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## CHINA'S MUSICAL REVOLUTION: FROM BEIJING OPERA TO YANGBANXI

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Yawen Ludden, Student

Dr. Jonathan Glixon, Major Professor

Dr. Lance Brunner, Director of Graduate Studies

CHINA'S MUSICAL REVOLUTION: FROM BEIJING OPERA TO  
YANGBANXI

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
School of Music at the Kentucky University

By  
Yawen Ludden  
Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Jonathan Glixon, Ph.D., Professor of Musicology

Lexington, Kentucky

2013

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### CHINA'S MUSICAL REVOLUTION: FROM BEIJING OPERA TO YANGBANXI

This study seeks to investigate the modern derivative of Beijing opera, known as yangbanxi, through macro and micro approaches. The first part of the thesis surveys the development of Beijing opera under the historical context and in its social, political, and cultural perspectives. The second part, taking a microscopic perspective, undertakes an in-depth analysis of the compositions that were solely created by composer Yu Huiyong. First, it assays the application of Yu's theory to his compositions of various Beijing opera arias. Second, it analyzes Yu's instrumental music in compositional dimensions such as material, structure, and techniques, considering the larger implications of Yu's approach. Third, it explores the highly acclaimed opera *Azalea Mountain* as a case study, integrating compositional analysis and sociopolitical perspective in order to give a relatively full picture of Yu's final work as sole composer.

The analysis also focuses on three aspects of the yangbanxi. The first aspect is the role of composers, in which Yu Huiyong was largely responsible for shaping the musical language and influencing the direction of Beijing opera. The second aspect is the role of politics, focusing on Jiang Qing, who had a clear vision to transform Beijing opera along revolutionary lines and the artistic and political wherewithal to implement that transformation. The third aspect is the role of culture in shaping society, with an emphasis on yangbanxi, as the artistic centerpiece of the Cultural Revolution, and special consideration is given to its role in creating a new mass culture.

Beijing opera, as a living art form, had been undergoing a process of modernization throughout the first half of the twentieth century, but it was Yu Huiyong who clearly articulated what needed to be done to make the traditional art form relevant to modern audiences. In particular, the most significant achievement of yangbanxi was its music development, which achieved a new height in artistic development thanks to Yu Huiyong's fully constructed music theory and newly established music and performance system. As the main composer, designer, theorist, and organizer of yangbanxi, Yu Huiyong made the greatest contribution to these developments. His academic research laid the theoretical framework of the further development of opera music, and his hands-

on practice and music innovation provided valuable experience for the younger generation.

**KEYWORDS:** Beijing opera, Cultural Revolution, Jiang Qing, yangbanxi, Yu Huiyong

CHINA'S MUSICAL REVOLUTION: FROM BEIJING OPERA TO  
YANGBANXI

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*November 26, 2013*  
Date

To the memory of my father and mother, for instilling in me an understanding of what is important in life, and for the great family they gave me. To my sisters and brother, for being role models I could look up to. To David, Jenny, and Jason, for bringing joy to my life. To all people who love Beijing opera and Chinese culture.

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## CHAPTER ONE: PREFACE

Writing this thesis has been as much an academic pursuit as it has been a process of understanding Chinese culture and myself. Working on Beijing opera is both familiar and foreign to me. Like many of the Western instrument performers growing up in Shanghai, I was more familiar and interested in Western music since most of the works that we practiced every day were by foreign composers. However, in addition to my favorite solo accordion pieces, such as the overture to *The Barber of Seville* by Rossini and “Carnival of Venice” by Jean-Baptiste Arban, there were a few Chinese works adapted from the yangbanxi, such as the overture to *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, as well as revolutionary tunes, such as “Song of The Female Commune Member.” These were the works that captured my curiosity about Beijing opera and Chinese music.

I did not know Yu Huiyong was the composer of these popular accordion works until I started my research on yangbanxi. Indeed, although his music is widely popular even among Chinese audiences today, his name is not well known and is rarely associated with his compositions. Yu rode the political coattails of Mao’s wife Jiang Qing, and when she fell from grace at the end of the Cultural Revolution, so did he. Thus, Yu is largely ignored by Chinese scholars, who wisely avoid getting involved in a career-breaking controversy. As Yin Xiaodong, the vice president of China National Beijing Opera Company, has noted, the musical achievement of yangbanxi was unprecedented, and Yu Huiyong, as the chief composer and the main organizer of the yangbanxi creation group, had a significant influence on the development of yangbanxi. However, Yin notes,

“up to today, there has not been an objective study evaluating Yu Huiyong’s role and contribution to the achievements of yangbanxi, which were unprecedented.”<sup>1</sup>

I am a child of the Cultural Revolution. Born into an intellectual family in Shanghai, I was exposed to all forms of culture—art, music, literature—from an early age. I started learning the piano when I was five years old, yet after the political upheaval swept the nation in 1966, I could no longer continue the “bourgeois” instrument. On the other hand, revolutionary art was highly encouraged, so I took up the “proletarian” accordion and was soon selected as a gifted student at the government-run Shanghai Children’s Palace. There, I thrived under the guidance of gifted teachers, and I had many opportunities to participate in a wealth of musical activities, from performing in front of foreign dignitaries to accompanying factory workers’ choirs. Although many historians have denounced the Cultural Revolution as a decade of disaster and a cultural famine, for musicians like me this period was a cultural feast, an enriching environment that nourished our developing musical talents.

Like many of my generation, I went through a lot of soul-searching in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. Without doubt, it had been a decade of turmoil and tragedy. And like many of my friends and family members, I left China, first for Japan and then for the United States. Yet, as I later looked back on that time, it did not seem nearly as terrible as I was told it had been. I recalled the thrill of the accordion competitions at the Children’s Palace, the zeal of creating revolutionary music with the workers’ choirs, and I came to realize that, at least in terms of my musical development, it had been the greatest decade of my life.

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<sup>1</sup> Yin Xiaodong, “Revelation of a music manuscript from Yu Huiyong,” (Beijing: China Theatre, 2013), 5: 52.

My exploration of the music of the Cultural Revolution has been both a personal journey and an intellectual quest. At a personal level, I needed to understand the extreme and conflicting feelings I had of that time period, and this I could only achieve through a mature examination of the historical, political, and cultural factors that had shaped the events forming the context of my childhood. The demands of an adult life—making a living, raising a family—had led me away from my greatest passion, music. However, as I began my graduate studies in musicology, I found that my personal search had also become the ideal research project. China was opening up, and there was now a desire to understand what had happened during that decade. I could see that my project was not just a personal interest; indeed, my research could help my native country heal.

As a musicologist, I began looking back at the music I had grown up with, especially the revolutionary operas, ballets, and symphonies—collectively known as yangbanxi—that were ubiquitous during that time. What I found surprised me. While it is true that yangbanxi were propaganda instruments of the Communist Party, they were anything but the ham-fisted productions of philistine bureaucrats. Quite on the contrary, I found in them profound musical richness and innovation; these works had indeed, in the words of Chairman Mao, achieved “a unity of revolutionary content with the highest possible artistic form.”

