbanxi,* the same as the revised traditional plays and newly created historical plays, were theoretically rooted in Mao's 1942 *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art*, their emergence was impossible without the support of left wing politics, which advocated with persistence the writing of revolutionary and proletarian literature. Nor could it be possible without the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s campaign in the late 1950s and early 1960s to revolutionize and popularize the performing arts while keeping pace with a series of Mao-endorsed policies and movements, such as the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961). In particular, the *yangbanxi* were cultivated in the CCP

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simultaneously created and performed in addition to these eight works; they were: *Azalea Mountain* (*Dujuan Shan*), *Song of the Dragon River* (*Longjiang Song*), *Fighting on the Plains* (*Pingyuan Zuozhuan*), *Red Cloud Mountain* (*Hongyun Gang*), *Boulder Bay* (*Panshi Wan*), as well as the ballets *Sons and Daughters of the Grassland* (*Caoyuan Ernü*) and *Ode to Yimeng* (*Yimeng Song*). However, these latter works were less popular than their predecessors, which might be partly due to their fewer artistic achievements. Film versions of all the major *yangbanxi* were also made between 1969 and 1974 and shown all over the country, which further reinforced the dominant position of *yangbanxi* in public culture in mainland China during the Cultural Revolution.

[2] Rosemary A. Roberts. *Maoist Model Theatre: The Semiotics of Gender and Sexuality in the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)*. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 2.

campaigned process of making new plays reflecting revolutionary and contemporary themes.

A brief survey of these five *yangban jingju* reveals that they were actually all created and performed in the late 1950s and 1960s under the changed political policy on drama reforms and an accelerated process of making revolutionary plays. For instance, *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* was first created in 1958 by Shanghai Jingju Company and premiered in August 1958 in Nanjing. Another model work, *Raid on White Tiger Regiment*, emerged even earlier in 1957, originally created by the Jingju Troupe of the Chinese People's Volunteer Arm (PVA or CPV). The other three model *jingju*, though coming out later, were still created in the early 1960s before the Cultural Revolution was launched.

Given the fact that a great deal has been written in both China and the West on the various issues and controversies with regard to the Cultural Revolution and the *yangbanxi*, it would be more intriguing and provocative to explore the pre-existing political environment and the varied initiatives during the late 1950s and early 1960s—the changeable conditions which have seldom been examined by scholars, but which played a major and significant role in nurturing and shaping these modernized *jingju* plays into model works. For instance, how should we define the *xiandaixi* (new plays with contemporary themes)? Should it be considered as a new genre, or is it a continuity of traditional *jingju*? When did the process of creating new *jingju* plays with contemporary themes begin? Was it a post-1949 movement under the CCP's political campaign on the *jingju* reform, or was the "reflecting contemporary themes" a traditional ideology embedded throughout *jingju* history? How many of these new plays were

created and performed prior to the Cultural Revolution, and what have these newly created plays contributed to the formation of the monopoly *yangbanxi*? Given that these new *jingju* plays with contemporary themes were mainly produced out of political considerations, did they achieve any aesthetic and artistic accomplishments? What kind of role did the CCP's politics, as well as even their leadership's personal tastes, play in the making of revolutionary and contemporary *jingju* plays, and what were the artists' and professionals' responses to those political initiatives and considerations? What kind of rises and falls within the nascent Communist regime caused the CCP's changes of policy-making on drama reforms? How shall we evaluate these new plays, which even adapted certain traditional techniques and conventions into a modern style to "dramatize the class struggle and take the side of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie"[3]? Obviously, it might be interesting to investigate why some of the experiments turned into complete failures, i.e. they never gained popularity during that time let alone being revived after the Cultural Revolution, while some other modernized plays, along with the *yangbanxi*, though based upon the notoriously heavy political impositions, became *hongse jingdian* (red classics). Did these successful ones really achieve the new artistic heights that reinforce an argument that a classical *jingju* could be modernized without losing its aesthetics, or were they sacrifices solely offered to revolution and its politics? Were these newly created plays cherished by the revolutionary generations, and still by contemporary audiences, as sacred masterpieces, or did the subsequent generation feel a fondness for these revolutionary heritages because these new plays had become part of their history and memory, even if it was haunted?

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[3] Colin Mackerras. *Chinese Drama: A Historical Survey*. (Beijing: New World Press, 1990), 167.

Based on these questions, this chapter explores the origin and development of new plays reflecting contemporary themes. It surveys the *xiandaixi* created during the time period from the late 1950s to middle 1960s when the CCP changed its policy on *jingju* reforms, examines how the radical leftist views gradually shaped the extreme politicization of *jingju*, and compares the differences between the *xiandaixi* created during the Communist regime with those practiced before the CCP took over the power. It is true that the CCP's imposed reforms on *jingju* revolutionized the essence of traditional *jingju*, from the basic performance conventions to the audience reception—not only that it requested a complex theory of characterization and all characters on the stage were depicted according to rigid class stereotypes, but also that it stuck to the principle of realism and completely eliminated the traditional role categories. In addition to the fact that the costumes, makeup, décor and stage properties were all given realistic features so as to reflect the proletarian hero's specific class, western orchestras were added to the old musical instruments because they sounded more heroic. Obviously, all these formal changes revealed that it was not a *jingju* like that in Tan Xinpei (1847-1917) or Mei Lanfang's time. Besides the conventional styles they abandoned and transformed, these new plays with contemporary themes adopted completely new contents that had never appeared in the old repertoire; nevertheless, they still soon became the red heritage and the invented tradition.

As Hobsbawn points out, "Revolutions and 'progressive movements' which break with the past, by definition, have their own relevant past, though it may be cut off at a certain date, such as 1789. [In *jingju*'s case, 1949 specifically.] However, insofar as there is such reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of 'invented' traditions is that the

continuity with it is largely factitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition."[4] These newly created plays with contemporary themes not only served as models to imitate and practice during the Cultural Revolution, but were also continuously performed on the post-Mao stage and repeated persistently with more new plays reflecting contemporary times being made in the twenty-first century.

New Jingju Plays Reflecting Contemporary Themes: Their Origin and History

Though this dissertation is focused on the discussion of *jingju* play reforms from 1949 to 1967 and, in particular, the creation of new *jingju* plays reflecting contemporary life in this chapter, in order to examine the questions I have listed above, we need to first understand that the idea of making modern plays involving contemporary themes was neither a new phenomenon that emerged suddenly in the post-1949 China nor an exclusive privilege ascribed to the Communist campaign and ideology. We easily find that under conditions of political turmoil and major social transformations, "*jingju* plays reflecting contemporary themes" assumed different names and forms historically.

The Jingju Reforms in the Early Twentieth Century: Shishi Xinxi (New Plays Reflecting the Current Society) and Shizhuang Xinxi (New Plays with Contemporary Costumes)

The first "creating *jingju* with contemporary themes" movement emerged in the late nineteeth and early twentieth centuries under the bourgeois-democratic revolutionary

[4] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. *The Invention of Tradition*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 2.

trends and influences. At the time, due to the weakness of the Qing government, the Chinese government signed a series of treaties which surrendered China's sovereign rights under humiliating terms. Under these circumstances, some political figures and patriotic intellectuals aimed to promote this "reforms and innovations" ideology to call for an awakening of the Chinese people and a resistance to the weak-kneed Qing court. The reforms and innovations were first carried out on the Chinese old literary genres by these reformists and intellectuals[5] at the time, and then expanded from literature to the field of theatre. In 1904 in Shanghai, Chen Qubing (1874-1933), a bourgeois who favored revolution, together with the famous *jingju* artist Wang Xiaonong (1858-1918), established the first theatre journal, *ershi shiji da wutai* (*The Twentieth-Century Grand Stage*), which enthusiastically propagandized the idea of reforming the old drama. In March 1905, Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), using his pen name San'ai, published an article titled "A Criticism on *Xiqu*" in the fourteeth issue of *xin xiaoshuo* (*New Novel*), in which he highly emphasized the drama's educational functions. In his words, theatres were the main institutions for educating the masses and the actors were their mentors.[6]

Since *jingju* was the most popular theatrical genre at the time all over the country, it was used as a main institution by these reformists and intellectuals to campaign for their patriotic and political ideas. They criticized the old drama (*jingju*) for the fact that it only performed those legends from antiquity and heroes in history, but paid no attention to the contemporary society. They pointed out that *jingju* plays should reflect

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[5] For example, Liang Qichao (1873-1929), a Chinese scholar, philosopher and reformist during the Qing Dynasty, who inspired Chinese scholars with his writings and advocacy for reform.

[6] Gao Yilong and Li Xiao eds. *Zhongguo Xiandaixi Shi* (*A History of the Chinese Contemporary Theatre*). (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 1999), 16. Chen's article was originally published on *Anhui Suhua Bao* in 1904.

contemporary realities and, furthermore, should campaign for the ideas of the bourgeois-democratic revolution so as to save the Chinese nation and people. The main purpose was to carry out *jingju* reforms and innovations, to create new *jingju* plays that can "get rid of the old evil customs, enlighten the Chinese people, promote nationalism, and call for the unity of the nation."[7] In this social-political environment, both the intellectuals and the *jingju* actors actively participated in the creating of modern *jingju*. This movement was largely Shanghai-centered and then followed by some other major cities, such as Beijing, Tianjin, and Wuhan.

In Shanghai, Wang Xiaonong, the *jingju* actor I have mentioned above, was one of the earliest to take actions practically in the *jingju* reforms and innovations. He created and performed a kind of *shishi xinxi*, which were a series of new *jingju* plays drawing their materials extensively from realistic novels about the current domestic and foreign affairs, such as *Heiji Yuanhun*[8] and *Guazhong Lanyin*[9], etc. In order to meet the purpose of "get rid of the old evil customs, [and] enlighten the Chinese people," he eliminated the polished literary *jingju* texts, and instead used colloquial languages. He also diminished the use of traditional *jingju* conventions in the performance of these plays, contending that these conventions were not suitable for his new plays, which should reflect and portray the contemporary society.

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[7] *Ibid.*; it was originally in the "general regulations" of the first theatre journal—*The Twentieth-Century Grand Stage*.
[8] A play created to critique the political situation at the time. It urges that Chinese people should quit smoking opium.
[9] A play that portrays the war between Poland and Turkey so as to emphasize the serious consequences anti-patriotism could have brought about.

Additionally, in 1908, the "New Stage" theatre was established by *jingju* actors Pan Yueqiao[10] and the Xia brothers[11] in Shanghai, which marked the upsurge of this movement in that it transformed the *jingju* reforms and innovations from an intellectual-centered movement to the actor-centered theatrical practices. Many new *jingju* plays were simply published by the intellectuals at the beginning of the movement. When the *jingju* actors actively participated in the movement, staged these new texts, and created their own new plays and performances, this reforms and innovations movement then really happened in the theatre. The Shanghai "New Stage" theatre was the first limited-liability *jingju* company in China, invested in and sponsored by Chinese bourgeois at the time, such as Shen Manyun and Yao Boxin, along with *jingju* actors Pan Yueqiao and the Xia brothers. After its establishment, the resident actors at "New Stage" created and performed numerous new *jingju*, which were named *shizhuang xinxi* (new drama performed in contemporary costume). By an approximate calculation, there were more than fifty *shizhuang xinxi* created and performed since 1908, including *Meigui Hua* (*Roses*) reflecting the anti-Qing court theme, *Xin Chahua* (*The New Lady of the Camellias*) and *Pan Lieshi Touhai* (*A Revolutionary Martyr Jumped into the Ocean*) portraying the heroic actions to resist foreign invasions, *Qiu Jin* praising the revolutionary heroine, *Bolan Wangguo Can* (*A Conquered Poland*) criticizing the crimes of Imperialism, and *Huanhai Chao* (*Officialdom*) unmasking the abuses of officialdom.[12]

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[10] Pan Yueqiao (1869-1928), *jingju* actor, mainly performed in Shanghai. He was named as a political revolutionary who was in the field of theatre arts during the period of Xinhai Revolution (also known as 1911 Revolution or the Chinese Revolution).

[11] Xia Yueshan and Xia Yuerun.

[12] Beijingshi yishu yanjiusuo and Shanghai yishu yanjiusuo, editorial committee. *Zhongguo Jingju Shi* (*A History of Chinese Jingju*), Vol. 1. (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1999), 344.

Obviously, this movement was unprecedentedly revolutionary in that first of all, none of these materials and ideological themes had been used in traditional *jingju* in any time and place before. Furthermore, the "New Stage" was built with a proscenium stage, which revolutionized the concept of performance space in the old tea-house theatre. This change of the stage further affected the way that *jingju* actors used to perform and the audiences' appreciation of performance customs, because in the tea-house theatre, the audiences were sitting around tea-tables rather than in rows.

Although Beijing was largely under Shanghai's revolutionary influences, the actors' reforms and innovations in Beijing did not go as far as Shanghai actors did. Their performances were still centered on the traditional *jingju* plays, but also included some pieces in their acting that reflected the current political reality and the contemporary situation. The most representative *jingju* actor in Beijing who took many revolutionary actions at the time was the *jingju* master Mei Lanfang. From 1913 to 1918, he created and performed a series of *shizhuang xinxi*, such as *Niehai Bolan* (*Great Waves of the Ocean*), *Huanhai Chao* (*Officialdom*), *Dengxia Gu*, *Yilü Ma* (*A Piece of Yarn*), and *Tongnü Zhanshe* (*A Young Girl Kills a Snake*).[13] Generally speaking, in terms of the story, performance style, costumes, stage properties and music, the reformed and innovated *shizhang xinxi* in this movement maintained few features of the traditional *jingju*. In many cases, *jingju* actors put on contemporary costumes or foreign clothes simply to speak political slogans on the stage while the traditional *jingju* music and performance conventions were completely eliminated or abandoned. For example, *jingju* actor Feng

[13] *Ibid.*, 355-358.

Zihe (1888-1942) was famous for his use of foreign songs in his new *jingju* performances at the time.

Although part of the high tide of creating new *jingju* plays in which both intellectuals and *jingju* professionals voluntarily participated in the early twentieth century, most of the newly created plays either appeared briefly or failed immediately. Mei Lanfang described his experiments of *shizhuang xinxi* as follows:

> In my whole performance life, performing the *shizhuan xinxi* (new plays with contemporary costumes) had the shortest time span, so I do not think I have done enough deep research into it. However, based on my knowledge and experiences, classical *jingju* was centered upon songs and dances, so that actors' singing and movements established their own rules and conventions according to the performance tempo. This aesthetics of songs and dances was rooted in the conventionalized movements and gestures, which had been created by our ancestral artists by ways of abstraction and exaggeration. Thus, *jingju* actors who were performing these classical plays had double tasks: besides performing the characters in the plot, they had also to demonstrate their capabilities of performing these songs and dances.
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> What the *shizhuang xinxin* performed were mostly plays about current stories and contemporary issues. In this case, the actor's performance had to reflect our daily life as realistically as possible, so that the conventionalized songs and dances had to be eliminated. Given such conditions the actors, who were trained in traditions and conventions since childhood, found that all they had learned became useless. For some actors, who were not even able to perform the traditional plays skillfully, it was hard to require them to act well in my newly created plays with contemporary costumes, such as *Deng Xiagu* and *Yilü Ma*. This was one of the reasons why I gave up creating such *shizhuang xinxi* later.[14]

Mei then added in a newspaper article that, "concerning the issues of creating contemporary characters while simultaneously inheriting the old traditions, of course, besides those songs and dances, the *jingju* music also played a significant role in the performance. In those *shizhuang xinxi* I had created in the past, the music always

[14] Mei Lanfang. *Mei Lanfang Quanji* (*The Complete Works of Mei Lanfang*). Volume 1. (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000), 276.

remained problematic…in a sense, how to create appropriate music to suit the modernized movements and gestures was a much more complicated process."[15] These comments were conspicuous and convincing since they were made by Mei during his final years when he had enough experiences and knowledge to evaluate his own successes and failures throughout his lifelong *jingju* experimentation and performance. In conclusion, he insisted that *jingju*, as a traditional performing art based on abstraction and symbolism, should be maintainable in its original forms. New reforms and innovations, although they might be experimented with and exercised, had to be dealt with cautiously, and it was better not to apply these changes into the newly created plays if they harmed the harmony of all artistic elements that composed the essence of *jingju*. Otherwise one ended up with a modern play that was simply not *jingju* at all any more.

Creating New Jingju Plays with Contemporary Themes during the Wartime: 1937-1949

When the Marco Polo Bridge Incident (July 7, 1937) marked the start of the second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) between the Republic of China's National Revolutionary Army (ROC, 1912-1949) and the Imperial Japanese Army, the creation of new *jingju* plays reflecting contemporary themes also entered an unprecedented phase. What is more, during the decades of the anti-Japanese war and the civil war, since China's vast territories were divided according to the different political occupations, the creation and the development of new *jingju* with contemporary themes also varied significantly from one region to another. For instance, northeastern China, under the puppet state

[15] Mei Lanfang. "Using Traditional Skills to Portray Contemporary Characters," *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*). December 10, 1958. Gao Yilong and Li Xiao eds. *Zhongguo Xiandaixi Shi* (*A History of the Chinese Contemporary Theatre*). (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 1999), 41.

Manchukuo[16] and the Japanese cultural despotism, witnessed the Japanese authority's largely tolerant attitudes towards the traditional *jingju* and their associated activities. In a sense, it facilitated the preservation of certain old *jingju* repertoire and the growth of *jingju* amateur troupes in the northeastern areas.