My master’s thesis focused on musical activities during the Cultural Revolution. On family visits back to China, I revived contacts with old friends and classmates, who wanted to share with me their experiences during that time. And these people provided me with new contacts. Over the course of several summers, I interviewed scores of musicians who had been active during that time; indeed, many of them are still active

today. I learned that neither my experiences nor my complex emotions about those times were unique; the Cultural Revolution had been a time of extremes—of both joy and pain—not just for me, but for many people.

I also began to detect a pattern in these interviews. Over and over again, one person's name kept cropping up. I knew the name, for he had been Minister of Culture during the Cultural Revolution and denounced afterward as a “first class Gang of Four element”; he had killed himself in shame. Yet the people I interviewed did not denigrate him; rather, these musicians had nothing but praise and respect for the man, and uniformly so. One after another, the people I interviewed named this one person as largely responsible for creating a safe haven for musicians during the political storm, for building an environment of openness and innovation in the musical world at a time when the rest of the nation was shrinking from turmoil. His name was Yu Huiyong.

A dedicated scholar with a phobia for politics, Yu had been handpicked by Mao's wife Jiang Qing to spearhead her vision for the revolutionary transformation of Beijing opera. As the father of Chinese musicology, Yu had extensive knowledge of both Chinese traditional forms and Western musical techniques. He was also a gifted composer, and he combined his research and his talents in the creation of a new art form called yangbanxi. Through the selective use of Western techniques, Yu was able to reshape Beijing opera—which had enjoyed mass appeal for centuries—into an art form with the musical and emotional expressive range needed for a modern society while retaining the traditional flavor of an ancient culture.

On one of my summer visits to China, I had the opportunity to meet Yu's widow Ren Ke. She was touched that I had taken an interest in her husband's work, especially at

a time when Yu was still officially considered an enemy of the people. I had several subsequent occasions to talk with her. Her stories corroborated the accounts I had heard from Yu's colleagues and students, but as the one who knew Yu more intimately than anyone, she could flesh out those stories with more detail and emotion; she showed me the real human being behind the famous figure. During my Fulbright year in China (2010-2011) I was based in Beijing, and I visited Ren Ke often. In part, I felt it my duty; although I had never met her husband, his music had had such an impact on my childhood, and had become woven into the fabric of my being. It disheartened me to see her so alone in her last days: her children had emigrated, just as I had, and she lived by herself. But I could also tell that my visits enlivened her; I know she was happy to talk with someone who wanted to keep alive the memory of the man she loved, who wanted to see his accomplishments fully acknowledged.

Also during my Fulbright year, I had the opportunity to work closely with Chinese musicologist Dai Jiafang of the Central Conservatory in Beijing. Dai is also interested in the music of Yu Huiyong, but he has had to work under political restrictions that I have not. Dai published an early biography of Yu Huiyong, but he had to disguise it as a work of fiction in order to get it past the state censors. Dai has written extensively about Yu Huiyong's influence on Chinese music during and since the Cultural Revolution, but he was also able to tell me many things that he dared not publish. With the academic freedom I enjoy here in the United States, I can properly evaluate the career of Yu Huiyong without fear of censorship or retribution.

I believe that Yu Huiyong is the most important Chinese composer and musicologist of the twentieth century. As a scholar, he amassed copious records and



analyses of traditional Chinese music; he also developed a theory of music that could transform the ancient art of Beijing opera into a new form with relevance in the modern age without forsaking its roots. As a composer, he successfully put that theory into practice by developing a modern form of Beijing opera called yangbanxi, a style that still influences Beijing opera composition to this day. But Yu's fate was tied to that of Jiang Qing, and her enemies became his. He is yet to be rehabilitated by the Chinese government; his accomplishments still go unacknowledged.

It is my hope that this dissertation can help right this wrong. I have sought to paint a picture of Yu Huiyong as he really was—a man of both foresight and folly—but I also wish to give rightful acknowledgement to the contributions of this devoted son of the revolution, whose country forsook him. Despite any weaknesses in this dissertation, I feel I will have accomplished my goal if it helps redeem the honor of China's greatest composer of modern times; perhaps it can help heal the wounds of the Cultural Revolution generation as well.

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## CHAPTER TWO: INTRODUCTION

All classes in all class societies invariably put the political criterion first and the artistic criterion second... what we demand is the unity of politics and art, the unity of content and form, the unity of revolutionary political content and the highest possible perfection of artistic form ... Literature and art fit well into the whole revolutionary machine as a component part.... They operate as powerful weapons for uniting and educating the people and for attacking and destroying the enemy.<sup>2</sup>

Seven years before the establishment of a new China, Chinese Communist Party leader Mao Zedong addressed the future leaders in art and literature at the celebrated 1942 Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art, thereby defining the function of art as a weapon to unite and educate people on the one hand, but also to attack and destroy the enemy on the other. It took almost two decades for Mao's art theory to become art policy and his vision to become reality. Based on Mao's Yan'an talk, Premier Zhou Enlai in 1963 presented an art policy, a three-part process simplified as "revolutionize, nationalize, and popularize." About the same time, Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, started leading the art revolution in China and embarked on her experiments with Beijing opera, ballet, and symphony, expressed most directly during the Cultural Revolution in a popular new musical and theatrical category called yangbanxi (literally, "model performance"). This was a new artistic model created and structured to serve the Chinese

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<sup>2</sup> Mao Zedong, "Talks at the Yanan Forum on Art and Literature," *Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: PLA Publishing, 1978), p. 250.

working class and it dominated China's theatrical and musical stages for more than a decade.<sup>3</sup>

In October 1976, however, just one month after Chairman Mao's death, things changed radically. Mao's widow Jiang was arrested, together with several of her colleagues, including Yu Huiyong, the Minister of Culture, who was in charge of all of China's cultural affairs and a prominent architect and composer of *yangbanxi*. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was declared over, denounced as a decade of disaster by the Chinese government, and condemned by intellectuals as the darkest age in Chinese history.<sup>4</sup> To bolster this verdict, academic research on the Cultural Revolution was strongly discouraged, and all kinds of music from this period, including *yangbanxi*, vanished from radio, TV, and the concert hall.

This blackout persisted from the late 1970s to the late 1980s. Beginning around 1990, a political thaw permitted musical works from the Cultural Revolution to be gradually reintroduced into mainstream Chinese society. Since then, *yangbanxi* has enjoyed a strong revival and continues to be a highly popular form of entertainment in theaters, on television, and in commercial and private entertainments such as karaoke.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The polemical phrase "eight stage works for 800 million people" (ba yi renmin ba ge xi) has been used to capture the severe restrictions on cultural production throughout the years of the Cultural Revolution. However this claim is unwarranted. First, these eight model operas had been already existed before the Cultural Revolution. Second, there were eighteen model works by the end of 1976 and many other forms of theatrical and musical works.

<sup>4</sup> In August 1977, during the 11th meeting the Communist Party, Hua Guofeng, Chairman of the Party announced the end of the Cultural Revolution.

<sup>5</sup> *Yangbanxi* now receives regular performances in major cities such as Shanghai and Beijing, and its CDs are sold in Chinese bookstores under the category of "Red Classic." Karaoke remains one of the most popular public and family entertainments in China. Other popular music includes the songs based on the quotations of Chairman Mao and the revolutionary songs from 1940 to 1970, which have been recorded on CD and are performed regularly in concert. Popular violin and piano solos from the Cultural Revolution have also been recently recorded. Pan Yinglin,

To this day, however, *yangbanxi* remains one of the most controversial of Chinese art forms among both Chinese and Western scholars. While many Chinese composers and performers credit *yangbanxi* with attaining the highest standards of music, performance, and theater, and claim that “we’ll never match that quality again,”<sup>6</sup> the denunciations of the Cultural Revolution hang like a cloud over the debate, leading to negative critiques of *yangbanxi* such as: “It is opposed to culture”<sup>7</sup>; or because of it “the whole country finds itself in a serious musical famine” during this period.<sup>8</sup>

### Searching for Definitions

The foregoing remarks, cast more as the definition of an interpretive position than as a formal argument, identify one of the core concerns of this study. The sharp controversies either supporting or denigrating *yangbanxi* are extraordinarily wide-ranging and deserve to be taken seriously in all their dimensions. They raise important questions, such as: What criteria should be used to judge *yangbanxi*? And what is the definition of music and culture in a contemporary Chinese context? If music is defined as works of music in the Western tradition and culture is understood as leisure pursuits of the elite, then there is little wonder many Western scholars would express negative opinions about a genre they barely know by name and have never experienced. As pointed out by van

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concertmaster of Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra and one of the most popular violinists during the Cultural Revolution, now tours many cities performing pieces from that period.

<sup>6</sup> This view was expressed by China’s famous conductor of the Central Philharmonic Orchestra, Li Delun. Quoted in Sheila Melvin and Jingdong Cai, “Why This Nostalgia For Fruits of Chaos,” *The New York Times*, October 29, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Leo Oufan Lee, “The Enduring Dimension in Contemporary Chinese Culture, Literature, and Intellectuals,” *Issues and Studies* 15, 1979.

<sup>8</sup> Chen Gang, *Red Violin* (Hong Kong: China Science and Culture), 1991, p. 68.

Zoonen, “Let us say for the moment that we are faced with a phenomenon—the enduring encounters between entertainment and politics—about which there is little knowledge but much opinion.”<sup>9</sup> This is exactly the condition of *yangbanxi*, which brings out the next question: what is *yangbanxi*?

*Yangbanxi* is a special term designated for art works approved by Jiang Qing and other government officials. The original eight *yangbanxi* included two ballets, one symphony, and five revolutionary modern Beijing operas, all created a few years before the Cultural Revolution. The number of *yangbanxi* increased during the Cultural Revolution, and by 1976 there were a total of eighteen revolutionary *yangbanxi* and several on their way towards completion.<sup>10</sup>

Although I will supply more specific evidence later, a few words need to be said to further clarify this term and its concept. First, *yangbanxi*, meaning model theater or model performance, is not a monolithic genre but encompasses all of the performing art, integrating genres such as ballet, symphony, and Beijing opera. Second, the growing expectation was that these new paradigms would be emulated and adopted by all arts workers. Third, *yangbanxi* provided the role models for the masses to emulate, thereby establishing an institutionalized system of attitudes, beliefs, and practices that would permeate the entire society. Fourth, *yangbanxi* was not aimed exclusively at promoting political awareness and communist ideologies—the prevailing belief in the West—but rather it served as a new artistic model created and structured to serve the Chinese

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<sup>9</sup> Liesbet van Zoonen, *Entertaining the Citizen: When Politics and Popular Culture Converge* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), p.2.

<sup>10</sup> This number was given by the Chinese musicologist Dai Jiafang during his series of guest lectures at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Dai is a professor of Central Conservatory, whose research is focused on the music during the Cultural Revolution.

working class. Finally, it was designed to preserve traditional forms as part of the Chinese cultural heritage.<sup>11</sup> In sum, *yangbanxi* is a special term designating new artistic works sanctioned and promoted by government leaders during the Cultural Revolution. Thus, regardless of how the aesthetic merits of *yangbanxi* are evaluated either in China or in the West, the cultural, social, and political implications of the *yangbanxi* endeavor are worthy of a major study.

### Need for the Study

As the artistic centerpiece of the Cultural Revolution, *yangbanxi* epitomized Chinese society, politics, and history more than almost any other form of expression from that period. Hence, understanding its cultural dimensions and especially its political context is essential to any apprehending of the Cultural Revolution and current-day China. The high-speed growth of the People's Republic today has attracted much excitement and enthusiasm, and a round of *Sinomania* seems to be in the making. According to Martin Jacques, the transformation of China's rise to economic supremacy is so massive that history will henceforward simply be divided into BC and AC: Before China and After China.<sup>12</sup> However, *Sinophobia* exists in equally strong measure. In particular, the Cultural Revolution remains one of the most talked about and least understood topics concerning twentieth-century China. In the preface to *Mao's Last*

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<sup>11</sup> This view is also discussed in Colin Mackerras, *Chinese Theater: From Its Origins to the Present Day* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983).

<sup>12</sup> Anderson, Perry. "Sinomania." Review of *When China Rules the World: The Rise of the Middle Kingdom and the End of the Western World* by Martin Jacques, *Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics: Entrepreneurship and the State*, by Yasheng Huang and *Against the Law: Labour Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt*, by Ching Kwan Lee. *London Review of Books*, 32 no. 2 (2010): 3-6.

*Revolution*, Roderick Macfaquhar simply states: “To understand the ‘why’ of modern-day China, one must understand the ‘what’ of the Cultural Revolution.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the interpretation of the Cultural Revolution is one of the central issues prevailing in modern-day China. As Wang Hui argues in his recent book, *The End of the Revolution: China and the Limits of Modernity*, China’s revolutionary past and its current social and economic reforms are part of the same process of modernization.<sup>14</sup>

Although my study does not directly address the Cultural Revolution, *yangbanxi* nevertheless can provide a useful medium connecting the Cultural Revolution and modern-day China. The librettos of model operas contain much social, historical, political, and ideological information. The production of model opera reflects upon not just music and performance practice but cultural beliefs and art policies associated with the Cultural Revolution that for many are still valid today.

Second, *yangbanxi* expresses tangible artistic values that remain a vital part of Chinese culture. Understanding *yangbanxi* helps elucidate the evolution of Chinese opera and sheds new light on our perception of modern-day Chinese performing arts and musical culture. For example, celebrated Chinese stage director Huang Zuolin often asks actors to borrow techniques from Beijing opera’s stage performances, and film director Zheng Dasheng has said that he draws inspiration from his *yangbanxi* experience.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Macfaquhar, Roderick and Schoenhals, Michael, *Mao’s Last Revolution* (Cambridge: the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), ix.