Jingju professionals in some other Japanese occupied areas and cities, such as Beiping (Beijing), Tianjin, Wuhan and Hangzhou, still performed the old repertoire. However, in Shanghai, before the UK, the United States and France officially declared war against Japan, and before the Japanese troops stormed in immediately following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the *jingju* professionals, under the leadership of renowned artists Ouyang Yuqian and Zhou Xinfang, enthusiastically created and performed a series of new plays to campaign for the Resist Japan and Save the Nation Movement at the Shanghai International Settlement.

Nevertheless, the *jingju* activities taken in the liberated areas[17] at the time under Mao's directive played the most significant role in the process of making innovations since they directly associated with and led decisively to the CCP's policies on *jingju* reforms in the post-1949 era. It is impossible to have a full discussion of all these *jingju* activities done in the CCP's different revolutionary bases during the Anti-Japanese War and the War of Liberation, but the most representative activities were the establishments of the Lu Xun Arts Academy in 1938 and the Yan'an Pingju (another name for Jingju)

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[16] Manchukuo (1931-1945) referred to a puppet state governed under a constitutional monarchy. The region in the northeastern China was originally historical homeland of the Manchus. In 1931, Japanese colonized the region and used Manchukuo as a base from which to invade China. Manchukuo's government was abolished in 1945 after the defeat of Japan at the end of the Second World War, and the territories formerly claimed by the puppet state were formally transferred to the Chinese administration in 1946.

[17] The liberated areas referred to the regions occupied by the CCP as its bases to fight against Japanese invasions during the Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945) and later, against the Guomingdang (GMD) during the War of Liberation (1946-1949).

Research Institute in 1942, where the first experiment of creating the CCP-advocated new *jingju* plays started.

1. *Lu Xun Arts Academy and the Methodology of "Putting New Wine into An Old Bottle" in the Creation of New Plays*

"Art for art's sake" seemingly never applied to the CCP's ideology since there was already a tradition of using drama as a weapon for social change at the time when the Party was established, and the idea of using drama as propaganda was further reinforced by the leftist influences in the 1920s and 1930s. The Long March brought the most important military forces to northern Shan'xi, where from the end of 1936 the CCP set up their headquarters in Yan'an. In the meantime, Mao Zedong had previously been elected the Chairman of the Party during the Long March in January1935 and he retained his influence dominantly over the CCP since then. Under such circumstances, in order to strengthen its revolutionary drama tradition and ensure that *jingju* could be best reformed to suit the needs of the revolution and of the masses, the CCP set up the Lu Xun Arts Academy in Yan'an in April 1938 with Mao's statement of "anti-Japanese realism and revolutionary romanticism"[18] as its artistic principle. The academy functioned not only as a performing troupe, but also as an educational institution with three departments: dramatic literature, music and art design.

Immediately after the establishment of the Academy, in July 1938, some of the first graduates along with other amateurs from the institution set up an experimental drama troupe. In the beginning, the troupe was mainly focused on performing spoken drama and there was only a small *jingju* division within the troupe, which was then frequently sent

[18] Colin Mackerras. *Chinese Drama: A Historical Survey*. (Beijing: New World Press, 1990), 121.

out as a mobile performing group to the frontlines of the Sino-Japanese war—battlefields in the eastern and southern Jin areas. This small *jingju* group, besides performing for the frontline forces, also shouldered the responsibilities of mobilizing the local masses, and served as productive laborers to support the frontline. In March 1939, the Academy set up an additional *jingju* research class so as to do further *jingju* research and foster its cultural cadres. The graduate students in this research class included A Jia and Li Lun, who later became *jingju* directors and played significant roles in creating both *jingju* historical plays and new plays reflecting revolutionary and contemporary themes. In the following year, 1940, the Jingju Performance Troupe was established; since then, it became the main institution for doing *jingju* research and performance, and creating *jingju xiandaixi* was one of its major tasks.

However, due to its lack of experience in creating new plays reflecting revolutionary and contemporary themes, the methodology adopted widely by the troupe in the beginning was "putting new wine in an old bottle." The so-called "old bottle" referred to the traditional *jingju*'s framework in terms of plot and performance format, while the "new wine" meant the new contents and materials drawn from contemporary life. Both phrases had initially appeared in Mao's conversations after he saw some of these newly created plays. In April 1938, Mao attended a soiree organized by the worker representatives where he watched a new *jingju Shengguan Tu* (*A Picture of Promotion*). After seeing the performance, he commented to the union representative that, "You see, the masses love this form. As long as the masses love it, we should create and perform it. However, the content is too old and outdated. It needs new revolutionary contents." He then directly pointed out in another talk that "we should not only propagandize the

revolutionary art, but also make the revolutionary art be capable of popularization. Now many people talked about the methodology of 'putting new wine into an old bottle.' In my opinion, it did not matter whether the new wine was put into 'an old bottle' or 'a new bottle;' as long as the result met the needs of anti-Japanese propaganda, it was good."[19] Based on Mao's endorsement, the Academy aimed to create this "new wine in an old bottle" *jingju* to meet definite political lines.

For instance, in July 1938, in order to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the Anti-Japanese war since it began, the *jingju* troupe of the Academy performed a newly created *jingju Songhua Jiang* (*The River of Songhua*). The entire performance was basically set into the framework of a traditional *jingju Dayu Shajia* (*The Fisherman's Revenge*), but with the ideology of the anti-Japanese campaign heavily imposed. The plot told how a fisherman who lived by the riverbank of Songhua, unable any more to tolerate the endless bullying and humiliation, mobilized the local masses to take up arms against the Japanese invaders. It became the first new *jingju* play created for the anti-Japanese propaganda, and could be considered the CCP's first genuine experiment of *geming xiandaixi*. In the performance, the original characters and their names remained the same, but the traditional costumes were completely eliminated. Instead, both the old fisherman and his daughter Guying put on contemporary laborers' clothes. The traditional *jingju* makeup for their role-types—*laosheng* and *huadan*—was also abandoned in order to ensure that the actors' faces look realistic. Though the entire performance was still accompanied by the traditional *jingju* orchestras with *huqin* playing both *erhuang* and

[19] Gao Yilong and Li Xiao eds. *Zhongguo Xiandaixi Shi* (*A History of the Chinese Contemporary Theatre*). (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 1999), 97.

xipi melodies and drum beatings to control the tempo, the lines in the dialogues and songs had all been re-written to suit the changed theme for revolutionary propaganda.[20] This first *xiandaixi* created by the Academy revealed the principal methodology that the CCP had practiced: to fill in the old *jingju* frameworks with new revolutionary contents. Yet while keeping the original characters and plot lines largely untouched, the CCP dramatists and reformers diminished the use of most traditional elements so as to adjust to the principle of realism and the needs of propaganda. As we can see later from the *yangbanxi*, though they progressed into a state of sophistication in both their forms and contents, they shared the basic ideological and theoretical doctrines with these previous *xiandaixi* created during the early Yan'an time.

Following the initial success of *The River of Songhua*, during 1938-1939, there were a couple of similar *xiandaixi* created by the Academy by the methodology of "putting new wine into an old bottle." For instance, *Yexi Feijichang* (*Attacking the Enemy's Airport in the Night*) was framed into the traditional play *Huoma Hu* (*The Lake of Luoma*), but it told the story about how the Chinese Eighth Route Army soldiers ingeniously and successfully attacked the Japanese military airport during the night. Another new play, *Liujia Cun* (*The Village of Liu*), was based on the framework of the traditional play *Wulong Yuan* (*The Wulong Yard*), in which the original characters—Mountain Liang rebels—were turned into either a scout of the Eighth Route Army or a local official getting armed for a revolt against the government. In another newly created *xiandaixi—Zhaojia Zhen* (*The Town of Zhao*), the author adapted it into the framework of the traditional play *Qingfeng Zhai*, and depicted how an Eighth Route Army soldier

[20] *Ibid.*, 97-98.

successfully seized the Japanese forces by seducing them under the disguise of female costumes. In these newly created plays, the actors all put on contemporary costumes and makeup to suit the characters in the plot; thus the traditions in the old repertoire, such as painted faces and dressing customs, were largely abandoned.[21]

These newly created plays by the methodology of "putting new wine into an old bottle" in CCP's early experiments were easily accepted by the masses since they were quite familiar with the traditional plays and frameworks that these new plays adopted. However, the pre-existing contradictions between the old forms and the new contents became blatantly obtrusive as more *xiandaixi* with varied contemporary themes were constructed to fulfill the political needs. The confrontations between the old performance style and the new Communist ideology, between the classical musical patterns and the intensified revolutionary languages, between the making of symbolic movements in realistic settings and the adapting of contemporary figures into classical characters—all turned out to be problems of incompatibility and impossible compromise. However, since the CCP's policy took the political considerations as priority in the creation of *xiandaixi*, the artistic aspects were not properly treated until a later phase—the late 1950s and early 1960s, the time when most renowned and widely performed *xiandaidi* were created.

2. Yan'an Pingju [Jingju] Institute and the Jingju Reforms in Yan'an

While during the Sino-Japanese war numerous new *jingju* plays with contemporary themes were created by the formerly established Lu Xun Arts Academy to stress the army-people relationship, self-defense against the enemy, prevention of sabotage, and fighting behind enemy lines, the CCP decided to set up the Yan'an Pingju

[21] *Ibid.*, 98.

Research Institute to facilitate *jingju*'s service to politics when the drama society from the 120th troop of the Eighth Route Army arrived at Yan'an in 1942. In the Pingju Institute's official report to the *jingju* circles, two major problems in *jingju* reforms were emphasized: one with regard to the anti-Japanese propaganda, and the other concerned about how to inherit the old repertoire. As Mao simultaneously provided the directive of "pushing out the old and creating the new," the Pingju Institute aimed to fulfill three major tasks: reforming the traditional repertoire, creating the *xianbian lishixi* (new historical plays), and making the *xiandaixi* (new plays with contemporary themes).

Substantially, most important of all the landmarks was the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art held in May 1942 where Mao made two speeches. They were later published under the title *Talks on the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art*, in which Mao ensured that the arts, including drama, should serve the masses rather than any elite. In my previous chapter, I have discussed especially the details about the formation of *Driven Up to the Mountain Liang*, which was highly praised by Mao as the beginning of the revolution in the old drama. Mao's 1942 *Talks*, as the political backgrounds of creating *jingju* historical plays by the Pingju Research Institute during the Yan'an time, simultaneously laid the theoretical foundation for the creation of *geming xiandaixi*. Mao contended that the artists should create for the masses of the people, saying:

> Here the audience for works of literature and art consists of workers, peasants, soldiers and revolutionary cadres. There are students in the base areas, too, but they are different from students of the old type; they are either former or future cadres. The cadres of all types, fighters in the army, workers in the factories and peasants in the villages all want to read books and newspapers once they become literate, and those who are illiterate

> want to see plays and operas, look at drawings and paintings, sing songs and hear music.[22]

Since in Mao's view, theatre should not be designed for elites, it was important for the artists to create acceptable works and further popularize these works. Previously, Mao had argued that the "old culture" should be studied critically so that "its democratic essence" could be assimilated while "its feudal dross" could be rejected.[23] As now the answer to "for whom should the artist create" was quite clear, inherent also in Mao's doctrine was an answer to the question about what should be created. It was legitimate, of course, to draw on "the life of the people," which Mao described as "a majority of the raw materials for literature and art, materials in their natural form, materials that are crude, but most vital, rich and fundamental."[24] Corresponding to Mao's directive and to the need to perform new plays reflecting "the life of the people" for the masses, the Pingju Research Institute created altogether eighteen new plays with various contemporary themes, such as the life of refugees from Henan Province, self-defense against the traitor, the migration movement, productive activities and the protection of border regions.

For instance, the new play *Nanmin Qu* (*A Prose of the Refugees*) depicted how, during the War of Resistance Against Japan, the Chinese people groaned under the rule of corrupt *Guomingdang* (GMD or Chinese Nationalist Party), when unfortunately the Henan province, one of the main areas under the GMD's control, was struck by both

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[22] "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art." *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, *Volume 3*. (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), 71-72.
[23] "On New Democracy." *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, *Volume 3*. (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), 381.
[24] Colin Mackerras, ed. *Chinese Theatre: From Its Origins to the Present Day*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1983), 159.

natural and man-made calamities. Under such urgent circumstances, the GMD government reacted Fascistically in every quality except efficiency. Without the disaster relief, the victims suffered terrible hardships of hunger and cold, and a large number of them died. The poverty-stricken parents had to sell their children to the traders of human beings in exchange for food. In contrast to the misery in the disaster-ridden areas under the GMD regime, the newly created play showed how some of the refugees fled out to the CCP liberated areas, where they settled down and lived happily ever since.[25] A similar plot appeared in another new play *Shang Tiantang* (*Go to the Heaven*), which made a sharp contrast between the portrayals of the areas under the control of the CCP and of the GMD. It told the story about an old woman living in the GMD-controlled areas who one day visited her relatives in the CCP's base in border regions. She witnessed how people lived a happy life there and felt that she had come to a beautiful place like Heaven.[26] It is worth noting that these new plays created by the Pingju Research Institute during the early and mid 1940s largely abandoned the "new wine in an old bottle" methodology adopted in the initial experiments in 1938 and 1939. Instead, both plots and characters were based on real materials drawn from the contemporary society. From this point on, the creation of *xiandaixi* was completely independent of the traditional repertoire in terms of the contents.

In conclusion, from the survey of the new plays with contemporary themes created prior to 1949, we can see how the idea of "reflecting the current society" varied and assumed different forms according to the changeable social and political environments. It

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[25] Gao Yilong and Li Xiao eds. *Zhongguo Xiandaixi Shi* (*A History of the Chinese Contemporary Theatre*), 102.
[26] *Ibid.*

was a movement first advocated by the patriotic intellectuals and dramatists in the early twentieth century, during which a series of *shishi xinxi* and *shizhuang xinxi* appeared. During the wartime, different political regimes and forces took an active interest in creating new plays reflecting current reality, and they also did what they could to ensure that the contents suited their interests. While "the CCP certainly did not permit pro-Japanese or counterrevolutionary [drama] in Yan'an, the GMD tried to prevent people from contact with Communist drama, usually unsuccessfully."[27] Though Mao's 1942 *Talks* in Yan'an, on the one hand, provided the theoretical basis for the new historical plays in which the dramatists were trying to teach the masses about the class struggle through old history; on the other hand, the *Talks* encouraged the invention of a new type of *jinjgu* play focused on contemporary events under the Communist ideology with the ultimate purpose of promoting patriotism or revolution. It is this latter type that foreshadowed a frenzy of making contemporary plays in a certain time during the post-1949 era and its dominance over more than a decade since the Great Leap Forward.

The Creation of New Plays Reflecting Contemporary Themes during 1949-1967

Besides censoring and banning the old repertoire in the CCP's *xiqu* reform movement that I have introduced in chapter one, the first couple of years in the nascent People's Republic of China (PRC) witnessed the enthusiasm for creating new plays reflecting the contemporary life of the masses in all kinds of *xiqu* forms. In some regions, special institutions were established specifically to create and perform new modernized

[27] Colin Mackerras, ed. *Chinese Theatre: From Its Origins to the Present Day*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1983), 155.

plays. For instance, the Xiqu Reform Bureau under the Cultural Department in the northwestern region organized various research meetings and seminars to discuss the practical issues in the process of creating new plays with contemporary themes. Due to its local leadership's insistence, seventeen new play scripts were written in only four to five months. Some performing troupes announced that they showcased only the newly created plays. For example, The Zhengfeng Drama Society in Tianjin performed fifty-five brand new plays a thousand and one hundred times from March 1949 to September 1950 with a daily performance schedule of both matinees and night shows.[28]

However, the seemingly efficient creation and frequent performance of the new plays with contemporary themes in all kinds of *xiqu* forms did not bring about these plays' popularity and the theatrical market's prosperity. On the one hand, I have discussed in the first chapter that the CCP's policies on reforming the old repertoire in accordance to the political lines and their banning notices on specific plays caused a shortage of performable plays and a standstill of theatre business in the mid-1950s. Under such circumstances, the CCP had to lift the banning impositions so as to stimulate the recessional market. On the other hand, though all *xiqu* forms actively participated in this movement into new plays with contemporary themes, they were substantially created to meet the propaganda for specific governmental policies or political needs, which did not last long. For instance, these plays were mainly focused on issues such as campaigning for the new Marriage Laws, supporting the Korean War (or the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea, 1950-1953) and the Campaign to Suppress

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[28] Gao Yilong and Li Xiao eds. *Zhongguo Xiandaixi Shi* (*A History of the Chinese Contemporary Theatre*), 131-132.

Counterrevolutionaries (1950-1952), propagandizing a series of agrarian reforms (1949-1956) and encouraging a Socialist education.[29] The CCP hoped to make its policies and principles understood and supported by the masses through the performances of these new plays, but after that they were no longer of interest. What is more, since these plays were normally created under a very short notice to meet these specific political requirements, it was impossible to solve the innate contradictions regarding their aesthetic aspects.