<sup>14</sup> Wang Hui, *The End of the Revolution: China and the Limits of Modernity* (Verso, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> For details about using Beijing opera techniques in stage drama, see Huang Zuolin, “Fusing of Revolutionary Realism with Revolutionary Romanticism” in *Tradition, Innovation, and Politics: Chinese and Overseas Chinese Theatre across the World*, TDR, Vol. 38, No. 2 (Summer, 1994): 22-23. Huang is a veteran stage and film Director, Founder and Honorary Artistic Director of Shanghai People’s Art Theatre. I also interviewed Huang’s grandson Zheng Dashen, director of the Shanghai Film Studio, who directed the first film of Beijing opera made after the end of the

Nancy Rao noted that “[f]rom the decades around the beginning of the twenty-first century, contemporary Chinese composers’ music has exhibited a great debt to the expressive power of music gestures from Beijing opera.”<sup>16</sup> In a similar vein, Jonathan Stock has observed that following the tradition of *yangbanxi*, many regional Chinese opera ensembles now include Western instruments or have experimented with their inclusion.<sup>17</sup> Thus, Jiang Qing argues that “[t]he influence of the Chinese Cultural Revolution is complex and exists at various levels” and that “it is the foundation of the development of contemporary art in China and a crucial source of identity for Chinese art in the global art world today.”<sup>18</sup> While these scholars argue from different perspectives, they all agree that there is much to learn from *yangbanxi*, and its impact cannot be ignored.

Indeed, the continuing importance of *yangbanxi* in Chinese society is indisputable. In 2009, China’s most influential and largest state-owned television network, CCTV, broadcast two extravagant live concerts to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of New China. The first concert was called “Red Classic—Beijing Opera Symphony,” which featured music from *yangbanxi*; the second concert was entitled

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Cultural Revolution, which premiered in June 2009. Zheng acknowledged that there is a lot to learn from *Yangbanxi* and traditional Beijing opera.

<sup>16</sup> Nancy Rao, “The Tradition of Luogu Dianzi (Percussion Classics) and Its Signification in Contemporary Music,” *Contemporary Music Review*, Vol. 26, Nos. 5/6 (October/December 2007), pp. 511-527. This article traces several significant musical gestures in Chen Yi and Chen Qigang’s works. The majority of Chinese contemporary composers, such as Tan Dun and Zhou Long (who are active in the United States), and many more in mainland China exhibit such trends in their compositions. Although Rao does not directly credit their experiences to *yangbanxi* during the Cultural Revolution, given that it was the only form of Beijing opera that was performed during these composers’ formative years, it is not difficult to see the connection.

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Stock, *Huju: Traditional Opera in Modern Shanghai* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Jiang Jiehong, ed., *Burden of Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary art* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), p. 2.



“Recreating Legend” and featured music from traditional Beijing opera.<sup>19</sup> Even without the suggestiveness of these titles, these performances on such a grand scale and on such a commemorative occasion served as a clear gesture to the public of the government’s support and endorsement of *yangbanxi* and Beijing opera.

### **Literature Review**

*Yangbanxi* has long been overlooked by academia. While an increased interest in China has produced a large body of scholarship in the West, virtually no serious musicological research on *yangbanxi* or the development of Beijing opera after the 1950s exists. To judge from recent publications in the United States, such as Terence Chong's 2003 paper “Chinese Opera in Singapore: Negotiating Globalization, Consumerism and National Culture,” Nancy Guy's 2005 *Peking Opera and Politics in Taiwan*, and Daphne Lei's 2006 *Operatic China*, we might wonder whether Beijing opera still exists on mainland China at all, or if instead it has emigrated to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, or New York’s Chinatown.<sup>20</sup>

Until recently, research in China relating to the Cultural Revolution was taboo (and to some extent it still is). Not surprisingly, research concerning music during the Cultural Revolution is scant, and substantial research on *yangbanxi* is virtually non-existent. To date, only two Ph.D. dissertations have dealt primarily with the *yangbanxi*.

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<sup>19</sup> This performance was first broadcast on May 30 and 31, 2009 and rerun several times on television. It can be viewed at the following website:

<http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/Sz4wy3ikWOQ>.

<sup>20</sup> Daphne Lei's 2006 book *Operatic China* deals with performances of Beijing opera in America’s Chinatown. See Daphne P. Lei *Operatic China: Staging Chinese Identity across the Pacific* (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

One of them is Guang Lu's *Modern Revolutionary Beijing Opera: Context, Contents, and Conflicts* (Kent State University), an ambitious study that attempts to cover almost everything related to Beijing opera from 500 B.C. to 1997. In his preface Lu states that he was "an insider by virtue"—a professional violinist at a state-level orchestra and that he mainly played *yangbanxi* music during the Cultural Revolution. Thus, he was an eyewitness to many events, and later became a professional composer, a university professor, and finally a doctoral student of ethnomusicology. Lu declares himself to be an "objective outsider" whose goal was to "complete a thorough study of the Modern Revolutionary Beijing opera and share with the world one of the most extraordinary experiences an ethnomusicologist could have."<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, discussions or observations that could be branded as "objective" are extremely rare. Instead, Lu's study teems with extreme exaggeration, unfounded negative comments, highly biased judgments, and vitriolic remarks. Yu Huiyong and Jiang Qing are described as evil, ignorant about music and opera, full of hatred toward Western music, disliking Beijing opera, immoral, and so forth. His illustration of Yu Huiyong, the chief composer and theorist of the *yangbanxi*, demonstrates his scornful and demeaning writing style. In his thesis, Yu was "only an ordinary teacher at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music before Jiang Qing found him in the late 1960s"<sup>22</sup> and "his innovation was only to add Western elements, such as harmony and orchestration into the

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<sup>21</sup> Lu, Guang. *Modern Revolutionary Beijing Opera: Context, Contents, and Conflicts* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1997), p. xvi.

<sup>22</sup> Lu, p. 224. This statement lacks basic knowledge. Yu was in fact already a prominent scholar of Chinese music theory, a Vice-Chairman of the National Music Department at the country's most prestigious conservatory, an eminent music critic and composer well before he became involved in the creation of *yangbanxi*.

traditional Chinese genre.”<sup>23</sup> He “climbed to the highest position” because “he was good at flattering those above him.”<sup>24</sup> After Jiang Qing was arrested, Yu was removed from his position. Lu gives a cursory summary of the end of Yu’s life by stating, “Without any hope, he committed suicide.”<sup>25</sup>

However, what seems more problematic is his conclusion that “[t]he birth of model opera (*yangbanxi*) was tragic to both Chinese theater and Chinese art...Such radical artistic reforms that do not conform with the artistic and cultural values of a given society are destined to fail in the long run. Despite its destructive power and its short-term prevalence, *yang ban xi* (*yangbanxi*) failed in the long run. It was doomed to fail...because it was a part of careful political conspiracy.”<sup>26</sup> Anyone familiar with contemporary Chinese history would recognize that the claims in his conclusion are almost identical to those that appeared in the Chinese newspapers of the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is unfortunate that the author conflated research with “personal reflections” and relied on secondary or tertiary sources.<sup>27</sup>

Liu Yunyan’s Ph.D. dissertation at the Central Conservatory of Music, *Analysis of Dan Aria Music in Modern Beijing Opera*, is a rare study of *yangbanxi* music carried out

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<sup>23</sup> Lu, p. 225.