Furthermore, while the traditional repertoire was still a form favored by the CCP in the nascent PRC, it is also worth noting that creating plays with contemporary themes was practiced extensively among all *xiqu* forms during the time, particularly in various small local drama and opera venues. The new plays of *kunqu* or *jingju* were still few. In his concluding report at the end of the National Traditional Drama Festival held in the eastern region, Xia Yan (1900-1995) promulgated a directive to promote the traditional drama in a new era and pointed out some issues about creating the new plays with contemporary themes:

> Shangdong Province's *lüxi*, Anhui's *sizhouxi*, Zhejiang's *yongju*, Jiangsu's *changxiju*, Shanghai's *huju* and *jianghuaiju*, Fujian's *minju* and *xiangju*, as well as *yueju* (Shaoxing Opera)[30], which previously were considered as impossible to reflect the contemporary life, now all contributed new plays with contemporary themes to our Drama Festival. Though these plays reflected the contemporary life of the masses and the class struggle, they still retained their own traditional characteristics. We had to understand that we were in a social transformation and the socialist reform, during which our people hoped to see more realistic plays to reflect their own work and life. We were absolutely ignorant if we did not create more plays reflecting the masses' life to meet their needs. However, we always had

[29] *Ibid.*, 135.

[30] These are all local theatrical forms belonging to the *xiqu* (traditional drama). Each theatrical form was rooted in its local cultures in terms of music and languages, etc.; thus, there was a diversity of *xiqu*—the representations of different theatrical forms varied significantly from one region to another.

> this same problem in the process of creating these new plays, because there were possible contradictions between the *xiqu*'s form and the content they had to reflect.[31]

We can see that during this time, though the CCP was always interested in creating new plays with contemporary themes to suit their political propaganda, they still encouraged a blooming of all types of *xiqu* and plays while their experiments in creating new plays were accompanied by cautions. Particularly in terms of using *kunqu* and *jingju*, such traditional and conventionalized theatrical forms, to reflect the contemporary life, their opinion remained conservative:

> *Jingju* originated in a feudal society and has established its own highly conventionalized performance techniques and skills through the artists' accumulations and efforts over generations. I do not think it was appropriate to impose on *jingju* artists to create new plays reflecting the contemporary life, because *jingju*'s conventionalized form contradicted the realistic or revolutionary content. I agreed with comrade Zhou Yang's opinion that these highly conventionalized theatrical forms, such as *jingju*, should not have contemporary themes imposed on them, because they are more suitable to represent legends and folktales. If we tried to interfere and modernize them, it could only harm their essence and characteristics. Rather, we could transform them gradually.[32]

The Debate About Whether Jingju Could Be Used to Reflect Contemporary Themes

As I have mentioned in the above section, in the first a few years of the nascent PRC (1949-1957), while all other traditional theatre forms were involved in the process of creating new plays with contemporary themes, and some works turned out to be successful, *jingju* remained largely traditional and untouched due to the CCP's cautious

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[31] Gao Yilong and Li Xiao eds. *Zhongguo Xiandaixi Shi* (*A History of the Chinese Contemporary Theatre*), 152.

[32] *Ibid.*, 153. Zhou Yang's comment about whether *jingju* should be used to reflect the contemporary life was in his article titled "The Reform and the Promotion of the National Traditional Drama," which was originally published on *Xiju Bao* (*Theatre Newspaper*) December, 1954.

attitudes towards it. The continuous and heated debate on whether *jingju* could be reformed to suit political needs and reflect the contemporary life lasted three years.

As soon as the theatre journal *Xin Xiqu* (*The New Traditional Drama*) started publication in September 1950, its first issue already published a series of articles and criticisms concerning issues about *jingju* reforms, such as whether *jingju* should implement a director system, problems about new décor and sceneries, as well as how to clean up the stage images, such as to eliminate the ghost images or get rid of certain inappropriate performance techniques.[33] In October 1954 in this journal, Tian Han proposed in his work report titled "My Work on the Theatre and Its Accociation in the Past Year" that *jingju* should be reformed and developed with contemporaries' successful experiences in literature, performing arts, music and fine arts, a proposal which drew great attention from the drama circles.[34] In the following two months, the Chinese Theatre Association held four discussion seminars to invite all dramatists, renowned actors, playwrights and directors to exchange their opinions. The topics were centered on whether it was necessary to reform the traditional drama and whether it was appropriate to use *jingju* to reflect the contemporary life. There were two major opinions expressed at the seminars. One contended that *jingju* should not be reformed, because its form was not suitable for reflecting contemporary themes and should not be treated as an institution for educating the masses. The other opinion, on the contrary, argued that since many traditional theatre forms had successfully created new plays reflecting the contemporary

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[33] Gao Yilong and Li Xiao eds. *Zhongguo Xiandaixi Shi* (*A History of the Chinese Contemporary Theatre*), 154.
[34] *Ibid.*

life, *jingju*, as one of the representative *xiqu* forms, should also adapt to the changed social political situations and perform contemporary themes.[35]

In this debate, the famous *jingju* dramatist and critic Ma Shaobo provided his solution intended to relax the tensions, saying, "We could do as many artistic experiments as possible to accumulate the successful experiences, and in the long run I believe we could gradually make *jingju* forms suitable for contemporary themes. We could first draw historical materials from the age of the recent past, from which we could transition smoothly to a phase that draws materials from the current life and society."[36] However, instead of mitigating the contradiction of the two opposite opinions, Ma's "transition" solution aroused more debates. Those who opposed the idea of creating new *jingju* with contemporary themes argued that if we tried to experiment with new forms in *jingju* to make it suitable to the modern materials, we in fact put *jingju* at risk that it might be transformed into something else: a new type of drama—a musical or an opera. Some people commented on Ma's solution that to use materials from the age of the recent past as its new content was not helpful at all in transforming *jingju* into an art for the modern times; rather, this phase of 'transition' would inevitably harm the essence of *jingju* because most traditions and conventions would still inevitably be eliminated to represent the "recent past." Some others thought such discussion on whether *jingju* should be made suitable to reflect contemporary themes was practically useless because *jingju* was too conventional to be transformed, so that the drama reforms should start with those less traditional theatre forms instead of *jingju*. There were also people

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[35] *Ibid.*, 154-155.
[36] Ma Shobo. "A Further Suggestion to the Jingju Reforms." *Xiju Bao* (*The Drama News*). October Issue, 1954. Gao Yilong and Li Xiao eds. *Zhongguo xiandaixi shi* (*A History of the Chinese Contemporary Theatre*), 155.

agreeing with Ma's suggestions. They praised Ma for having brought up a bold and wonderful proposal, and agreed that to use recent historical materials in the experiments might serve well as a transition to transform *jingju* into a modern form.[37]

From these heated debates and different opinions expressed at various forums and conferences held by the Department of Culture or the Theatre Association, we can conclude that the question of whether *jingju* could reflect contemporary themes largely remained at a theoretical level. Though it had already been tried experimentally in practice by the artists in the early twentieth century and later by the CCP during the wartime, the plays created and performed at the time only existed very briefly. However, as Mackerras stated, "The Great Leap Forward saw a thrust towards more modern themes in the traditional theatre,"[38] and thus to create new *jingju* with revolutionary and contemporary themes became the major work in the CCP's following *jingju* reforms.

The Frenzy of the Great Leap Forward Movement in the Traditional Theatre

In 1957, famous *jingju* masters Mei Lanfang and Zhou Xinfang, on behalf of the theatrical circle, urged a halt to the indiscriminate revival of the old plays after the lifting of the banning policy. The artists' self-censorship foreshadowed a shift of the CCP's policy from artistic freedom to restriction. Furthermore, under the influence of Mao's Great Leap Forward Movement, which aimed to use China's vast population to rapidly transform the country from an agrarian economy into a modern socialist society through the process of rapid industrialization and collectivization, in practice the CCP regarded

[37] Gao Yilong and Li Xiao eds. *Zhongguo xiandaixi shi* (*A History of the Chinese Contemporary Theatre*), 155.
[38] Colin Mackerras. *Chinese Drama: A Historical Survey*. (Beijing: New World Press, 1990), 157.

the promotion of the modern revolutionary theatre as its chief concern in the reform of *jingju*. If more attention was given to the preservation of the traditional *jingju* in the former liberal phase, now things turned the other way around.

A major conference focused on the creation of new plays with contemporary themes was held in June and July 1958, at which Zhou Yang indicated clearly the CCP's shift in its policy:

> There should be a leap forward in the drama expressing modern life. There should also be a leap forward in planning and editing superior traditional pieces. From now on, no efforts should be spared in producing pieces with material reflecting modern life, and we should not ask for any excessive or additional conditions for doing this.[39]

Based on this changed directive, a notion of "walking on two legs" in drama reforms was brought up at the conference; Liu Mingzhi explained that, "one leg is modern items, and the other leg is traditional items."[40] Though seemingly both "items" were paid equal attention, the substantial aim was to "carry on a bitter battle" over the three Great Leap Forward years so that the missions in drama reforms could be completely accomplished. In her concluding report at the conference, Liu clarified the detailed steps of creating new plays expressing contemporary life:

> Our directive is: in our reforms of the traditional theatre, we need to follow the general political line of constructing a Socialist new country. Artistic creation should be in accordance with this political line. We should also carry on Mao's initiative to "push out the old and create the new." The priority should be given to the creation of new plays with contemporary themes...so that these new socialist plays could better serve our soldiers, peasants and workers, as well as our Socialist revolution and construction.

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[39] *Xiqu Yanjiu* (*Drama Research*). Issue 4, 1958, 5.
[40] Geng Zhang, ed. *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama · Beijing Volume*. (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1999), 1453.

> Our slogan is: carry out a bitter battle over three years and thereby increase the proportion of modern items in the great majority of local drama styles and troupes from twenty percent to more than half.[41]

Though Liu did mention that maintaining traditional pieces was just as important as creating the new items, in practice, people completely neglected the "leg of the traditional items." Instead, the proneness to boasting and exaggeration started in all local troupes. In the beginning, some troupes in Liaoning Province brought up as a slogan "one hundred new plays created in one year," and requested the playwrights to make a timetable for their writing: a complete new play must be written in two days, and on the third day, it should be performed to the audience.[42] The theatre circles in Henan province were even more exaggerating: everybody was writing plays and a troupe could "leap forward" dozens of scripts a day. According to a rough calculation, in the first half of the year 1958, there were 2346 new plays reflecting contemporary life created in the province. From January to November in 1959, 23 troupes in the local Xinyang area created 756 new plays, among which 94 were large sized plays in terms of their length, 199 were middle sized, and 463 were small sized. Most of these newly created plays were composed of absurd representations of revolution, socialist production and industrialization. For instance, in a new play *Bibi Kan* (*The Competition*), She Saihua and

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[41] Liu Zhiming. "Making Effort to create New Socialist National Drama—The Concluding Report At the Conference of the Traditional Theatre Reflecting the Contemporary Life Held on July 14, 1958." *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama · Beijing Volume*. (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1999), 1453-1454.

[42] *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama · Liaoning Volume*. (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1994), 13.

Mu Guiying were set into a competition with the Worker-Peasant Red Guards. In another newly created play, a sweet potato was so huge that it could be cut only by a saw.[43]

Although the speed of creating a large quantity of new plays was very swift, none of these newly written plays lasted. Indeed most of them were never put into rehearsals, let alone performed. For instance, in Jiangsu province, the masses were mobilized and encouraged to write and create new plays. As a result, ten thousand plays were created in one year; however, except for a few of them, most were not rehearsed and performed.[44] In Zhejiang province, the dramatists normally spent ten days on writing a new play in the beginning. Later, the local government mobilized the extensive masses to participate in the writing process, so that in two days, sixty new plays were finished. In the meantime, various competitions for creating new plays were held among local troupes. In the first round, one troupe created a number of 600 new plays, while in the second round, another troupe reached the number of 3000. In such ridiculous competitions, some troupes were even able to create a huge number of sixty million to one hundred million new plays since as long as the materials were drawn from contemporary life and politically right, all other artistic aspects were completely outside the considerations. In a short time, even cooks and illiterates also joined in creating new plays because there were infinite raw materials that could be drawn from the contemporary life.[45]

The year of 1958 witnessed a frenzy of the Great Leap Forward movement not only in the Chinese economy, but also in the traditional theatre circles. The former ended up in

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[43] *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama · Henan Volume*. (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1988), 25.
[44] *The Annals of Chinese Traditional Drama · Jiangsu Volume*. (Beijing: Chinese ISBN Press Centre, 1993), 33.
[45] Chen Tushou. *Ren Youbing, Tian Zhifou* (*Whether God Knows That the Human Beings Are Sick*). (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2000), 67-68.

a three-year famine disaster, which caused tens of millions of deaths, while in the latter, a real farce was being put on since most of these newly created plays were barely performed at the time and all were rapidly forgotten.

1958: The Creation of New Jingju Baimao nü (The White-Haired Girl)

As the year of the Great Leap Forward had witnessed the emergence of a large number of new plays with contemporary themes, numerous new *jingju* plays reflecting revolution or contemporary life were created as well under the same political pressure and frenzy. A list of some of these productions is given in Appendix D.

We can see from the list of the new plays created during this period that many of these plays later participated in the Jingju Xiandaixi Performance Festival in 1964. For instance, both these later new plays—*The Sparks of Revolution in the Common Reeds* (*Ludang Huozhong*) and *Shajia Bang*—were actually growing out of the play *White Clouds and Red Flags* (*Baiyun Hongqi*), which was originally created in 1958. And some titles still remained in the list of *yangbanxi*.

It is worth noting that while most newly created plays in other *xiqu* forms were largely forgotten and barely survived, most of these *jingju* experiments listed in Appendix D stood out as successful. For instance, *The White-haired Girl* (*Baimao nü*) marked the beginning of the first wave of creating new *jingju* plays with contemporary themes. Though the playwrights Ma Shaobo and Fan Junhong started writing its script on March 8, 1958, and finished it in only two weeks (March 20), *The White-haired Girl*, in contrast to those plays appearing briefly at the time, gained vast popularity and a series of

successful experiences through the rehearsals and performances by *jingju* artists Li Shaochun (1919-1975) and Du Jinfang (1932-).

1. The basic story

The play begins with the peasant girl Xi'er waiting for her father back home to celebrate the Spring Festival on the eve of the Chinese New Year. Yang Bailao, Xi'er's father, had been away to avoid the debt collector from the despotic landlord, Huang Shiren. He returned home at dusk with no gifts other than a red ribbon to tie Xi'er's hair for the holiday. Unfortunately, the debt collectors came for the farmland rent that Yang Bailao had been unable to pay. They killed Yang Bailao and took Xi'er away by force as Huang Shiren's concubine.

At the landlord's house, Xi'er was forced to work day and night and felt exhausted. One day, when Xi'er dozed off while trying to take a short break, the landlord's mother came on the scene and poked at Xi'er's face with hairpins to wake her up. Then she ordered Xi'er to prepare her a bowl of soup. When the soup was served, the landlord's mother was not satisfied with the taste, so she poured the still-boiling soup on Xi'er's face. Outraged by the pain and anger, Xi'er grabbed the whip the landlord used to punish her and beat up the landlord's mother. Since the landlord's mother fell and fled by crawling on the floor, Xi'er was subsequently punished and locked up by the landlord.

Aunt Zhang, an elderly maid of the landlord, was very sympathetic to Xi'er. One day, Aunt Zhang stole the key to Xi'er's cell from the pocket of the landlord's overcoat and helped Xi'er escape. Shortly after Huang Shiren found that Xi'er was missing, he sent Mu Renzhi and other men to chase her. Xi'er arrived at a river. She took off one of her shoes, left it on the side of the river, and then hid in the bushes. Mu Renzhi came and

only found a shoe, so he assumed that Xi'er had drowned in the river and reported that to the landlord. Xi'er thus escaped to the mountains, and in the following years, she lived in a cave and on the offerings she could gather from a nearby temple. She fought against all kinds of beasts and bad weather. Gradually, her hair turned completely white.

On a stormy night, the landlord Huang Shiren and his men came to the temple to provide offerings. However, the thunderstorm stopped their trip. It happened that Xi'er was in the temple too, and Huang saw her by the light of a flash of lightning—with her hair long and white, and shabby clothes that had been weathered nearly white. Huang thought it was the reincarnation of a goddess who came to punish him for his mistreatment of Xi'er and other despotisms. He was so frightened that he was literally paralyzed. Simultaneously, Xi'er recognized that it was her enemy and seized the opportunity to take revenge. She picked up a brass incense burner and hurled it against Huang. However, the landlord and his men fled.

In the meantime, Xi'er's long-ago fiancé, Wang Dachun, had joined the Eighth Route Army and fought in the Sino-Japanese war. Now he returned with his army to overthrow the rule of the Japanese invaders and landlords. They distributed the landlords' farmlands to the peasants. After Aunt Zhang told Dachun about Xi'er's story, they decided to search for her in the mountains. Finally, Dachun found his Xi'er outside the cave with long and white hair. They reunited and rejoiced in the end.

Actually, the story of the white-haired girl was quite well-known, and its numerous other artistic forms had been widely appreciated by the masses. Though the play mainly emphasized the class struggle—the confrontations between the landlords Huang Shiren, his mother, his accomplices, and the peasants Yang Baolao, his daughter Xi'er, and

Xi'er's fiancé Wang Dachun, already quite a few opera songs and ballet dances from productions in other artistic forms had reached certain aesthetic heights and remained quite popular.

2. How to perform a jingju Yang Bailao

Since *The White-haired Girl* was among the first of a series of new *jingju* plays created in the post-1949 period drawing their materials from contemporary revolution and life, the artists were faced with the major problem of how to use *jingju*, such a traditional and conventional form, to meet the needs of new content. For instance, definitely the characters in the new play could not use the old costumes and makeup. Rather, they were in the realistic clothes worn by peasants and landlords. Additionally, the way of talking and walking should also be different from those historical characters from legends or antiquities. Those songs and dances, which Mei had insisted on as unchangeable and contradictory elements against the contemporary content, remained still problematic. Furthermore, was there a way that the artists could make use of the conventionalized movements, gestures, fighting skills and acrobatics to fit into a modernized context? It is worth noting that, though the play was performed under the guide of a director, A Jia, who was cultivated in the Yan'an revolutionary base and graduated from Yan'an Pingju Research Institute, he was actually someone who tried to keep *jingju*'s characteristics instead of eliminating them to meet solely political requirements. Furthermore, the play was to a large extent created through the collaboration of all artistic staff: actors, musicians, playwrights, etc., and most important of all, the actors still played the major significant role in the entire creation and performance process.

Li Shaochun, the famous *laosheng* actor who performed Yang Bailao, recorded in an article his personal experiences on the creation of the character Yang Bailao. He mentioned a series of experiments and attempts he had used in the performance, and from which we might have a sense of how this renowned *jingju* artist tried to eliminate the conflicts between the traditional form and the modern content, and managed to establish a Yang Bailao that was *jingju*:

> After I received the script, the first thing hitting my mind was how to create a *jingju* Yang Bailao? Since if we adopted the *jingju* form to perform Yang, different from that in spoken drama or opera, we ought to use the traditional *jingju* skills and techniques. Because the *jingju* style was exactly embodied in these traditional skills and techniques, in a sense, they represented the *jingju* style. Without these techniques, *jingju* lost its style. We should also take the audiences' response into our considerations: without the long beard makeup and the long sleeves in the costumes, how should we move around on stage in a way that the audience would not feel was ridiculous or inappropriate? After a discussion with the director, we decided to use the typical pose after I appeared on the stage, and then to continue using the subsequent movements and expressions to absorb our audience into the plot—most importantly, we needed to let them feel that it was a *jingju* rather than something else. It was also important that the first three scenes needed to be performed well; otherwise, the following scenes would be more difficult.
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> So, how should I [Yang Bailao] enter the stage? We felt that it was closely associated with the tempo of gongs and drums. If we used *niusi*[46], it was hard for me to enter. In this situation, I consulted our player of gongs and drums. He suggested that Xi'er sing the last line of *nanbangzi*[47] in a loosened way, so that he could play the gongs to suggest that there was a blowing of wind. I then entered the stage with this first "blow of wind," and after displaying a couple of movements suggesting that I was in another "blow of wind," I posed on the upper front stage in a final beating of the drum. In this case, the performance still looked like *jingju*,

[46] In the *jingju* orchestra, besides the major instruments *huqin* (the Chinese violin), *erhu* (the "minor" Chinese violin), *yueqin* (the moon guitar), etc., a series of Chinese percussion ensemble, such as gongs and cymbals are used to provide the basic rhythmic background for songs, speeches, dances, movements, and martial arts, etc. These basic rhythmic patterns are called *luogujing*. *Niusi* is one of the various patterns of *luoguojing* produced from beating of the *xiaoluo* (small gong without a boss, beaten with a stick or a thin plate.) *Niusi* is typically used for the major characters entering onto the stage, but also on many other occasions to indicate the character or the environment.

[47] It is one typical musical pattern of songs in *xipi* melody.

and in the meantime, it fit into the plot that Yang Bailao returned home on a stormy night with heavy snowfall. After my first appearance on the stage, it was better for me to move around whenever I was singing, because it would be awkward to move around once I stopped singing.

For the ordinary poses or gestures, I mostly adapted those from our traditional performance, and changed a little bit according to the specific meaning or environment that I needed to indicate. For instance, I used another posing position when I tried to push Huang Shiren's gate. However, I could not pose too much since it would look incompatible with the performance style. There was only one place I needed to use a strong posing position, which was in the third scene while Yao was telling Uncle Zhao that "Huang Shiren wanted my daughter to pay off his farm land rent." I needed to stretch my right hand out with my right arm completely straight—such a kind of pose was actually not right in the traditional performance, because it broke the rule that all movements and poses should be formed as circles. However, I could not use the traditional performance here, because it would not demonstrate Yao Bailao's anger at Huang Shiren. Thus, during the process of performing the contemporary figures, there were still some traditions and conventions that needed to be changed to suit the changed content.

There were also some conventions that we could not make use of. For instance, in the past performance, whenever I referred to myself, I usually raised my beards up by both hands. Now, not only were the old beards gotten rid of, but I was also stuck with a new mustache. If I still used the old performance with a mustache, it must look really strange and ugly. In this play, I only touched my mustache once, and that was after I tied Xi'er's hair with the red ribbon, while I was looking at Xi'er with joy. I never used this gesture elsewhere.

But there were also some traditional conventions, which, if we used them appropriately, could express the characters' emotions perfectly. For example, in the third scene after Xi'er went into deep sleep, Yang Bailao sang a *siping diao*: "I saw Xi'er was in a steady and deep sleep, how could she imagine that a disaster was imminent. This was a trap that Huang had set…" During this singing scene, I adopted almost the complete movements and gestures used in a scene of one traditional play. I used a series of these conventionalized movements to demonstrate how Huang set the trap for me—he had written a contract and forced me to sign my signature. I felt that if I used a long monologue to tell the plot, it was not as powerful as using these conventions to reflect the intensified anger and helplessness Yang felt at the moment.

In conclusion, we could make certain changes to these traditional conventions so as to suit the needs of the characters.[48]

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[48] Li Shaochun. "My Experiences of Performing Yang Bailao." *A Must Read for the Actors*. Yang Yumin and Wu Qianhao, eds. (Beijing: Zhongguo xijujia xiehui Beijing fenhui, 1985), 371-373.

Though the actress who performed Xi'er during this newly created play imported techniques from ballet, she still thoroughly took advantage of the traditional skills and movements, such as many conventionalized steps, which made her performance both suitable for characteristics of a contemporary figure and enjoyable for its largely unchanged skills and techniques.

Nevertheless, the triumph of a single white-haired girl certainly could not justify that *jingju* was exactly the appropriate form to reflect contemporary life. As its director A Jia pointed out, "We could not thus conclude that *jingju* was completely suitable for reflecting the contemporary themes after seeing only a *White-haired Girl*."[49] Indeed, the successful solutions adopted in *The White-haired Girl* could not apply to all the new *jingju* plays with contemporary themes. In particular, it was not only an issue with regard to solving a purely artistic confrontation between form and content, as under such political impositions an ideal of art for art's sake never existed.

From "Walking on Two Legs" to "Emphasis on Three Types of Plays"

The first wave of the Anti-Rightist Movement in 1957, which involved severe attacks against famous intellectuals and renowned artists, pushed the entire performance market into a worse situation. In particular, under the following Great Leap Forward frenzy and pressure, all troupes all over China had to participate in a ridiculous competition for creating new plays with contemporary themes, which did not bring about theatrical prosperity and more performable plays; instead, a theatrical famine occurred

[49] The abstract of the "Talks on the Discussion Seminar about the Jingju Reflecting the Contemporary Life." Issue 11, July 6, 1958. Fu Jin. *Xinzhongguo Xiju Shi: 1949-2000* (*A History of Chinese Drama: 1949-2000*). (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002), 73-74.

because the old artists were oppressed and self-censored from performing the traditional repertoire, and the performing troupes also became more cautious about choosing what kind of plays to perform, while simultaneously a large number of the newly created plays, composed mostly by non-professionals to meet specific political needs, rarely survived due to the fact that the traditional theatre was still quite popular among the masses.

We can see from the previous banning and censoring process that the CCP's policies towards the *jingju* reforms had taken twists and turns: after realizing that the local authorities and the troupes had started to ban the old repertoire excessively, the CCP lifted the banning notice so that the *jingju* artists could still perform the traditional plays that they were familiar with and on which they depended for earning a living. Similarly, after the Great Leap Forward in the creation of the new plays with contemporary themes, the CCP was shocked to find that the entire country was in a calamity-ridden situation. Many artists complained about losing their jobs and having no plays to perform. On May 3, 1960, at the Report-back on the Performance of New Plays with Contemporary Themes, the vice president of the Cultural Department Qi Yanming brought up a directive to emphasize three types of plays, that is, to create more new plays reflecting the contemporary life, to continuously revise and perform the traditional repertoire, and to create more new historical plays. Under such circumstances, the CCP again revised its official policy on the traditional theatre from strictly the campaign for creating new plays to reviving the old repertoire. Thus, the year 1961-1962 witnessed a large number of traditional plays re-staged extensively.

What is more, at the conference held in Guangzhou from March 2 to 26, 1962, the Premier of PRC Zhou Enlai (1898-1976) adopted a more tolerant policy towards the

Chinese intellectuals so as to correct the mistakes the CCP had made during the previous Anti-Rightist Movement during which many were accused of rightist inclinations and bourgeois ideologies. Particularly, the foreign minister and the previous mayor of Shanghai, Chen Yi's speech at the conference on March 6 found an echo in the theatrical circles. He honestly and frankly admitted that the CCP's former policies of the Great Leap Forward and on the *xiqu* reforms were riddled with errors. He said:

> I think we have a problem here, that is, everybody has anger and complains. Now, I want all of you to express your anger and complaints…we had a series of mistakes and errors in these political movements, which caused an abnormal relationship among our cadres, political workers, and our dramatists. I have already said yesterday that the relationship between our party cadres and the scientists was not right. Some scientists felt that they were wronged because they did love and embrace the CCP leadership and wished to contribute to our socialist society, however, they were still regarded by our political workers as bourgeois intellectuals and capitalist scientists. Thus, they were not even allowed to write academic papers. Particularly in the works of massive irrigation and steel production in the Great Forward Movement, many methods were anti-science. They knew that ten thousand pounds of grain could not be produced out of an inch of land, but they still insisted that it was possible. Why? They dared not to tell the truth. Because once they said that it was impossible they would be accused of being 'conservative,' and they would be criticized for their capitalist inclination; they had to keep silent…now, nobody even dares to boast of 'writing sixty scripts over night.' There were many confrontations among our political organs and the scientists, dramatists, directors, and actors. We need to try to solve these problems.[50]

In Chen's talk, he specifically condemned the widespread methodology used in the Great Leap Forward to create the new plays with contemporary themes:

> It was popular that a new play's theme was drawn from the CCP's political ideology, its content from the masses' contemporary life, and its form developed from the dramatists' skills. However, I need to question—

[50] Chen Yi. "The Talk on the National Conference of the Spoken Drama, Operas, and Children's Theatre." March 6, 1962. It was published in *Wenyi Yanjiu* (*Literature and Art Research*), Issue 2, 1979. Fu Jin. *Xinzhongguo Xiju Shi: 1949-2000* (*A History of Chinese Drama: 1949-2000*). (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002), 95.

> did not a dramatist have his own ideology? Why could the CCP leadership impose their ideologies? The content was from the masses' contemporary life, so did not a dramatist have his life, and did not the leaders have their own lives? Were the leaders all dead? So did only the dramatists have to deal with the problems of form and skill?[51]

This conference revealed the CCP's realization of their previous mistakes in both economic and theatrical constructions.

On November 15, 1962, in his talk at the Capital Jingju Creation Seminar, Qi Yanming reaffirmed the previous directive which he had brought up in 1960: "there were a series of errors in our campaign for creating new plays with contemporary themes in 1958. We tried to give a percentage of the plays that should be created and performed, and it was not right. Actually, no matter whether the content is from antiquity or from contemporary times, whether the form is traditional or modernized, we need all of them as long as they serve our masses of the people."[52] It was these speeches from which the CCP established its new policy towards the *xiqu* reforms and emphasized equally three types of plays: revised traditional plays, newly created historical plays and new plays with contemporary themes.

Indeed, the Guangzhou conference played a significant role in an era of political turmoil, which again, encouraged a cultural diversity. It was like an ideology of liberation at the time, as the famous dramatist Cao Yu (1910-1996) recalled later:

> After the Liberation [1949], I worked as hard as many other intellectuals. Although I had joined in the CCP officially, in practice, I was labeled as a bourgeois intellectual. I felt so oppressed by this political accusation that I could not even speak my mind freely. How could I serve well and create more plays for our socialist country? Not only I, many other comrades were all afraid of becoming the 'anti-Socialist poisonous dross.' Now, the

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[51] *Ibid.*
[52] Gao Yilong and Li Xiao eds. *Zhongguo Xiandaixi Shi* (*A History of the Chinese Contemporary Theatre*), 200.

> Guangzhou Conference liberated our ideologies, and rid us of the label of 'bourgeoisie.' That hidden shadow in my heart during the past thirteen years since the Liberation finally disappeared. How grateful I am to the CCP and how pleased I am! However, the happiness did not last long.[53]

It seemed that each period of liberation was followed by one of a stricter restriction. Thus the CCP's emphasis on three types of plays and their embrace of cultural diversity soon vanished. Accompanied with the slogan "performing the contemporary thirteen years only" brought up in 1963, the creation of the new plays with contemporary themes reached its heyday, which foreshadowed the exclusive model theatre.

The Campaign of Performing the Contemporary Thirteen Years

On January 4, 1963, at the New Year's Gala of the Shanghai Literature and Art Circles, Ke Qingshi, the advisor of the Shanghai city Party committee, brought up the slogan of "writing the contemporary thirteen years."[54] Here, the "thirteen years" referred to the years since Liberation (1949-1963). In Ke's talk, he highly praised the newly created spoken drama *Dierge Chuntian* (*Another Spring*) and the movie *Li Shuangshuang*, which both drew their materials from the contemporary thirteen years. Obviously, this slogan was an immediate challenge to the previous common agreement set by the CCP's directive "emphasis on three types of plays" because it substantially rejected the performance of both the traditional repertoire and new historical plays.

Though in the beginning, the slogan only aroused a new debate on what should be considered Socialist literature and art, while some argued that the slogan took a

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[53] Liang Binkun. *Zai Cao Yu Shenbian* (*The Days with Cao Yu*). (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1999), 24-24.
[54] Fu Jin. *Xinzhongguo Xiju Shi: 1949-2000* (*A History of Chinese Drama: 1949-2000*). (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002), 97.

completely lopsided view to the theatre work, others responded enthusiastically that only plays reflecting the contemporary thirteen years should be created. A series of CCP initiatives issued later that year reinforced the idea expressed in the slogan.

On June 5, 1963, the Department of Culture issued a notice to control the renowned artists' recruitment of new students and requested these artists to participate in the labor projects in factories and farmlands during which process they could be reformed by the workers and peasants. Thus they would be able to create new plays suitable for the revolution. On August 27, the Department of Culture issued another notice to request all troupes to perform plays reflecting the anti-superstition and the freedom of marriage campaigns to cooperate with the CCP's current propaganda for the class struggle and the Socialist education. In the previous year 1962, on November 22, the Central Committee of the CCP had issued a report to enhance and improve the play reform work, and in another notice issued on December 7, the Department of Culture had specifically condemned a series of plays, including *Li Huiniang*. Thus, on May 6, 1963, Shanghai *wenhui bao* (*Wenhui News*) published Liang Bihui's article "A Criticism on the So-called Harmless Ghosts," which expanded the criticisms of Meng Chao's *Li Huiniang* to all plays containing ghost images. It is clear that Li Huiniang and numerous other ghost images were taken advantage of by the CCP leftists as an excuse to request a suspension of the traditional theatre and an attack on their political opponents within the party.[55]

On December 12, 1963, when Mao Zedong commented on the Report of Pingtan Reform, he said:

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[55] *Ibid.*, 97-99.

> There are many problems in various artistic forms—theatre, opera, music, fine art, dance, movie, poem, and literature, etc. Many people have participated in the Socialist reform, but they did not bring notable results. Numerous departments and organs are still governed by the 'dead.'…there are more severe problems in the theatre circles. The economic base has already changed in our society, but our artistic department, one of our major superstructures, has still remained quite problematic…many of our party members have advocated the feudalist and capitalist arts rather than socialist arts—this is really weird![56]

On June 27 in the following year 1964, during the *Jingju Xiandaixi* Performance Festival, Mao further criticized the theatre associations and their affiliated publications:

> In these past fifteen years, most of these associations and their publications basically did not carry out the CCP's directives. They became bureaucrats because they distanced themselves from the workers and peasants, and they refused to reflect the Socialist revolution and construction. In these recent few years, they even turned into Revisionists. If they were not reformed by now, in the near future, they will establish a club of Petőfi like the one in the Hungarian Revolution.[57]

These two directives of Mao directly provided a theoretical basis for Jiang Qing's attitude of negating all artistic work and her persecution of literature and art cadres who held opinions different from hers. Of course, after the issuance of Mao's second directive, the literature and art circles launched a Rectificaiton Movement, in which Tian Han's new historical play *Xie Yaohuan* was criticized. Not long after both Xia Yan and Tian Han were dismissed from their offices, in 1965, Wu Han and his *Hai Rui Baguan* (*Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*) were specifically condemned by Jiang and her gang as a play used by the bourgeoisie to fight against the dictatorship of the proletariat and the socialist revolution.