<sup>24</sup> Lu, pp. 225-27.

<sup>25</sup> Lu, pp. 225-27.

<sup>26</sup> Lu, pp. 580-589.

<sup>27</sup> Lu, p. 6. I interviewed Lu’s classmate from Kent University Luo Qing, who is now a professor at Shanghai Conservatory. Dr. Luo told me that he does not agree with Lu’s conclusion and believes it has serious problems.

in Mainland China. However, it is concerned almost exclusively with technical issues and very little with the social and political dimensions. As such its value is very limited.<sup>28</sup>

Two general studies about the music of the Cultural Revolution have been authored in the United States. Lei Ouyang Bryant's dissertation *New Songs of the Battlefield: Songs and Memories of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* carries the distinction of being the first to document and analyze the five-volume anthology of songs published from 1972 to 1976. Her study makes some convincing points based on her observations and interviews, such as "Music, more often than not, serves as a reliable means to evoke the memories and emotions of the Cultural Revolution period perhaps otherwise forgotten."<sup>29</sup> She even conducted a well-documented survey whose findings confirm that "the lyrics of revolutionary music are considered more encouraging as age increases."<sup>30</sup> In her conclusion, she reduced the result of her survey to merely the presence of nostalgia. True, there is nostalgia among people toward the music of the Cultural Revolution. But such a statement does not require a large survey and analysis of data to support such a minor sentiment. To me, the result of her survey tells us there is something more than just nostalgia, and the author deliberately chose to ignore it because the data does not turn out as she imagined or does not fit her already planned conclusion. In addition, there are also some critical mistakes in her studies. For example, mistaking

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<sup>28</sup> Liu Yunyan, *Analysis of Dan Aria Music in Modern Beijing Opera*, (Beijing: Central Conservatory of Music Press, 2006). Dan aria is one kind of Beijing opera composition written specifically for young female performer.

<sup>29</sup> Lei Ouyang Bryant, *New Songs of the Battlefield: Songs and Memories of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, (University of Pittsburgh Ph.D. dissertation, 2004), p. 204.

<sup>30</sup> Lei Ouyang Bryant, p. 203.

Chairman Mao's quotation song as a Red Guards' song and making no distinction between "Red Guards" and "Red Army."<sup>31</sup>

A recent paper, *Red Detachment of Women and the Enterprise of Making "Model" Music during the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, has been posted on the University of Chicago website by Clare Sher Ling Eng. She claims to "challenge established narratives that portray the Cultural Revolution as a time of artistic famine and nihilism" and to rehabilitate the "eight model works."<sup>32</sup> The author's courage in bucking current trends in scholarship and searching for the values expressed by art in the Cultural Revolution are laudable, and her general methodology has its merits. However, as in Bryant's thesis, several misconceptions prevent her from fully accomplishing her aims. For one thing, her work claims to "explore the identity of Red Detachment as a unique concretion of tenets of Chinese Communist ideology." Yet, she offers no consideration of the political figure Jiang Qing, who played an important role in shaping the very tenets and specifically this ballet;<sup>33</sup> for another, since this ballet was created before the Cultural Revolution, it can hardly support her opposition to the belief in "the Cultural Revolution as a time of artistic famine." Furthermore, what needs to be rehabilitated is not the play—since *Red Detachment of Women*, like many *yangbanxi*, has been performed worldwide

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<sup>31</sup> Red Army was founded in 1927 and later became the Chinese People's Liberation Army. Red Guards were a mass movement of civilians, formed by students and other young people in China during the Cultural Revolution. See Lei Ouyang Bryant, *New Songs of the Battlefield: Songs and Memories of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, p. 93-103.

<sup>32</sup> For Eng's paper see <https://letterpress.uchicago.edu/index.php/voicexchange>.

<sup>33</sup> See <https://letterpress.uchicago.edu/index.php/voicexchange> for Eng's paper, p. 6. Jiang Qing's involvement in this Ballet is well known and recorded in many books published in the United States, such as Ross Terrill's *Madame Mao: The White-Boned Demon* and Roxane Witke's *Comrade Chiang Qing*.

since the 1980s—but people: composers, performers, and those who were actually involved in the process of creation and production.

Two studies deal with Yu Huiyong. Richard Kraus, a political scientist at the University of Oregon and a leading scholar of Chinese studies, has written several books and articles concerning the art of the Cultural Revolution. His article, “Arts Policies of the Cultural Revolution: The Rise and Fall of Culture Minister Yu Huiyong,” illuminates cultural policy through the plans and personalities of Cultural Minister Yu Huiyong.<sup>34</sup> Kraus’s treatment of the topic is certainly adequate for a study of this nature, and he seems knowledgeable about Chinese politics and art politics. The limitation is that Kraus adopts many views directly from the Chinese sources at face value. Furthermore, his misconception of pen names led him to misattributing particular comments to Yu Huiyong. In spite of these errors, Kraus’s writings are the most relevant to this study and include many intriguing points that reveal important connections between politics and culture.

While concealing its true sources and disguising itself as creative literature, another Yu Huiyong study, *Toward Extermination—The Rise and Fall of the Cultural Revolution Cultural Minister Yu Huiyong*, by Chinese scholar Dai Jiafang, Professor of Musicology at the Central Conservatory in China, is based on primary sources that no one had previously seen, including Yu’s files and his 170,000-word confession.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> One interesting detail is reflected in the title of his article, which is identical to Dai Jiafang’s book. Kraus’s title sounds neutral but its content is less than neutral, while Dai’s title is politically correct for publication but its content is actually more neutral.

<sup>35</sup> Dai Jiafang, *Toward Extermination—The Rise and Fall of the Cultural Revolution Cultural Minister Yu Huiyong*, (Beijing: Guangming Daily Press, 1994). I interviewed Dr. Dai in the summer of 2006. Dai is currently director of Musicology Institute at Central. Prior to this position, Dai had worked many years at the Central Government Cultural Bureau and eventually

Considering that research on the Cultural Revolution was forbidden in China at the time, it took great courage and integrity to write such a book featuring an objective treatment of music and politics. It took Dai three years to find a publisher who would dare publish such a book, and only one month after its release the book was banned in China.

Dai interviewed many people (most of whom have since died) who had worked with Yu at various stages of his career, including his earliest musical activities with an army unit before he entered the Shanghai Conservatory. Unfortunately, the book cannot be considered Yu's biography because of the sensitive issues and sources. Contrary to Lu's study, Dai described Yu as a person who was musically talented but politically incompetent, who had both virtues and faults, who was not as perfect as Yu's admirers claim, but certainly not as malevolent as in Lu's portrayal.<sup>36</sup>

A few works about the history of the Cultural Revolution are worth mentioning. Roderick Macfaquhar and Michael Schoenhals' *Mao's Last Revolution* and Harrison E. Salisbury's *The New Emperors: China in the Era of Mao and Deng*, both include reliable information and truthful description about the Chinese Communist Party, its history, policy, leaders, and their struggles.<sup>37</sup> *The Culture of Power: The Lin Biao Incident in the Cultural Revolution* is a book written by Chinese scholar Jin Qiu, the daughter of a disgraced former commander of the Chinese Air Force. Although the author makes no attempt to hide the fact that "personal motivation and determination" were the principal

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reached a considerably high position—vice minister of education, which allowed him access to Yu's file and confession. It took many years for the central government to permit his resignation from such a high post and eventually allow him to be transferred to his current position.