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[56] Mao Zedong. "Two Directives on the Literature and Art." *Remin Ribao* (*People's Daily*), May 28, 1967. Fu Jin. *Xinzhongguo Xiju Shi: 1949-2000* (*A History of Chinese Drama: 1949-2000*), 105.
[57] Mao Zedong. "Two Directives on the Literature and Art." *Remin Ribao* (*People's Daily*), May 28, 1967. Fu Jin. *Xinzhongguo Xiju Shi: 1949-2000* (*A History of Chinese Drama: 1949-2000*), 113.

1964: A Revolution of Jingju—The Second Wave of Creating Jingju Xiandaixi

I have mentioned earlier that the successful creation of *The White-haired Girl* had marked the beginning of the first wave of creating new *jingju* plays with contemporary themes during the late 1950s. Since the slogan of "performing the contemporary themes" along with a series of other directives were brought up by the CCP during 1963 to impose Maoist orthodoxy within the Party, the Department of Culture pushed ahead more vigorously with its program to revolutionize the *jingju*. In the *xinhua news* on June 5, 1963, the CCP announced that they would organize a *jingju xiandaixi* performance festival in 1964, which would "mark the *jingju* revolution entering a new era."[58] This festival represented the second wave of creating new *jingju* with contemporary themes in the early 1960s. From June 5 to July 31, 1964, a festival was held composed of new *jingju* plays only with contemporary themes. It involved twenty-nine *jingju* troupes from eighteen provinces, cities, and autonomous regions, and thirty-five new modernized *jingju* plays were performed.[59] All together the participants numbered over 2400, and the thirty-five new plays were performed a total of 108 times in five different theatres. After July 15, there were 90 additional performances of these plays open to the public. Additionally, approximately 460 million people watched twenty-three nights of performances through the Beijing Television.[60]

During the whole festival, the CCP leadership also held eight report sessions to discuss the current domestic and international situation, and reinforced the idea that

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[58] Xinhua News Agency. "The Jingju Xiandaixi Performance Festival Opens in 1964." *Xiju Bao* (*Theatre Newspaper*), Issue 6, 1964. Fu Jin. *Xinzhongguo Xiju Shi: 1949-2000* (*A History of Chinese Drama: 1949-2000*), 108.
[59] Fu Jin. *Xinzhongguo Xiju Shi: 1949-2000* (*A History of the Contemporary Chinese Theatre, 1949-2000*), 108.
[60] *Ibid.*

jingju, as a major part of the superstructure, must be revolutionized to meet the political needs. In other words, new *jingju* plays must be created to reflect the life of and for the soldiers, workers and peasants so as to be suitable for the contemporary Socialist construction and Cultural Revolution. Under such political circumstances, the news agencies in Beijing widely reported about the whole festival with such headlines as "The Grand Revolution in A Cultural Battle," and "Continuously and Thoroughly Making the Socialist Revolution in A Cultural Battle," which all foreshadowed an exclusively revolutionary theatre.

Before we proceed to discuss further how these newly created *jingju* plays formed the basis of the *xianbanxi*, we might first have a glance at these thirty-five new titles, which are listed in the Appendix D.

In terms of the content, we can see that there were fifteen plays reflecting the CCP's revolutionary history, such as *Azalea Mountain*, *Red Guards on Honghu Lake* and *The Red Detachment of Women*, which were based on the second civil war, portraying how the peasants took up the revolution under the CCP leadership. The new plays *The Legend of the Red Lantern*, *There Is No Lack of Successors to Carry On the Revolutionary Cause*, and *The Sparks of Revolution in the Common Reeds* depicted the Chinese people resolutely fighting against the Japanese invaders during the Sino-Japanese War. In the plays *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, *Red Rock*, *Jie Zhenguo* and *The Gate Number Six*, audiences could see vividly represented how the People's Liberation Army, the CCP underground organizations, and the workers in cities defeated the counter-revolutionaries in the Liberation War. In addition, there were twenty plays drawing materials from the post-1949 Socialist revolution and construction, among which

The Red Sun on the Mountain Ke, *Winds and Thunders on the Miao Mountains*, and *Dai Nuo* focused on the struggle between the bandits and the minorities, while a series of others, such as *Li Shuangshuang*, *The Record of Ploughing and Weeding*, *The Bar*, and *The Little Sisters Heroines of the Grasslands* reflected the social and economic physiognomy of a new China under the Socialist revolution and construction. We can see from these titles that some plays (e.g. *The Legend of the Red Lantern* and *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*) appeared later as the major model works of the *yangbanxi*, while some (i.e. *The Sparks of Revolution in the Common Reeds*), though with their titles changed, still remained in the *yangbanxi* categories after undergoing numerous revisions.

As we can see, the development of the CCP's creation of new *jingju* plays with contemporary themes had undergone a transformation from the "putting new wine into an old bottle" methodology used by the cadres at the Lu Xun Arts Academy, to the revolutionary content being independent of the traditional framework in the new plays created by the graduates from the Pingju Research Institute, and onward to the early attempts at solving the innate contradictions between the old form and the new content in the creation of *The White-haired Girl* during the first wave of creating new *jingju* plays with contemporary themes. Now these plays constructed in the early and middle 1960s took on several characteristics which prepared them well for the formation of the *yanbanxi* in both form and content, artistically and ideologically.

To be more specific, there were a couple of progressions in plot development and character formation in these newly created plays.

1. The dramatists paid much attention to these plays' structure and their plot was largely complicated by many episodes

Many of the newly created plays were designed with a much more complicated plot following a chronological storyline or a beginning-climax-ending structure, so as to keep the audience in suspense until near the end of the performance. For instance, in the play *The Sparks of Revolution in the Common Reeds* depicting how Aqing Sao, a CCP underground liaison woman, under the disguise of a tea-shop keeper, helped to cover up the wounded soldiers' evacuation, the plot was designed in a way that hardly had one wave subsided when another rose—one trouble followed another. A similarly complicated plot appeared in another play *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, which portrayed how the hero Yang Zirong, a PLA-soldier under the disguise of a bandit, infiltrated the bandits' stronghold to find out when and where to attack the bandit chief, Zuo Shandiao and his gang. Other plays, such as *The Army and People in Yan'an*, *Azalea Mountain*, and *Hong Sao*, all used uniquely designed plots to make the performance not only suitable for the political needs but also interesting and absorbing.[61] For instance, one scene in *Hong Sao* depicted how the wounded soldiers were saved by drinking milk from the civilians.

Some plays drew typical and popular materials from contemporary life. For instance, in *The Legend of the Red Lantern*, which was based on a true story of communist undercover agents working at a Huicui railway station in Hulin fighting the Japanese invaders during the Second Sino-Japanese War, there was a symbol for revolution—the red lantern—throughout the play. Concentrating on the exploits of the communist underground activities under Japanese occupation in 1939, the play told how

[61] Gao Yilong and Li Xiao eds. *Zhongguo Xiandaixi Shi* (*A History of the Chinese Contemporary Theatre*), 240-241.

the protagonist Li Yuhe, a railroad worker who was engaging in underground work, was taken away by special agents. It further portrayed how Li Tiemei was determined to follow the example of her father and carried the revolution through to the end after hearing the heroic story about her family from her grandma Li.

These plot-complicated new plays were quite different from the traditional repertoire, which mostly had a very simple storyline. The traditional plays were largely drawing their materials from the legends and figures from histories, so the masses were already quite familiar with these popular stories and tales. By attending the tea-house theatre, the audiences were substantially listening to a performance focusing on its songs and dialogues, rather than seeing how the plot proceeded. Particularly in those *wuxi*, the audiences were more interested in seeing the display of actors' dances or martial arts—whether their movements and fighting demonstrated their good command of the conventional skills and techniques. There were actually many inaccuracies and confusions of time, place or character in these traditional plays due to the fact that they were initially established on an oral legacy—instead of performing according to a written script, most actors used only a plot outline, and the real performance was highly dependent on a common knowledge shared among the professionals and on the stage improvisations. Based on this performance tradition and shared knowledge, the audiences were coming for the *jingju* stars' singing and dancing rather than picking up errors of historical inaccuracies. Thus, we can see from the traditional repertoire that there were many short scenes focused specifically on songs standing out from a complete play, or independent highlights featuring dances and martial arts standing on their own—even without a complete story or plot, they did not interfere with the audiences' appreciation.

Though some of these newly created *jingju* plays, particularly those very sophisticated plays in the *yangbanxi*, also had certain episodes that could be performed independently, they largely followed a complicated story line in a sequential narration and needed more time for changing the stage décor and properties, which was not as flexible as the smooth transition between scenes in the traditional performance.

2. *The dramatists strived to establish distinct images of characters.*

As Roberts states that, "traditional Beijing Opera (*jingju*) is an extremely complex non-realist art form whose symbolic nature is epitomized by the famous painted faces of many of the male characters,"[62] the process of characterization in the traditional *jingju* performance was fulfilled not only by the actor but also by the role type he or she represented. In a sense, the actor needed not only to perform the characteristics associated with his or her role-type, but also to perform the character he or she played in the plot. For example, one of the major role types in *jingju*, *jing*—the painted face male role, boasted fifteen basic facial patterns with over 1000 specific variations. These patterns and coloring derived from the Chinese traditional color symbolism were used on an actor's face to suggest the role type's general personality. For instance, the color red denoted uprightness and loyalty. White represented evil or crafty characters, whereas characters of soundness and integrity were normally given a color black. "Characters represent certain standardized and clearly gendered personalities each with their own standardized gestures, way of walking, vocal techniques, make-up and costume,"[63] so that "a typical audience would be familiar with the conventions and symbolism associated with each

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[62] Rosemary A. Roberts. *Maoist Model Theatre: The Semiotics of Gender and Sexuality in the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)*. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 23.
[63] A. C. Scott. *The Classical Theatre of China*. (New York: Macmillan, 1978), 16-18.

role and character, and would expect them to be reproduced faithfully in every performance."[64] That is why whether a character was evil or good was very easily recognizable as soon as the actor appeared on the stage. Additionally, since each individual had his own personality, the actor needed to perform different characteristics out of the similar role-types or painted faces. This is where the *jingju* actors had to use those techniques and skills affiliated with certain role types to create a unique character on the stage, which not only required a good command of the conventions but also a skillfully management of these techniques.

In these newly created *jingju* plays, since the traditional makeup and costumes were all eliminated and the artists were dressed as realistic images, they only had to make their characters' unique personalities fleshed out in the play. They did not have to perform his or her typical "role type" or "painted face;" thus, the traditional techniques and skills affiliated with role types were largely useless in these new plays. Instead, actors had to create a series of new movements to demonstrate these new characters' heroic actions and revolutionary determination. For instance, the typical and popular figures in these new modernized *jingju* plays, such as Li Yuhe, Li Yumei and Yang Zirong, set the basis for a later doctrine that the *yangbanxi* stuck to—the three emphases: among the entire cast, the positive characters must be emphasized; among the positive characters, those heroic characters must be emphasized; among the heroic characters, those major heroes must be emphasized.[65] In this case in the performance, the major

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[64] Rosemary A. Roberts. *Maoist Model Theatre: The Semiotics of Gender and Sexuality in the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)*. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 24.

[65] It was an artistic doctrine that all literature and art workers must obey during their creation of heroes during the Cultural Revolution. The "three emphases" was first brought up by Yu Huiyong in his article

heroes were usually placed in the center of the stage while their antagonists were given their stage space at the corner or not facing directly to the audiences. Or, the heroes were given strong and direct light on the stage, while the antagonists were lit with weak or backlight.

In terms of the form, while the traditional costumes and makeup were largely abandoned, the artists and dramatists had to try to make some of the traditions and conventions adaptable and suitable for the new content with (re-)invented traditions.

We know that the traditional *jingju* was used to depict legends and historical figures since its inception, and it had already developed a series of conventions to follow and adopt whenever it needed to represent new characters from antiquity. However, both its traditional conventions as well as its symbolic and abstract nature conflicted with the realistic features represented in these newly created plays with contemporary themes. As continuous debates had already been held throughout modern *jingju* history on whether *jingju* could be made suitable for their contemporary contents, *The White-haired Girl* had seemed to step successfully forward on the revolutionary road, and these newly (re-) created plays during the early and mid 1960s, to a large extent, might have solved some of these problems in a similar way.

Firstly, instead of abandoning them, these new plays tried to make use of the traditional songs and musical patterns. The newly created songs were still based on the two major *jingju* melodies, *xipi* and *erhuang*, with certain changes and variations, which on the one hand, were suitable for the revolutionary heroes' personalities, and on the

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"Let the Literature and Art Circle be An Everlasting Base for Propagandizing Maoist Thoughts," which was published in *wenhui bao* (*wenhui news*) on May 23, 1968.

other hand, still sounded like *jingju*. The artists tried to make appropriate use of certain musical patterns to make them sound new and simultaneously in traditional *jingju* style. For instance, the implementation of *da beigong* in *The Sparks of Revolution in the Common Reeds* was one of the most successful examples in making use of the tradition. *Da beigong* was a performance pattern in traditional *jingju* in which one character was facing the audience and singing, while the other on the stage would turn his or her back to the audience to indicate that he or she was in a mode of thinking or undertaking a psychological transformation. In the new singing mode, the composer craftily set it among three characters—the heroine Aqing Sao, and her two antagonists Diao Deyi and Hu Chuankui[66]. The scene was set at Aqing's teahouse: the Japanese had left and the villagers were preparing to fetch the wounded communist soldiers when Hu and his men arrived. Aqing served Hu and Diao with tea and cigarettes. Diao was suspicious of Aqing's identity and tried to trap her with clever questions, but she riposted him brilliantly. Under such urgencies, Aqing fooled the enemy into firing a gun, hence warning the soldiers, who had hidden in the villagers' boats. Here is part of the renowned singing in turn that might give a sense of how it worked in this newly designed episode:

Diao Deyi: [Staring at Aqing's back and singing]
This woman is not that normal.
Aqing Sao: [After Diao turns his back to the audiences, she turns around and sings]
What is in Diao Deyi's mind?
Hu Chuankui: [Who has been showing his back to the audiences, now turns around and sings]
Diao did not show due respect for my feelings at all!
Aqing Sao: [After Hu turns his back to the audiences again, she sings referring to Hu]

[66] In the play, Diao Deyi was the chief of staff and Hu Chuankui was the commander of the puppet "Loyal and Righteous National Salvation Army".

I can actually take advantage of this idiot!
Diao Deyi: [Opens a box of cigarettes, shows it to Aqing and says]
Take one!
[Aqing Sao waves her hand and rejects.]
Hu Chuankui: [Speaks to Diao]
She does not know how to smoke. What are you doing?
Diao Deyi: [While Aqing turns her back, he faces to the audiences and sings]
Her attitude is neither haughty nor humble.
Aqing Sao: [After Diao turns, she turns around and sings]
What kind of wicked ideas is Diao Deyi thinking about?
Hu Chuankui: [Turns to face the audiences and sings]
What kind of tricks is Hu playing with?
Aqing Sao: [Turns to the audiences and sings]
Do they actually belong to Jiang (Jieshi) or Wang (Jingwei)?
Diao Deyi: [Facing the audiences and singing]
I have to ask clever questions to figure out who she is.
Aqing Sao: [Turns around and sings]
I must take precautions against his questions.
[Aqing attempts to go inside the teahouse, while Diao Deyi stops her from behind.][67]

Since Aqing's true identity was a CCP underground liaison woman under the disguise of a tea-shop keeper, she was responsible for the wounded soldiers' safe evacuation. However, she did not expect that the enemies would come to her tea-shop so swiftly; without any preparation, she had to act according to circumstances—not only to protect her own identity, but also to figure out simultaneously how to give the warning signal to the soldiers hidden on the boats. As we can see from this short piece, the singing was sung in turn by three performers on the stage; whenever one was facing the audience and singing, the other two would turn their backs to the audience, to suggest on the one hand that they were in a thinking or suspicious mood, and on the other hand, to push the

[67] The performance can be viewed in many DVD versions, and this *dabeigong* part is quite popular among the masses. I am translating this part of the performance from my memory of seeing different versions of both live and videoed perforamnces.

singing one forward on the central stage. Thus, this mode of singing fulfilled both the plot and artistic needs.

Additionally, in order to meet the demands of the protagonists' heroic actions, the composers also made certain inventions in their singing. For instance, in the play *There Is No Lack of Successors to Carry On the Revolutionary Cause*, for the singing of Tiemei, one of the heroines, in the jail, instead of using a *huadan*'s typical melodies, the singing was designed with a traditional *xiaosheng* musical format, so as to use a more powerful voice to express Tiemei's determination and passion for joining the revolutionary force.

In terms of the speech and dialogues, the dramatists also tried to make use of the traditional patterns. For example, in the *Azalea Mountain* created by the Ningxia Jingju Troupe, the heroine Ke Xiang's four lines which she was speaking while she entered the stage were adapted from the poetic format that was traditionally used by a major character once he or she posed at the first appearance on the stage. This poetic format was a type of poetry form consisting of four lines or phrases each five or seven Chinese characters in length. Since these newly composed lines portraying revolutionary themes were incorporated coherently into its original meter, the music thus still sounded like traditional *jingju* even with its content changed.