<sup>36</sup> Dai's depicting of Yu fits the description of Yu's other colleagues whom I have interviewed. One thing for sure is that Yu certainly has more admirers than enemies.

<sup>37</sup> Harrison E. Salisbury, *The New Emperors: China in the Era of Mao and Deng* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992). Macfaquhar, Roderick and Schoenhals, Michael, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge: 2006).

driving forces behind her research, the book is not a memoir of the Cultural Revolution. Jin utilizes theories from Western social science and analyzes her primary source—a manuscript written by her father—to illustrate the power struggles among its politicians.

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Jin's monograph is compelling and insightful, providing supplementary aid for our understanding of contemporary Chinese politics and affairs. However, unlike other scholars working on the Cultural Revolution, she does not try to convey the impression that her account of the Cultural Revolution is the authentic or definitive version. Instead, she sensibly acknowledges that the Cultural Revolution was a complex period in contemporary Chinese history, and that no single study can presume to encompass all aspects of this history. Also, she points out that the Cultural Revolution means different things to different people, and these meanings vary from place to place.

Although several books praise *yangbanxi* enthusiastically, such as Colin Mackerras's *The Chinese Theater in Modern Times: From 1840 to the Present Day* and Liang Mingyue's *Music of the Billion* (which goes so far as to say: "had this genre continued its development after the Cultural Revolution, it would have led to a national contemporary style of opera and certainly to a new height in Chinese operatic tradition)."<sup>39</sup> Both studies amount to lip service since neither provides any serious evidence to support their statements.

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<sup>38</sup> Qiu Jin, *The Culture of Power: the Lin Biao Incident in the Cultural Revolution* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. xii.

<sup>39</sup> Liang Mingyue, *Music of the Billion* (New York City: Heinrichshofen, 1985), p. 158. This book was published in 1977 and in 1983; it was re published under a similar title as *Chinese Theater: From Its Origins to the Present Day*, which remains largely the same but has many of the earlier praises of *yangbanxi* excised.



The above literature review makes clear that very little academic research has been devoted to *yangbanxi* or the music of the Cultural Revolution in spite of the circumstance that, since 1990, *yangbanxi* has enjoyed a vigorous revival and continues to be one of the most popular forms of entertainment both in theaters and in private gatherings. Yet, most existing research on it remains superficial and inaccurate. Since the Cultural Revolution occurred in China and most Chinese sources and materials were classified until very recently, there has been little incentive for Chinese scholars to write about this period. Therefore, most research related to the Cultural Revolution has been done by Westerners or overseas Chinese, many of whom are unfamiliar with the political and social realities of China either then or now. Many scholars, according to Roderick Macfaquhar, based their research on secondary or tertiary materials that are out of date and inaccurate.<sup>40</sup> This produced a common flaw among these scholars—a lack of the cultural and historical awareness necessary to create a coherent picture; the use of this false information not only led to invalid conclusions but created even more confusion.<sup>41</sup> Studies that leapfrog over the Cultural Revolution and focus solely on purely technical issues<sup>42</sup> or purposely neglect the contributions of the important political figures (such as

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<sup>40</sup> There is a growing awareness of the dangers of circulating inaccurate information among Western scholars. See, for example, Macfaquhar, Roderick and Schoenhals, Michael, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge: 2006).

<sup>41</sup> Both are seen in Bryant's and Lu's dissertations, which simply pass on value judgments expressed by the Chinese press at certain periods, and without acknowledging that these views change. For example, the Chinese press during the Cultural Revolution period often labeled the period before 1966 as "a black dictatorship in the arts," while from 1976 to the end of the 1980s the Chinese press labeled the period of the Cultural Revolution as the Gang of Four's "fascist dictatorship." Later on, the period from the late 1970s through the 1980s was labeled as "bourgeois liberalism."

<sup>42</sup> One of such cases is Elizabeth Wichmann's book, *Listening to Theater: The Aural Dimension of Beijing Opera*, which is a study of Beijing opera based on her first-hand experience studying performances in China in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The book provides detailed discussions of linguistic, musical, vocal, and instrumental components of the sound system in the Beijing

Jiang Qing and Yu Huiyong),<sup>43</sup> or deal only with symptoms rather than causes. Such omissions, as Jiehong Jiang has stated, either demonstrate the writer's belief in the artistic mediocrity of that decade or deny the reality that China's revolutionary past and the current changes China is undergoing are driven by the same forces of modernization.<sup>44</sup>

### Scope and Methodology

My study attempts to bridge the gaps between politics and culture by focusing on the tension and interplay between individual creativity and the politicized sociocultural environment. The primary purposes of this study are to trace the development of *yangbanxi*; to reassess its social, political, cultural, and musical merits; and to speculate on the future direction of Beijing opera. In so doing I hope to shed light on our understanding of mainstream Chinese art music and to provide an alternative perspective to the excessively politicized critiques of Western writers on *yangbanxi*.

Vital to this study is the figure of Yu Huiyong, the principle composer of *yangbanxi*. I began collecting primary source material for this study in 2005. These materials, including Yu's original sketches, recordings, writings, and personal letters, were scattered in several places among Yu's students, friends, and family members, who were gracious enough to share these with me. Many of them have promised me that they

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opera. However, it fails to mention the extensive changes in Beijing opera, as if *yangbanxi* never occurred or was not a part of Beijing opera.

<sup>43</sup> Neither Bryant nor Eng give any meaningful credit to Jiang Qing or Yu Huiyong even as they discuss the musical anthology and revolutionary ballet, which clearly emerged under the leadership of Jiang and Yu. This omission is more understandable if the author is Chinese and has written for Chinese publication—for example, Liu's dissertation.

<sup>44</sup> Jiang Jiehong, *Burden of Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007); Wang Hui, *The End of the Revolution: China and the Limits of Modernity* (London: Verso, 2010).

will share this information when I start writing. For example, Yu's former student Gong Guotai, now a composer at Shanghai Beijing Opera Company, provided me with a short score for *On the Docks*; Yu had prepared this short score and marked it with instrumental cues and suggestions for Gong to develop into a full score. The primary sources also includes Yu's unpublished book manuscripts and lecture notes taken by his students who took his classes in the 1960s, as well as the published scores, photos, film recordings, and audio recordings.<sup>45</sup> Dai Jiafang also provided me with portions of Yu's confession, which he wrote in prison before his death. Many of the sources related to *yangbanxi* and the Cultural Revolution are no longer classified, but Yu Huiyong and Jiang Qing remain sensitive topics.<sup>46</sup>

Much of the information in this thesis comes from interviews with people who knew and worked with Yu Huiyong. I first began interviewing Yu's widow Ren Ke in 2006, and I met with her on a number of occasions until her death in 2013. I also interviewed dozens of performers of the *yangbanxi* as well as associated composers and conductors; in addition I met with a number of musicians and scholars who had been students of Yu.

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<sup>45</sup> Dr. Jiao Jianzhong, professor at Shanghai Conservatory and former president of the National Music Research Institute of China kindly gave me a copy of his notes, transcribed from an original source. Some early recordings and photos were not open to the public, and the only access was through personal connections and by escort of an authority figure of that company or a reference letter from a higher organization.

<sup>46</sup> Both Yu Huiyong and Jiang Qing committed suicide while in prison. In China some people consider suicide as a way to escape humiliation or to save loved ones from humiliation or embarrassment. Therefore this kind of suicide is regarded as an "honorable" death. However, according to communist doctrine, suicide is an act against the communist party—"self-murder" and self-termination towards the party and its people. Theoretically, those who commit suicide will never be rehabilitated and remain forever the party's enemy.

This dissertation focuses on three elements in the development of yangbanxi. The first is the role of composers. I agree with Michael Steinberg's statement that opera is, "in the end, the composer's [because it] stands or falls by its music [and it] is the music that delivers the words."<sup>47</sup> Therefore, I deal exclusively with principal composer Yu Huiyong and the formation of his *avant garde* style and aesthetics. Three yangbanxi—*On the Docks*, *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, and *Azalea Mountain*—serve as case studies and are examined in detail, as they represent the three most important stages of operatic development. Some traditional Beijing opera is utilized for illuminating musical, theatrical, and textual differences.

The second is the role of politics. The Chinese social and political climate has been changing continually since the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, and these changes have influenced intellectual and artistic life, consequently propelling Beijing opera to change. Nevertheless, the most significant social change occurred after 1949 when the People's Republic of China was established under the leadership of Chairman Mao, who made radical social, economic, and ideological changes. However, it was Jiang Qing's pragmatic implementation of these policies that set the stage for further developments in art and culture. Thus, I focus on Jiang Qing, who was the driving force behind the establishment and legitimization of yangbanxi. To a lesser extent, I also consider Chairman Mao, who laid out the fundamental art principles for the new China. In this

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<sup>47</sup> Michael Steinberg, "Nixon in China," jacket notes for John Adams, *Nixon in China*, Orchestra of St. Luke's Edo de Waart, Nonesuch 79177 (1987).

context, I see compare Mao's thoughts and Jiang's practice to theories expounded by Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin.<sup>48</sup>

The third is role of culture in shaping society. The Cultural Revolution in general, and *yangbanxi* in particular, was about creating a new mass culture while maintaining the roots of China's longstanding traditions. Beijing opera became the cultural touchstone precisely because it was an important part of the mass culture in China long before the Communist Party took power. In short, my goal is to reveal why *yangbanxi* was created, how *yangbanxi* was created, and what the impact of *yangbanxi* was during and after the Cultural Revolution.

In an attempt to cover the above areas, I emphasize Confucian philosophical thought and traditional Chinese belief. However, I ground my discussion in the Western theories of Carl Dahlhaus and Theodor Adorno. For example, I apply Carl Dahlhaus' theory of *Grundlagen der Musikgeschichte* in this study. According to Dahlhaus, one has to understand the meaning of an act/event before analyzing and discussing the cause and effect of this act/event. The understanding of an act includes reconstruction of the person's motivation by empathizing and being sympathetic with this person. Therefore, instead of depicting the event, I place emphasis on the persons who made things happen. In an attempt to cover the above areas, I attempt to lay out the circumstances of his/her life in as balanced and objective a manner as possible.

Additionally, I employ different approaches and methodologies according to topic and content. For example, when exploring the creation and perception of *yangbanxi*, I apply the methods of ethnography, which emphasizes the psychological and social

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Lei Ouyang Bryant, *New Songs of the Battlefield: Songs and Memories of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, (University of Pittsburgh Ph.D. dissertation 2004), p.46.

aspects of musical processes. When discussing and interpreting the meaning of yangbanxi, I integrate musical experience with cultural phenomena, historical change, philosophical concepts, and social movements in order to provide a more balanced and multivalent reading. I also apply the tenets of comparative literature, because it is only by exploring the textual, theatrical and musical differences among yangbanxi, traditional Beijing opera and Western opera that one can determine how far yangbanxi has progressed or retreated. Likewise, one can only evaluate whether yangbanxi brought Chinese music to a higher standard or destroyed the foundation of Chinese musical art by analyzing and comparing the changes in its own development as well as changes in society and music creation before and after it. Re-embedding yangbanxi in its social, political, cultural, and historical context is only one step in this process. We must also relate it to the society from which it came and for which it was aimed, judging it on its own terms and by the criteria that identify it. Only by doing all this in accordance with its cultural underpinnings and ideological significance can one begin to comprehend its meaning and value.

This dissertation investigates yangbanxi from both macro and micro perspectives, reaching the conclusion that that is it best not to consider yangbanxi a separate art form but rather as the continuation of traditional Beijing opera. With its relatively complete theory as well as its new musical and performing system, yangbanxi marked a milestone in the development of Beijing opera and completed the long process of the transition from traditional to modern form.

## Chapter Overview

The remainder of this dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter Three surveys the history of opera in China from antiquity to the modern era. For two millennia, musical drama has been an integral part of Chinese culture, and over the centuries various regional styles have developed. Beijing opera arose in the capital toward the end of the eighteenth century as an amalgam of northern and southern regional styles. Partly due to imperial patronage and partly due to popular appeal, Beijing opera rose to the status of national opera in the nineteenth century. We will see that many of the conventions of Beijing opera were adopted from other regional forms, and in part the richness of this art form can be accounted for by the fact that it drew from so many traditions. As China urbanized in the twentieth century, a number of attempts were made to reform Beijing opera in order to make it more relevant and accessible to China's rising middle class, but with little lasting effect.

Chapter Four examines the development of revolutionary Beijing opera during the twentieth century. Mao Zedong clearly understood the role of the arts, including opera, in mobilizing the largely illiterate masses to the revolutionary cause. At the Communist base in Yan'an, a new movement in revolutionary Beijing opera developed. These revolutionary operas hewed close to the traditional Beijing opera model in terms of music and performance techniques, but replaced the generals, scholars, and beauties of the old social order with the peasants, workers, and soldiers that were the heroes of the new socialist utopia. After Liberation in 1949, the Communist government instituted Beijing opera reform at a national level, but there was little consensus about how to proceed. The term *yangbanxi*, often translated as "model opera," was used specifically to refer to the

operas, ballets, and symphonic works developed under the aegis of Mao's wife Jiang Qing in the years leading up to the Cultural Revolution. During the Cultural Revolution, yangbanxi became the sole model for the development of new revolutionary art works.