Secondly, since many works drew their materials from military affairs, which reflected how the CCP took up the armed struggle during the wartime against different enemies, in these newly created military plays, the artists tried to incorporate the traditional acrobatics and fighting skills of *wuxi* (traditional military plays) into the representation of the contemporary war, which made the traditions, on the one hand, harmonious with the new contents, and on the other hand, prominently maintained

jingju's style. For instance, in the *Raid on White Tiger Regiment*, most traditional techniques related to legs, arms, waists, steps, and those associated with jumping, looping, falling, and wrestling were all skillfully used in such scenes as depicting how the Volunteer Army managed to pass through the wire entanglement set by the enemy. In the scene portraying how these soldiers broke into the enemy's stronghold by way of jumping from the edge of the cliffs, specific techniques such as "tiger jump," "a kite's turn," and "loop the loop in the clouds," were all used on the one hand, to suggest a transition from one place to another in a scene, on the other hand, to give a full display of the consummate skills of these *jingju* actors.[68]

In the new play, the actors also needed to develop new skills and techniques that did not exist in the traditional repertoire. For instance, they had to design a series of movements for the soldiers to represent how they skillfully passed through the minefield. There were also new dances and techniques created to portray the soldiers' use of bayonets and long-barreled guns. Additionally, the traditional props were given new meanings. For example, in another play, *Fighting Against the Sea Waves*, the actors created a series of new dances to suggest they were on a boat and in a vast ocean. As we know that "water flags" were only used in certain *jingju* plays drawing their materials from myths, such as *The Legend of the White Snake*, in the new play, the actors adopted the method from those traditional *jingju* to use "water flags" to suggest the waves of the sea.[69]

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[68] Gao Yilong and Li Xiao eds. *Zhongguo Xiandaixi Shi* (*A History of the Chinese Contemporary Theatre*), 240.
[69] *Ibid.*, 242-244.

Besides trying to make these conventions related to military movements and acrobatics useful, the actors and costume designers also strived to combine certain traditional skills with inventions. For example, by adopting the characteristics in traditional *jingju* costumes that all pieces of the clothing could be easily sewn together or taken apart, the designer tried to make the costumes look contemporary while allowing them to continue to function flexibly in the traditional manner. For example, for Hu'er, who dressed with his shirt unbuttoned and his chest bared, the designer made a belt to avoid the shirt coming loose at the bottom. A piece of white towel was hung on the belt so as to suggest that Hu'er was a porter transporting goods around. When the plot developed later in a way that needed Hu'er to start the acrobatic fighting in the scene, the white towel was turned into a weapon, and the belt could be loosened simultaneously to make sure that the actor could move around with high proficiency.[70]

What is more, the artists also drew all kinds of elements from other art forms to enrich and develop their traditional conventions. In the play *Raid on White Tiger Regiment* (*Qixi Baihutuan*), the march of the *Volunteer Army* was incorporated into its theme melody. In *Red Rock* and *Dai Nuo*, the other ethnic group's musical instruments were added into the traditional *jingju* orchestra, and their musical elements were incorporated into the traditional music patterns.[71]

Since most of these plays not only successfully made use of certain traditional conventions and skills to enrich their new performance reflecting the contemporary life, but also established their own (re-)invented traditions that could be adopted and applied

[70] *Ibid.*, 243.
[71] *Ibid.*, 244.

to more new modernized *jingju* created contemporarily or in the future, some artists commented:

> Our audiences were moved by these *jingju* with contemporary themes because they had completely new plots, new characters, and new forms. The actors absorbed raw materials from their own life, to make them useful to their new performance. They did not only inherit the old traditional elements from the old plays, but also invented new ones. There were a series of problems we thought impossible to be solved, such as conventionalized techniques, speaking patterns, acrobatics and role-types; now it seems that all were solved well by our artists. We accumulated successful experiences in creating these new plays, and these new invented techniques and skills fit well into the new performance. We would of course know that they were all new, but we did not feel them unnatural or awkward.[72]

New Jingju with Contemporary Themes vs. Traditional Repertoire

We can see from the survey of these newly created *jingju* during the second wave of creating new *jingju* plays with contemporary themes that, though they had gained good experiences in reflecting contemporary and revolutionary content and invented a series of traditions that the later dramatists and players could follow and make use of, they were significantly different from the traditional repertoire, not only because there remained a series of unsolvable problems, but also because of some major changes in its essence.

1. The monopoly of revolutionary themes vs. diverse stories

Though the newly created *jingju* had more complicated plot in terms of a play's storyline and structure, as a theatrical genre they only featured the revolutionary themes and heroes. On the contrary, even though traditional plays could be generally divided into major categories—*wenxi*, which focused on songs and dialogues, and *wuxi*, which

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[72] *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*). July 15, 1964. Gao Yilong and Li Xiao eds. *Zhongguo Xiandaixi Shi* (*A History of the Chinese Contemporary Theatre*), 244-245.

featured intensified fighting scenes and acrobatics—, the contents were widely diverse and from many sources, such as legends, (historical) novels, folktales and classics.

2. The revolutionary characters vs. different role-types and their schools

While the new modernized *jingju* featured characters with their own unique personalities, they were nevertheless all divided into two major categories: revolutionary and non-revolutionary. By contrast, since the traditional repertoire was drawn from diverse resources, these plays had a full display of all kind of characters, such as gods and goddesses, emperors and generals, scholars and beauties, immortals and ghosts. What is more important, these characters' varied role-types were associated with diverse singing, speaking, dancing and combating styles. In terms of the performers, there were a number of representative actors and actresses for their type of role, and some of them had established their own performance styles[73]. For instance, the Mei (Lanfang) school—a smooth, perfectly timed, and poised performance style, was established by Mei and internationally acclaimed during his skillfully portrayal of a series of female characters. The essence of this performance style would be harmed if it were used to meet the needs of revolutionary characters and plots.

3. Fixed format vs. flexible structure

The traditional *jingju* was a performers-centered and market-oriented art form. "Actors-centered" refers not only to the creation of plays but also to their performance. In the process of creating a play, the major actors would choose the materials and musical patterns that would best suit their own physical conditions. They could not only choose

[73] In *jingju*, there are various kinds of performance styles due to different performance characteristics of actors and actresses, such as Tan (Xipei) Style, Yu (Shuyan) Style, etc. in *laosheng* category, Mei (Lanfang) Style, Shang (Xiaoyun) Style in *qingyi* category.

what kind of plays to perform, but also organize their own cast (supporting actors, etc.) and musicians. In the performance, the entire tempo was controlled by the actors instead of the musicians, as the actors would give the orchestra players signals that they would sing or move more slowly or quickly according to the circumstances, enabling them to adjust their performance according to the audiences' reception. Particularly in some highlights, the actors would make improvisations on the stage with the changed situations of performance. For instance, in the traditional play *Meilong Town*, the disguised emperor would say three "hao" which meant "good" while he was looking the girl up and down, because he was impressed by her loveliness and beauty. When the *jingju laosheng* master Ma Lianliang performed the emperor once in a Hong Kong theatre, he said "good" in English instead of in its original Chinese so that the entire audience was amused because English was their official language.[74] However, such improvisations were not allowed in a revolutionary play, which had a fixed performance format. What is more, since the Western orchestra was added into the traditional one in new plays, the performance tempo was also set under the strict playing of the musical scores and the guidance of the conductor. The actors on the stage needed to follow the orchestra instead of the other way around.

"Market-oriented" refers to the fact that the traditional plays were created and performed according to the needs of the market and the audiences. The box office results were the major significant criteria for the actors' value. Though in the revolutionary plays, the actors were still involved in the process of artistic creation, their performance

[74] I learned it through conversations with my M.A. advisor Zhu Wenxiang (1939-2006). This Ma Lianliang's performance experience in Hong Kong is well known among the Chinese traditional theatre circle.

freedom was restricted into the political propagandized sphere. Particularly in the *yangbanxi*, the performance was even more restricted into a rigid imitation based on the "models." Under such heavily political impositions, the free market actually never existed, and actors became subsidized by the state.

4. The revolutionary concepts vs. traditional culture codes

Every single prop on the traditional *jingju* stage had its own style, and the display of the stage properties (e.g. two chairs and one desk) had its own rule. Every little color had its cultural meaning, and even a slight difference in an emboidery substantially suggested the varied domestic or social hierarchies. For instance, if the actor who performed Yang Guifei wore a *mang* (the official robe) but forgot to wear a *yudai* (the precious-stone belt), it would be considered a severe stage accident, because both *mang* and *yudai* were symbols for concubine Yang's status. Thus, in *jingju*, the makeup and costume managers were very important stage staff, who must have a sophistication of using these props and costumes, and a good knowledge of the history and the cultural customs. However, since the new *jingju* plays practically abandoned the traditional constumes and makeup, these affiliated cultural codes were lost simultaneously.

5. Revolutionary realism vs. Symbolic abstraction

The soul of the traditional *jingju* lay in its symbolism and abstraction. Its symbolism and abstraction were not reflected in adopting such symbolic objects as the red lantern in *The Legend of the Red Lantern* to symbolize the revolution and a message that the revolution would be carried on by the followers. Rather, they existed throughout the entire performance of a traditional play, embodied in actors' singing, speaking, dancing and combating accompanied with the harmonious playing of the orchestra.

Climbing up a stair, closing a door, riding on a horse, traveling a long distance, crossing a river, etc.—no matter how complicated the real situation was, the actors on the stage could use their own body movements and gestures to create that vividly physical environment. On the one hand, they were abstracted from imitating nature, and on the other hand, they largely relied on the audiences' imagination—their acceptance that by stepping around a circle on the stage the actor suggested that one thousand miles have been traveled. Thus, the traditional *jingju* had a high performance flexibility in terms of their time and place, which could be readily indicated by the performers' movements. On the contrary, the revolutionary and contemporary *jingju* needed to implement the realistic stage sceneries and settings. The inherent contradictions between the realistic stage properties and the symbolic performance were largely unsolved. For instance, in *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, there was a scene depicting how the PLA-soldier Yang Zirong rode a horse up to the wooded mountain. Though the actor created a series of movements to suggest that he was riding on a horse as he had performed in a traditional play, the realistic backdrop with the fixed picture of the forest made the audiences feel that the actor was seemingly riding the horse in the same woods forever. This realistic backdrop actually interfered with the freedom of the actors' performance and the audiences' imagination.

6. The political teaching vs. enjoyable and relaxed audiences' reception

Although the debates about whether theatre is an institution for entertainment or for education have lasted centuries and been worldwide, most theatre-goers would hope to relax themselves by attending a performance instead of being educated again outside their routine school and work, even if indeed, through such theatrical participation, they might

actually learn something. In a free and market-oriented performance, the actors, first of all, were to perform to make a living. Thus, they could not make primary a purpose to educate the audiences unless they wanted to irritate them. What the actors cared most was how many tickets were sold, whether the theatre was completely full, how the audiences were responding to their stage performance moments, and whether they would return or tell others to come. For the audiences too, unless they could be entertained or feeling relaxed or enjoying themselves by regularly going to the theatre, one could not justify why they would love to pay repeatedly for seeing these shows or specific actors. As we can see, the entire creation of the new *jingju* with contemporary themes was in a heavily political controlled discourse despite the audiences' preference for the traditional repertoire, so that *jingju* was substantially turned into a compulsory class of revolution that both the actors and the audiences had to attend.

1964 and Its Aftermath

Following the 1964's Jingju Xiandaixi Performance Festival, various *xiandaixi* festivals were held in varied regions and local areas. In a sense, the successful holding of the Jingju Xaindaixi Performance Festival promoted and marked the beginning of another wave of creating and performing new plays with contemporary themes all over the country. Almost during the same time on June 22, 1964, in Hunan Province, a Xiandaixi Performance Festival was held in Changsha with *jingju*, *xiangju*, *hanju*, *xiangkun*, *huaguxi*, spoken drama and opera having more than forty new plays performed. On July 3, another Xiandaixi Festival was held in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Its twenty-eight troupes altogether performed thirty-three new plays. During July and

August in Jiangsu Province, the Xiandaixi Festival was held in Nanjing City, which lasted forty days with nine *xiqu* forms having twenty-six new plays performed. In early August 1964, Gansu Province's Xiandaixi Festival was held in Lanzhou, with twenty-nine new plays performed by eleven *xiqu* forms. In 1965, more Xiandiaxi Festivals were held in different regions, such as northeastern, northern, eastern, central and southern China. In 1964-1965, performing only newly created plays with contemporary themes became a popular phenomenon widespread in every performance troupe and all over China.[75]

We might see this as another period of prosperity for the theatre, but this theatre was much different from its original form. Both artists and scholars have admitted that most new plays created in this second wave reached a new aesthetic height, because they attempted to eliminate the confrontations between the old form and the new content, and to a large extent, solved many of the problems that Mei Lanfang and other artists living in his time had not been able to deal with. However, we should realize that these new plays, first of all, were created out of political propaganda, and to use the CCP's terms, they were exactly the products of the revolution and the class struggle. Of course, it might not have been too bad if the campaign for the "three types of plays" could have been put into practice in the long run, because the artists certainly could still perform the old repertoire even though creating new *jingju* plays with contemporary themes was as well encouraged; however, the intensified class struggle and the campaign for "performing only the contemporary thirteen years" led to the leftist inclination of banning the entire

[75] Gao Yilong and Li Xiao eds. *Zhongguo Xiandaixi Shi* (*A History of the Chinese Contemporary Theatre*), 246-247.

traditional repertoire along with all the newly created historical plays. These views were clearly expressed by Jiang Qing in her "About the Jingju Revolution" at the Festival seminar:

> Now we all performed the *jingju geming xiandaixi*; however, was everybody on the same page? I do not think so…here I have provided two astonishing numbers for your consideration.
>
> Firstly, according to a rough calculation, there were three thousand performance troupes (amateur troupes and other illegal troupes were not counted) all over the country, among which approximately ninety were professional troupes of spoken drama, about eighty literature and art ensembles, and all the rest were troupes of the traditional drama. On the stage of traditional drama, there were emperors and generals, scholars and beauties, as well as monsters and demons. Even for those ninety troupes of spoken drama, the plays they performed may not have reflected the life of workers, peasants and soldiers. Their stage was occupied by the dead from Chinese and foreign histories. Theatre was supposed to be an institution for educating the masses. Now, all these emperors and generals representing feudalism, and scholars and beauties of the bourgeoisie occupied the stage, which harmed our economic base and construction.
>
> Secondly, we had more than six billion workers, peasants and soldiers in our country with only a small number of landlords, the rich, rightists, counter-revolutionaries, and capitalists. So we should ask whether we should serve the six billion or this small number? Not only the CCP members need to think about it, those patriotic literature and art workers should also give it a thought. The food you ate was from peasants' diligent ploughing and seeding in the fields; the clothes you wore were from workers' weaving; the house you lived in was made by the construction workers; the soldiers vigilantly guarded our territorial lands so that we felt secure. Now, the artists did not reflect their life in the artistic works; instead, they still performed those feudalist and capitalist plays. I want to ask them, which class were you representing, and where was your "artistic conscience"?
>
> I knew that there would be some reversal in the process of creating *jingju* revolutionary and contemporary plays. However, as long as we can think thoroughly about the two numbers I have mentioned above, there will be no, or fewer reversals. It does not really matter even if a reversal occurred, because history itself is complicated, and we are not able to reverse it. We highly encourage the creation of *geming xiandanxi*, which should reflect these contemporary fifteen years since the establishment of

> the PRC. Our priority is to create a series of revolutionary protagonists on the contemporary stage.[76]

In her talk, Jiang Qing tried to argue that a *jingju* revolution was necessary so as to meet all the CCP's political propaganda; she also strived to find an Achilles's heel in the nature of traditional *jingju* so that the theatrical revolution would be justified:

> I have been a part of the traditional theatre for two years, and I have been doing research for both actors and audiences. I can conclude that nobody would want to see these traditional plays unless they were carefully reformed…and all these revisions and reforms are not as urgent and necessary as making the new plays reflecting contemporary life.[77]

It was the speech Jiang made at the seminar in 1964 that clearly expressed her views on the direction of the *jingju* revolution, which declared not only her active participation in the revisions of these newly created *jingju* and later turning them into *yangbanxi*, but also her mounting up to the political arena. The following year witnessed a series of alleged leftist intellectuals and politicians dismissed from their positions; *Hai Rui Baguan* was criticized and all other historical plays along with the entire traditional repertoire were completely banned. In May 1967, in order to celebrate the 25-year anniversary of the publication of Mao's 1942 *Talks*, eight *geming yangbanxi* were performed for thirty-seven days in Beijing with 218 performances. Simultaneously, *Hong Qi* (*The Red Flag*) published a headline editorial to "celebrate the great victory of the

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[76] Jiang Qing. "About the Jingju Revolution—A Talk on the Performers' Seminar at the Jingju Xiandaixi Performance Festival Held in July 1964." *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*), May 10, 1967. Fu Jin. *Xinzhongguo Xiju Shi: 1949-2000* (*A History of the Contemporary Chinese Theatre, 1949-2000*). (Changsha: Hunan meishu chuban she, 2002), 119-120.
[77] *Ibid.*

jingju revolution."[78] From then on, *jingju* entered an era of the exclusively revolutionary theatre—*yanbanxi*.

Conclusion:

Definitely, creating new *jingju* with contemporary themes was not a new ideology ascribed to the CCP regime. Numerous experiments had already been undertaken by the patriotic intellectuals and artists in the early twentieth century during the social and political turmoil, while most of the newly created plays turned out to be failures. The *jingju* master Mei Lanfang even concluded that *jingju* was not an appropriate form to reflect the contemporary life due to its highly conventionalization and symbolic nature. During the second Sino-Japanese War, *jingju* was made use of by both the artists and the CCP to meet the needs of Resist Japan and Save the Nation Movement. In the Yan'an time, the CCP ensured *jingju* as their major means for political propaganda. By the establishment of such institutions as the Lu Xun Arts Academy and later, the Yan'an Pingju Research Institute, creating *jingju* with contemporary themes became a more practical and plausible task to meet the CCP's political demands and campaigns. Though the first wave of creating new *jingju* with contemporary themes occurred under the pressure of the Great Leap Forward, the *White-haired Girl* turned out to be successful, and the CCP and its cadres still attempted to gain good experiences from their experiments. Their initiatives and directives towards *jingju* reforms also undertook twists and turns, in which normally a more politically restricted phase would follow a relatively

[78] "Hooray for the Jingju Revolution's Great Victory." *Hong Qi* (*The Red Flag*), editorial, Issue 6, 1967. Fu Jin. *Xinzhongguo Xiju Shi: 1949-2000* (*A History of the Contemporary Chinese Theatre, 1949-2000*). (Changsha: Hunan meishu chuban she, 2002), 122.

liberal phase, and so on in turn until the beginning of the Cultural Revolution when the restriction reached its extreme. The year of 1964 witnessed a large number of new *jingju* reflecting contemporary and revolutionary themes created and performed at the Festival.

Inevitably, these new *jingju* with contemporary themes created to meet the CCP's political demands were not the original *jingju*, as the new performances eliminated many traditions and conventions and had imposed upon it a series of new ideologies and political considerations that *jingju* had not been familiar with. With most costumes and makeup eliminated from the traditional performance and certain images, techniques and skills cleared off the stage, it was revolutionized to reflect the intensified class struggle and contemporary life. The overwhelming popularization and continuity of performances seemingly declared the *jingju* revolution's victory. In a way, these plays pushed the *jingju*'s innovations and reforms into an unprecedented era. Of course, it was unfair to conclude that revolutionary *jingju* were without any aesthetic accomplishments simply because they were products completely driven by political propaganda; however, we should not neglect the fact that their later popularity was based on the heavily imposed political discourse with the entire people's sight and hearing being raped because the masses were forced to see and hear only these *yangbanxi* during the Cultural Revolution.

The beginning of the twenty-first century witnessed not only the revival of historical *jingju* and traditional *jingju*, but also the continuity of revolutionary *jingju*. It seemed that the creation of the new *jingju* with contemporary themes had become an inseparable part of *jingju*'s invented tradition as more *jingju* plays reflecting the contemporary life emerged on the twenty-first century stage—even in a post-Mao era that gradually encouraged a cultural diversity. However, we should not neglect the fact that,

as a performing art that was mainly inherited by the actors' oral teaching and physical demonstration, *jingju* had already lost many of its traditional techniques and skills due to the intensely political impositions. Though the newly created *jingju* might have provided new ways to make itself suitable for the changed social and political conditions, and indeed, with certain works becoming successful, it might have been better, as Mei had suggested, also to maintain *jingju* in its original form.

Conclusion

At the Fourth Chinese *Jingju* Art Festival[1] held in Shanghai from December 4 to 14, 2004, the premiere of a newly created *jingju* play *Sancun Jinlian* (*Three Inch Golden Lotus*) by Wuhan City Jingju Troupe swiftly became a media event drawing great attention from not only the performing arts circle but also the common audiences. Obviously, it already overawed people by drawing its material from the famous author Feng Jicai (1942-)'s novel of the same title, in which a woman's doomed fate was sadly portrayed and the act of foot binding severely condemned; the re-appearance of the almost extinct technique *cai qiao* (lotus feet) in this performance, which was implemented to show women's lithe steps and graceful movements, took Shanghai by storm. Coincidentally, the opening night of *Three Inch Golden Lotus* was on exactly the same day as The Hungarian National Ballet's performance of *Spartacus* at different theatres in Shanghai. On the next day, some local newspapers used a headline "Chinese and Western ballets were in an open competition" to play to the gallery. Nevertheless, I was still quite impressed by the power of media to elevate a nearly forgotten *jingju* technique to both national and international attention. Chinese ballet, ironically, had been substantially considered "poisonous grass" by the nascent Chinese government during the

[1] In 1994, the 100-year anniversary ceremony for the birth of *jingju* artists Mei Lanfang (1894-1961) and Zhou Xinfang (1895-1975) was held. At the time, Chinese President Jiang Zemin (1926-) pointed out at the round-table meeting of the ceremony that Chinese people needed to spread their national art and carry forward their national spirit. Responding to President Jiang's call, *jingju* professionals explored and experimented with new ways to preserve, spread and develop *jingju*. With these efforts, many new *jingju* plays with various reforms and innovations were created by different professional *jingju* companies, troupes, and individuals. In order to review these achievements in *jingju* performance, production, and education, exhibit *jingju* professionals' accomplishments, spread *jingju* art more extensively, and push *jingju* work forward to prosperity and full-development, the Ministry of Culture planned to hold Chinese *Jingju* Art Festival every three years. After the first *jingju* festival successfully held in Tianjin in 1995, Beijing, Nanjing (Jiangsu Province), Shanghai, Jinan (Shandong Province), and Wuhan (Hubei Province) held the following five festivals in 1998, 2001, 2004, 2008, and 2011 respectively.

1950s, and more than sixty years have passed since this "Chinese ballet" had been banned after Liberation.

In 2004, while I was doing my M.A. research at the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts, the main female protagonist of *Three Inch Golden Lotus* Liu Wei (1968-) happened to be pursuing her MFA at the Graduate School. Since both of us came from Wuhan city and lived in the same graduate student residences, we soon became acquainted with each other. I often went to see her daily practice and rehearsals, and talked to her during the break. Liu had never received any *cai qiao* training in her early *jingju* career, and had made a quite recent choice to adopt it after she decided to turn Feng's novel into a *jingju* play.

I asked, "You know that the technique is almost extinct in mainland China. Only a few surviving *jingju* artists know how to perform on *qiao*, but they might even be too old to demonstrate accurately all the affiliated skills. What's more, it's a technique to a large extent learned at a young age and then practiced throughout one's life, which needs lots of hard work and is quite time demanding. What makes you determined to learn such a difficult skill at this time, and even to have successfully persuaded fourteen other actresses to practice it with you?"

"Well, I knew that it's hard, from the very beginning that our troupe planned to create this new play. But I love Feng's original novel. The novel itself has amazing plot and stories. I felt inspired by both the book title and the female character. Since it was a story dealing with the history of women's foot binding, I immediately thought about resuming the *cai qiao* technique, so as not only to reflect the realistic theme but also to embody the beautiful essence of women. It took me almost one year to learn and practice

the basic movements until I could do it with skill and ease. And it was by then that I recognized the huge difference between performing with *qiao* and without it. Of course, it takes time and lots of hard work, and involved physical pains and hurts throughout, but I want to make something *new*, something Liu, and something that nobody else can do," Liu proudly replied. I had already known that what Liu called "new" was actually a long neglected traditional technique; though the social context might have changed, the history constantly repeated itself—when a quasi-obligatory technique is revived in a time of modernity after more than sixty ears of banning, it is not only a "(re-)invented tradition," but also a new concept and a free style. The era when a technique is purely regarded as a technique rather than as containing any political implications seemed finally, if not completely, to have arrived. Of course, when I say "if not completely," I am suggesting that art is not completely separated from political considerations even in this changed social context. So as the *jingju* festival was sponsored by the Chinese government and *jingju* has been elevated as a national drama, these traditional techniques are considered, in a way, as orthodox Chinese culture to stand against those non-Chinese.

Following the first step made by Liu Wei in her *Three Inch Golden Lotus*, *jingju* contemporary *huadan* actress Chang Qiuyue (1978-) started to learn *cai qiao* as much as possible from one of the Xiao (Cuihua) School's representative actors Chen Yongling (1929-2006) who was in his last a few years, and eventually revived the tradition of using "lotus feet" technique in such traditional *huadan* repertoire as *Cuiping Shan* (*Cuiping Mountain*) and *Wulong Yuan* (*Oolong Yard*). Because of this, Chang was praised by both the contemporary *jingju* artists and audiences as one of the great successors of the Xiao School, which had been sunk into oblivion during the political turmoil. Seemingly all of a

sudden, a large number of traditional plays re-appeared in various *jingju* competitions, festivals, and performances. Tea-house theatres were re-modeled and re-established, and they became popular again. Even the property-men showed up on certain occasions, who might be there representing a tradition rather than simply serving as stage workers. It seems as if an era in which "the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living"[2] has passed; however, is this revived tradition still the one our ancestors witnessed in the past centuries?

I remembered years ago, while I was visiting old friends in Beijing, I noticed that the long torn-down *yongding men* (*yongding gate*)[3] was reconstructed in order to give the contemporaries a glimpse of the old Beijing city. However, it looks neither fish nor fowl—on the one hand, it was indeed re-built according to the old blueprint; however, on the other hand, it was in every way not resembling its original appearance: its bricks lack that deep grey in color; its temple lacks solemnity; its roof decoration lacks majesty. Even though we might have highly accurate measurements and advanced technologies of restoration by which we could forge the same architecture, how could we rebuild the historical richness—the glints and flashes of daggers and swords, the bloodstains of the warriors, the singings and songs of poets, the words and romances of the lovers? Could we really reconstruct that temple of Apollo, or does its desolate scene actually show more mightiness since it was historical, classical and original? Similarly, it was not the same *jingju* even though certain banned skills and techniques are revived on a

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[2] Karl Marx. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. New York: International Publisher. N.D.
[3] Yongding Gate was the former front gate of the outer section of Beijing's old city wall. It was originally built in 1553, and torn down in the 1950s to make way for the CCP's plans of new road system in Beijing. In 2005, the gate was reconstructed at the site of the old city gate. However, it was re-built disconnected from the original road leading towards the gate and into the city.

contemporary stage, and the *jingju* artists do not really enjoy their artistic freedom and a completely liberal phase.

On the one hand, the post-Mao era (1978-) did witness a temporary revival of the traditional theatre in the 1980s, and seemingly a theatrical renaissance in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, during which not only many traditional plays were re-staged, but also a series of previously "cleaned up" stage techniques and images reappeared on the stage. However, on the other hand, the 1980's temporary revival of the traditional theatre soon subsided with the rise of the new mass media. Since 1990, the Chinese economy has been developing at an unprecedented pace, and together with it has come rapid urbanization. *Jingju*, which had already been destroyed during the past political turmoil, was even more marginalized in the process of modernization and westernization. It has had to keep pace with the social development so as to compete with other entertainments. Thus, new *jingju* plays with a grand spectacle on stage emerged, texts of the old *jingju* plays were deconstructed, and traditional performance pieces were partitioned and rearranged into a post-modern setting. In a word, the post-1990 era embraced more reforms and transformations in *jingju*, the outcome of which we might call "experimental *jingju*" or "intercultural *jingju*." Since the theatrical market as a whole has already shrunk, funds have to be raised for traditional *jingju* to survive. Under such circumstances, *jingju* troupes and players turn to the state for help and thus have been made more dependent on the government so that the government gets more involved in *jingju*. Alternately, the troupes put on commercial *jingju* plays to advertise or cater to the needs of business enterprises so as to get their funding and support. In this sense, the

revival of traditional plays and banned techniques does not suggest a totally liberal phase or a complete artistic freedom for the *jingju* professionals.

Obviously, in a way, the current social and economic environments in China make it even harder for the traditional art to survive. Moreover, the marginalization of *jingju* is the inevitable outcome of the CCP's arbitrary reforms on this genre in the early phase of the nascent PRC. The harm does not solely exist in the political propaganda or artistic directive itself; it lies more in the decades of suppression of the art and surveillance of the people, which castrated the artists' creativity and the audiences' imagination. What has been lost refers not only to those great artists and their performance skills, to the old repertoire and performable plays, but also to various theatrical customs, to the mutual communication and understanding between the actors and the audiences. Obviously, compared to the Greek tragedy and the Japanese Noh, *jingju* might be seen as still a live genre in that it continues to develop in such a manner that the real artist-created pre-revolutionary art has not been completely lost for most people. However, we should not neglect the fact that, *jingju*, as a performing art, was passed down by oral teachings and physical demonstrations. Those performance skills and techniques might have already gone with the wind of revolution and the death of the masters. The truly old traditional forms might be hard to re-construct even with a great effort, let alone the fact that *jingju*'s survival is under many financial constraints.

Indeed, my approach towards the *jingju* reforms during 1949-1967, while categorizing it into (revised) traditional, new historical and revolutionary or contemporary plays, has indicated how difficult it became to solve the confrontations between the content and form, or the artists' opinions and the political considerations.

Through an interweaving of historical facts and detailed interpretations of certain plays, it has presented a clear overview of the paradoxical complexity of *jingju* reform during 1949-1967. The number of plays in the old repertoire which had been censored or banned in the early nascent Communist regime was apparently reduced. Inevitably, however, theatre censorship further brought about the loss of numerous performance skills and techniques, which might not be remediable. The making of historical plays and the creation of plays with contemporary themes might have successfully expanded the *jingju*'s current repertoire. Those plays, which were created by the artists, tentatively making the new ideologies fit into the traditional forms, or adapting the old conventions perfectly into the new stories, turned out to be popular, whereas most others which, created under heavily political pressure, did not really solve well the problems between the old form and the new content, appeared only briefly.

Personally, I would prefer that this reform had not happened. As we know that there is only one Mona Lisa in the Louvre, any other imitations, forgeries, and copies have lost their value. I am certainly not against reforms and experiments, but I think that before we start our reforms and experiments towards arts and traditions, there should be an effort to preserve the traditions or keep their original forms well in the first place. Who knows whether the next generation, or next next generation, while they are enjoying hip-pop *jingju* and black-box *jingju,* would not ask about how their great-grandparents or grand-parents had enjoyed *jingju* during their own time? It would be sad that that history was a blank, and that the children could not know their ancestors' theatre.

Appendix A

List of Banned Jingju Plays in 1949

Reasons for banning	Banned play titles
Contain and propagandize superstitions	*You Liudian* (*Travel through Six Palaces*), *Pishan Jiumu* (*Cleave the Mountain to Save A Mother*), *Tan Yinshan* (*Visit the Nether Land*), *Zha Panguan* (*Behead the Judge*), *Heilü Gaozhuang* (*Accusation from A Black Donkey*), *Qiyuan Bao* (*The Wrong is Righted*), *Baxian Dedao* (*Eight Gods' Taoist Attainments*), *Huozhuo Sanlang* (*Capture Sanlang Alive*), *Sanxi Baimudan* (*Play Tricks Three Times on the White Peony*), *Daohun Ling* (*A Bell That Can Steal People's Spirit*), *Yinyang He*
Contain and propagandize superstitions	(*Yinyang River*), *Shiba Luohan Shou Dapeng* (*Eighteen Arhats Conquer the Roc*), *Da Jinzhuan* (*Beat the Golden Brick*), *Tangminghuang You Yuegong* (*Emperor of Tang Visits the Moon Palace*), *Liuquan Jingua* (*Liuquan Sends Fruits to the Nether World*), *Kunlun Jianxia Zhuan*

	(*A Chivalrous Man in Kunlun Mountain*), *Qingcheng Shijiu Xia* (*Nineteen Chivalrous Men in City Qing*), *Fengshen Bang* (*The Investiture of the Gods*), *Zhuangzi*, *Feijian Zhan Bailong* (*Flying Sword Chops the White Dragon*), *Zhongkui*, *Fan Yan'an* (*Fight Against Yan'an*), *Yanzhi Ji* (*The Plan of Rouge*).
Contain and propagandize obscenities	*Hongniang* (*The Crimson*), *Hudie Meng* (*The Butterfly's Dream*), *Haihui Si* (*The Haihui Temple*), *Shuangling Ji* (*The Story of the Double-bell*), *Shuangding Ji* (*The Story of the Double-nail*), *Yeshi Zhai* (*The Yeshi Studio*), *Cuichun Jijian* (*Cuichun Sends A Note*), *Guifei Zuijiu* (*Guifei Intoxicated*), *Shazi Bao* (*Murder the Son*), *Yanzhi Pan* (*The Judicial Precedent of Rouge*), *Pansi Dong* (*Pansi Cave*), *Shuangyao Hui* (*Compete for the Husband*), *Guanwang miao Ji Piaoyuan* (*The Temple of Guanyu and the Brothel*).
Contain and propagandize obscenities	
Propagandize national capitulationism or foreign invasions	*Silang Tanmu* (*Silang Visits His Mother*), *Tieguan Tu* (*A Picture Drawn by Tieguan*),

	Tie Gongji (*Iron Cock*), *Yanmen Guan* (*The Yanmen Pass*).
Propagandize slavish ideology	*Jiujing Tian* (*The Day of Nine Watches*), *Nantian Men* (*Nantian Gate*), *Shuangguan Gao* (*The Conferment of Two Honorary Titles*).
Propagandize the oppression of the masses	*Wuhan Shaqi* (*Wuhan Murders His Wife*), *Meilong Zhen* (*Meilong Town*), *Cuiping Shan* (*Cuiping Mountain*), *Hongmei Ge* (*Hongmei Attic*), *Ku Zumiao* (*Cry in the Ancestral Temple*).
Extremely boring, or performances without fixed scripts	*Fang Mianhua* (*Spin and Weave the Cotton*), *Ximi Jiating* (*A Theatre Fan's Family*), *Ximi Xiaojie* (*A Mistress Who Loves Theatre*), *Shi Huangjin* (*Pick up Gold*), *Shiba Che* (*Talk Nonsense*), *Shuangpapo* (*Fear One's Wife*), *Xiazi Guandeng* (*A Blind Guy Scrolls at the Lantern Festival*).
Extremely boring, or performances without fixed scripts	

Appendix B

The Structure of the Drama Reform Bureau

<table>
<tr><td colspan="6">The People's Republic of China & The Chinese Communist Party</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">↓</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">The Minister of Culture</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">↓</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">(The Chinese National Traditional Drama Reform Commission)
The Bureau of Traditional Drama Reform</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">↓</td></tr>
<tr><td>Arts Division</td><td>Scripts Censoring Division</td><td>Supervision Division</td><td>Folk Arts Division</td><td>Offices and Libraries</td><td>Other Affiliated Institutions</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5" rowspan="4">The media and press organs:
1. People's Daily (renmin ribao)
2. Traditional Drama Newspaper (xiqu bao)
3. People's Theatre (renmin xiju)
4. New Traditional Drama (xin xiqu)
5. The Plays (juben)</td><td>1. Jingju Research Academy</td></tr>
<tr><td>2. Traditional Drama Experimental School</td></tr>
<tr><td>3. Mass Audience Theater</td></tr>
<tr><td>4. New Traditional Drama Bookstore</td></tr>
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Various local reform organs (in provinces, cities, districts, etc.)

Appendix C

New Jingju Historical Plays: 1949-1964

Time/Period	Play Title[1]
Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BC) — The Spring and Autumn Period (771-476 or 403 BC), The Warring States Period (475-221 BC)	1. *Zhaixing Lou* (*Picking-Star Tower*) 2. *Jiangxiang He* (*The General and the Minister of the State Renewed Their Cordial Relations*) 3. *Zeng Tipao* (*The Embroidered-Robe as A Present*) 4. *Luhua Ji* (*A Coat Quilted with Reed Catkins*), 5. *Bingfu Ji* (*A Story about the Military Tally*)
Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BC) — The Spring and Autumn Period (771-476 or 403 BC), The Warring States Period (475-221 BC)	6. *Ku Qinting* (*Cry for Relief Troops at the King's Court in Qin*) 7. *Woxin Changdan* (*Sleep On Brush-wood and Taste Gall—Undergo Self-imposed Hardships*) 8. *Ximen Bao* (*Ximen Bao*)
Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE)	1. *Dongfang Shuo Toutao* (*Dongfang Shuo*

[1] I have translated these play titles mainly by the plots or stories they focus on unless the title is a specific name or place. I am not suggesting in any way that other literary translations were inappropriate. I simply would like to introduce the historical or cultural backgrounds in which these plays were set.

	Steals Peaches) 2. *Da Jinzhuan* (*Tragedies in the King Liu Xiu's Palace*) 3. *Qiangxiang Ling* (*A Resolute and Steadfast County Magistrate*)
The Three Kingdom Period (220-280 CE) The Three Kingdom Period (220-280 CE)	1. *Chibi Zhizhan* (*The Battle of Red Cliffs*) 2. *Shenyi Hua Tuo* (*A Miraculous Healer—Hua Tuo*) 3. *Qingmei Zhujiu Lun Yingxiong* (*Cao Cao and Liu Bei Defining A Hero While Warming the Green Plum Wine*) 4. *Da Du You* (*Beat Du You*) 5. *Zhuan Cao Xiu* (*Getting the General Cao Xiu*) 6. *Lü Bu Yu Diao Chan* (*The General Lü Bu and the Beauty Diao Chan*) 7. *Du Yinping* (*Occupy Chengdu From Yinping Secretly*) 8. *Chuchu Maolu* (*Zhuge Linag Left His Residence and Followed Liu Bei after His Three Visits*) 9. *Fenghuang Erqiao* (*The Two Qiao Sisters of Phoenix Terrace*)

	10. *Guan Yu Zhisi* (*The Death of Guan Yu*) 11. *Zhan Weinan* (*The Battle of River Wei*) 12. *Yiling Zhizhan* (*The Battle of Yiling*)
Jin Dynasty (265-420 CE) — The Six Dynasties (220-589)	1. *Chu Sanhai* (*Zhou Chu Kills the Tiger and the Dragon*) 2. *Liuyin Ji* (*The Love Story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*) 3. *Mulan Congjun* (*Mulan Joined the Army*)
Sui Dynasty (589-618)	1. *Xiaoma Zhuan* (*Qin Qiong and the Wagang Rebels*) 2. *Cheng Yaojin Zhaoqin* (*The Marriage of Wagang Rebel Cheng Yaojin*)
Tang Dynasty (618-907) Tang Dynasty (618-907)	1. *Nao Tiangong* (*Havoc in Heaven*) 2. *Sandao Bajiaoshan* (*Monkey King Borrows Princess Iron's Bansho Fan*) 3. *Wudi Dong* (*Havoc in Cave*) 4. *Jingde Zhuangfeng* (*Jingde Disguised in Madness*) 5. *Shuilian Dong* (*Water Curtain Cave*) 6. *Xixiang Ji* (*Romance of the West Chamber*) 7. *Renmian Taohua* (*Face Like Peach Blossom*)

	8. *Da Jinzhi* (*Guo Huai Beats His Pricess Wife*) 9. *Yinxiang Chaihui* (*Chen Xingyuan Meets Mei Linagyu When He Sees the Hairpin*) 10. *Zhuan Tangying* (*Tang's Camp*) 11. *Longnü MuYang* (*Dragon Lady Tends the Flocks of Sheep*) 12. *Zheng Yingying* (*Zheng Yingying*) 13. *Xie Yaohuan* (*Xie Yaohuan*) 14. *Wu Zetian* (*The Empress Wu Zetian*)
The Five Dynasties (907-960) The Five Dynasties (907-960)	1. *Wuhou Yan* (*The Banquet*) 2. *Jingtai Hui* (*Reunion of Liu Zhiyuan and Li Sanniang*) 3. *She Saihua* (*She Saihua*)
Song Dynasty (960-1279) - Jin Dynasty (1115-1234) - Liao Dynasty/Khitan Empire (907-1125)	1. *Cailou Ji* (*Romance of the Colorful Tower*) 2. *Ba Yan* (*Leave the Banquet*) 3. *Zhizhan Lu Zhailang* (*Judge Bao Executed Lu Zhailang*) 4. *Bishang Liangshan* (*Driven Up to the Mountain Liang*) 5. *Qin Xianglian* (*Qin Xianglian*) 6. *Chisang Zhen* (*Chisang Town*)

Song Dynasty (960-1279) - Jin Dynasty (1115-1234) - Liao Dynasty/Khitan Empire (907-1125)	7. *Wushu Nao Dongjing* (*The Five Gallants in Kaifeng*) 8. *Daming Fu* (*The Beijing County*) 9. *Bibo Tan* (*The Green Lake*) 10. *San Chakou* (*The Divergence*) 11. *Liulang Tanmu* (*Liulang Visits His Mother*) 12. *Wutai Xionghui* (*Brothers Meet at Wutai Mountain*) 13. *Tanfu Ji* (*Visiting Residence*) 14. *Lanma Guoguan* (*Yang Bajie Across the Frontier Pass*) 15. *Yang Bajie Youchun* (*Yang Bajie Goes On a Spring Outing*) 16. *Muguiying Guashuai* (*Mu Guiying Takes Command*) 17. *Yangmen Nüjiang* (*The Generals of Yang Family*) 18. *Linjiang Yi* (*Linjiang Station*) 19. *Taohua Cun* (*Peach Flower Village*) 20. *Yezhu Lin* (*Wild Boar Forest*) 21. *Li kui Tanmu* (*Li Kui Visits His Mother*) 22. *Liehu Ji* (*Tiger Hunting*)

Song Dynasty (960-1279) - Jin Dynasty (1115-1234) - Liao Dynasty/Khitan Empire (907-1125)	23. *Sanda Zhujiazhuang* (*Occupy Family Zhu's Village by Three Attacks*) 24. *Heixuanfeng Li Kui* (*Black Whirlwind Li Kui*) 25. *Maiyi Fangyou* (*Shi Hualong Made A Living As A Performer*) 26. *San Daoling* (*Three Attempts to Steal the Arrow-Shaped Token of Authority*) 27. *Yuemu Cizi* (*Yue Fei's Mother Tattooing On His Back*) 28. *Chezhi Pojin* (*Defeated Jin's Army*) 29. *Guizhong Yuan* (*Romance of the Cabinet*) 30. *Jianghan Yuge* (*Defeated Jin's Army With the Help of Fishers*) 31. *Yuzan Ji* (*Romance of Jade Hairpin*) 32. *Wangjiang Ting* (*Wangjiang Pavilion*) 33. *Huichun Ji* (*Return to the Spring*) 34. *Manjiang Hong* (*All Are Red in the River*) 35. *Zhuxian Zhen* (*Zhuxian Town*) 36. *Niu Gao Zhaoqin* (*The Marriage of Niu Gao*) 37. *Mai Shui* (*Selling Water*) 38. *Xu Liang Chushi* (*Xu Liang at the Wulong*

	Ridge) 39. *Chuncao Chuangtang* (*Chuncao Breaks into the Court*) 40. *Liang Hongyu* (*Liang Hongyu*) 41. *Qiangtou Ji* (*Un-filial Sons and Daughters*)
Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368)	1. *Fan Xuzhou* (*Rebellion in Xuzhou*) 2. *Jiujiang Kou* (*At the Nine Rivers Entrance*)
Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)	1. *Gao Liang Ganhui* (*Gao Ling Catches Water*) 2. *Xu Yanzhao Zhanzi* (*Xu Yanzhao Executes His Son*) 3. *Sun An Dongben* (*Sun An Made a Petition to the Emperor*) 4. *Shengsi Pai* (*To Live Or To Die*) 5. *Hudie Bei* (*Butterfly Cup*) 6. *Yunluo Shan* (*Yunluo Moutain*) 7. *Shuang Heyin* (*Two Compatible Seals*) 8. *Zhou Ren Xiansao* (*Zhou Ren Betrayed His Brother's Wife*) 9. *Shiyi Lang* (*The Eleventh*) 10. *Fengxue Pei* (*Romance of Wind and*

Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)	*Snow*) 11. *Sanbu Yuanyi* (*Willing to Marry*) 12. *Ge Ma* (*Ge Ma*) 13. *Da Miangang* (*Beating With A Jar*) 14. *Wanhui Tiaochuan* (*Romance at the Boat Festival*) 15. *Yizhi Hua* (*A Flower*) 16. *Sanjia Fu* (*Friendship of Three Families*) 17. *Tiao Nüxu* (*Choose A Son-in-law*) 18. *Hong Niangzi* (*The Heroine Red*) 19. *Jin Chang'an* (*Enter the County Chang'an*) 20. *Taohua Shan* (*The Peach-Blossom Fan*)
Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)	1. *Sandao Jiulongbei* (*Steal the Nine-Dragon Cup*) 2. *Zhiqu Hangzhou* (*Taking Hangzhou By Strategies*) 3. *Jintian Fenglei* (*The Jintian Uprising*) 4. *Zhan Tianyou* (*Zhan Tianyou*) 5. *Song Jingshi* (*Song Jingshi*) 6. *Yimin Mingce* (*A List of the Rebels*) 7. *Huadeng Ji* (*Lantern Festival Romance*)
Myths & Mythologies (Date	1. *Baishe Zhuan* (*The Legend of White*

Unknown)	*Snake*) 2. *Niulang Zhinü* (*A Love Story of Niulang and Zhinü*) 3. *Ju Dagang* (*Mend A Jar*) 4. *Shen Haili* (*A Miraculous Oyster*) 5. *Hongqiao Zengzhu* (*Present A Pearl at the Rainbow Bridge*) 6. *Xianshi Tianhai* (*Bring Stones to Fill the Sea Up*)
Non-Chinese	*San Zuo Shan* (*Three Mountains*)

Appendix D[1]

The New Jingju Plays with Contemporary Themes: 1964

Title	Director	Performing Troupe
Raid on White Tiger Regiment (*Qixi Baihutuan*)	Shang Zhisi Yin Baozhong	Shangdong Provincial Jingju Troupe
The Sparks of Revolution in the Common Reeds (*Ludang Huozhong*)	Xiao Jia Chi Jinsheng	Beijing Jingju Troupe
Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy (*Zhiqu Weihushan*)	Ying Yunwei, Tao Xiong, Li Zhonglin, Li Tongsen	Shanghai Jingju Troupe
The Riverside of Arrow Shaft (*Jiangan Hebian*)	Xia Chun Wang Shixu	Beijing City Experimental Jingju Troupe
There Is No Lack of Successors to Carry On the Revolutionary Cause (*Geming Ziyou Houlairen*)	Shi Yuliang	Haerbin City Jingju Troupe
Fighting Against the Sea Waves (Zhan Hailang)	Zhang Mingyi Ma Ke	Shanghai Jingju Troupe
A Story About Sending Off the Manures (*Songfei Ji*)	Jin Suwen Lin Dehai	Shanghai Jingju Troupe
The Bar (*Guitai*)	Xue Zhengkang	Shanghai Jingju Troupe

[1] *Zhongguo Jingju Shi* (*A History of Jingju*). (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1999), 1680-1682.

An Interrogation on a Chair (*Shen Yizi*)	Zhang Qin Yi Mingduo	Shanghai Jingju Troupe
Be Sure Not to Forget (*Qianwan Buyao Wangji*)	Jia Shihua Wang Shi	Heilongjiang Provincial Xiqu School
The Little Sisters Heroines of the Grasslands (*Caoyuan Yingxiong Xiaojiemei*)	Dong Lai Wang Yingdou	Neimenggu Art Theatre Jingju Troupe
Red Guards on Honghu Lake (*Honghu Chiweidui*)	Liu Jingyi Qian Yuantong	Beijing City Jingju Troupe Two
The Gate Number Six (*Liuhao Men*)	Fang Chen Zhang Wenxuan	Tianjin City Jingju Troupe
Li Shuangshuang (*Li Shuangshuang*)	Wang Zhongping	Nanchang City Jingju Troupe
The Red Army Across the Dadu River (*Qiangdu Daduhe*)	Wu Shaopeng	Nanchang City Jingju Troupe
The Red Sun on the Mountain Ke (*Keshan Hongri*)	Yu Zongkun	Wuhan City Jingju Troupe
Dai Nuo (*Dai Nuo*)	Wu Feng Zhang Baoyi	Yunnan Provincial Jingju Troupe one
The Army and the People in Yan'an (*Yan'an Junmin*)	Chu Jinpeng, Shi Meiqiang, Wang Junpeng	Shanxi Provincial Jingju Troupe

Azalea Mountain (*Dujuan Shan*)	Yin Yuanhe Sun Qiutian	Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region Jingju Troupe
The Record of Ploughing and Weeding (*Gengyun Chuji*)	Xu Ziquan Feng Yuzheng	Jiangsu Provincial Jingju Troupe
The Two Brothers on the Grasslands (*Caoyuan Liang Xiongdi*)	Yang Yongquan	Qinghai Provincial Jingju Troupe
Red Rock (*Hong Yan*)	Guo Zhiyin He Desheng	Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Jingju Troupe
Five Keys (*Wuba Yaoshi*)	Guan Min	Changchun City Jingju Troupe
The Legend of the Red Lantern (*Hongdeng Ji*)	A Jia Luo Hongnian	National Peking Opera Troupe One
Jie Zhenguo (*Jie Zhenguo*)	Zhang Xianyou, Sun Mingkun, Ren Xichun, etc.	Tangshan City Jingju Troupe
Growing Up in the Fires (*Liehuoli Chengzhang*)	Zhang Youfang	Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Jingju Troupe
The Red House Manager (*Hong Guanjia*)	Gao Jialin	Henan Provincial Jingju Troupe
A Good Daughter-in-law	Zhu Yi, Ma Wanlou, Xu	Henan Provincial Jingju

(*Hao Xifu*)	Zhenhua	Troupe
Screening An Advance (*Yanhu*)	Ma Deshan Song Yousheng	Henan Provincial Jingju Troupe
To Whip Again (*Zai Jiebian*)	Xu Ziquan	Jiangsu Provincial Jingju Troupe
Hong Sao (*Hong Sao*)	Liu Shixun	Shangdong Xibo City Jingju Troupe
Be Sure Not to Forget (*Qianwan Buyao Wangji*)	Zou Gongfu	National Peking Opera Troupe Two
Azalea Mountain (*Dujuan Shan*)	Xiao Jia Zhang Aiding	Beijing Jingju Troupe
Winds and Thunders on the Miao Mountains (*Miaoling Fenglei*)	Chen Shaoqing Zhao Shihua	Guiyang City Jingju Troupe
The Red Detachment of Women (*Hongse Niangzijun*)	Zheng Yiqiu	National Peking Opera Troupe Four
The Tune of Red Flag (*Hongqi Pu*)	Li Zigui	National Traditional Theatre Research Institute Experimental Jingju Troupe
The Chaoyang Village (*Chaoyang Gou*)	Liu Muduo	National Traditional Theatre Research Institute Experimental Jingju Troupe

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