Chapter Five explores the life and career of Yu Huiyong, chief composer of the yangbanxi. Yu grew up in rural Shandong province and joined the Communist army in his youth. After Liberation, he attended the Shanghai Conservatory, where he was later retained as professor of music. During his tenure at the conservatory, Yu conducted invaluable musicological research on Chinese folk music. He also developed a theory for Beijing opera reform that he explained in a number of books and articles. These caught the attention of Jiang Qing, who saw in Yu's theory a well articulated plan for revolutionary opera reform in line with her own vision for yangbanxi. I also briefly consider how Yu implemented his theory in the composition of yangbanxi arias. During the Cultural Revolution, Yu rose to the position of minister of culture due to the political protection provided him by Jiang Qing and Chairman Mao. In this capacity, he was able to create a safe haven for the artists involved in yangbanxi production from the political storm ravaging the rest of the country. He was also able to turn national resources to one of his most beloved causes, the preservation of China's folk music heritage.

Chapter Six assays the application of Yu's theory to the composition of vocal music for yangbanxi. I begin with a perusal of the essential elements of traditional Beijing opera arias as illustrated in several examples. I then consider Yu's evolving compositional style. By juxtaposing key yangbanxi arias with traditional examples, I show that Yu very skillfully maintained the essence of the Beijing opera aria while



expanding its range of musical expression. I also demonstrate that Yu was not afraid to break the rules, but when he did so it was always to achieve a purposeful effect.

Chapter Seven considers the instrumental music that Yu composed for yangbanxi. By the mid-twentieth century, there were two separate traditions of music composition in China. Of course, the older tradition was that based on Chinese folk and courtly music going back centuries. Yet there had also been a century-long tradition of Western music performance and composition by the time that Yu set to work on yangbanxi production. What Yu created was a masterful blend of Western and Chinese conventions in instrumental music composition, much as Beijing opera had been an amalgam of northern and southern styles two centuries prior.

Chapter Eight comprises a case study of the opera *Azalea Mountain*, which was Yu's last major work and is generally considered to be the most complete of all the yangbanxi. I show how Yu took a Wagnerian approach to this opera, involving himself in every aspect of the production, including not just the composition of the music but also the construction of the libretto, the design of the stage art, the choreography of the martial arts scenes, the selection of the cast, and the training of the performers. I also show how Yu, like Wagner, made extensive use of motifs and themes to unify the opera and to convey a richness of emotionality never before experienced on the Beijing opera stage.

While this study is not about the Cultural Revolution, yangbanxi nevertheless is connected with the Cultural Revolution because it was the cultural centerpiece of the period. This study also makes no attempt to present a complete history of Beijing opera. Rather, it is the first survey of Beijing opera's contemporary history across a wide range

of methodological perspectives. My aim is to offer a fresh approach to China's national and international identity through the content and form of yangbanxi.

In sum, this dissertation considers a number of questions concerning the relationship between politics and the arts. First, we need to consider whether politics can serve to enhance the arts, and if so, we need to examine the political conditions that can allow the arts to flourish as well as those that hinder artistic creativity. Second, we need to examine the movement to modernize Beijing opera in the twentieth century as well as the sociocultural factors that drove it toward the adoption of Western techniques; within this context, we need to consider whether it is more appropriate to view yangbanxi as part of the natural evolution of Beijing opera, or whether it is better to view yangbanxi as an entirely new art form. Third, we need to reconcile this period of rapid operatic development with the politically charged environment of the Cultural Revolution. Since *yangbanxi* emerged from Chinese society, politics, and history more directly than any other form of musical expression, these questions are central to any understanding of the Cultural Revolution and China's own national identity.

## **CHAPTER THREE: OPERA IN CHINA FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE MODERN ERA**

### **A Brief History of China and its Music**

China was one of the great civilizations of the ancient world, contemporaneous with Egypt, Greece, and Rome. And yet, unlike its Western counterparts, Chinese civilization has remained intact from its roots five thousand years ago all the way to the present day. Residents of Cairo need travel but a short distance out of the city to visit the pyramids of the pharaohs, but they cannot read the literature of the ancient civilization that built them. However, every schoolchild in China learns to recite from memory the classical poems of their own culture going back two or three millennia. Thus, to understand China, one must not only have a grasp of the size of its population and the extent of its territory, one must also comprehend the depth of the timeframe in which the Chinese view themselves—five millennia.

This is not to say that China has always been a political unity for the last fifty centuries. Indeed, even during the life of China's most famous son, Confucius (551-479 BC), the region was divided into a number of constantly warring states. Yet even in those days there was the sense of a unified Chinese culture. This was not based on a common spoken language, since the dialects of Chinese were then, as now, as different from each other as are the Romance languages today. Despite the mutual unintelligibility of these

various regional dialects, though, there was a linguistic glue that has held the civilization together for millennia, and that is a common logographic script that could be read by any literate person--in his or her native dialect. Even today, a person from Beijing may not be able to *speak* to a person from Hong Kong, but the two *can* communicate in writing.

China is not so much a nation-state as it is a cultural entity, encompassing multiple groups speaking dozens of dialects, extending across vast expanses of territory and vast expanses of time. As such, it is impossible to understand China or its culture today without understanding its deep history. Historically, all the Chinese emperors placed a great emphasis on music. From early on special institutions and academies were established to collect and edit folk songs, to train musicians and maintain high profile music activities, and to produce new musical works. Particularly, intellectuals have been instrumental in creating new works, writing music treaties, and spreading the formal music for ritual and ceremonial purpose, while at the same time, performing musicians were seen as belonging to the lowest class.

Although humans had been living in the Yellow River since prehistoric times, by 3000 B.C. there were clear signs of a developing Chinese culture in that region that was spreading south toward the Yangzi River valley area as well. Archaeological research has found remnants of walled cities, rice farming, pottery manufacture, silk production, and even samples of writing containing known precursors to modern Chinese script.<sup>49</sup> In

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<sup>49</sup> Archeological evidence for settlement along the Yangzi River also goes at least as far back. The Hemudu Culture, a Neolithic site, was discovered in 1973 along the Yangzi in Zhejiang province. Settled from 7000 to 6500 BC (in four phases) and covering an area of 40,000 square meters, Hemudu is one of the earliest cultures to cultivate rice and domesticate animals such as pig and dog. There was also evidence of practice of fishing and hunting, indicated by the remains of bone harpoons, bows and arrowheads, and fishing boats. Along with the cultural products such as jade ornaments and carved ivory artifacts, there were music instruments, such as bone whistles

1999, at Jiahu, a Neolithic Yellow River settlement, Chinese and American Archeologists discovered several eight-hole heptatonic flutes made from bird wing bones. Though more than 7,000 years old, they can still be played.<sup>50</sup>

By the time of Confucius, twenty-five centuries later, Chinese culture had encompassed the Yangzi River valley as well, but those regions were not politically unified. Nevertheless, we do see, from the writings of that time period, a highly developed culture with undeniable Chinese characteristics, including references to music and musical theater. According to one of the earliest Chinese encyclopedias (*Lüshi Chunqiu*, literally *Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals*, compiled around 239 B.C.), the early Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 B.C.) was a period that was considered the foundation of music development and musical ideas, and the imperial court set up a formal musical institution to keep up with the well-organized ritual system.<sup>51</sup> Specifically, six grand works (combining song, dance, and instrumental music) that were each inherited from the six earlier dynasties, and each in praise of the emperor, were regarded as classical music (*yue jing*) and performed for the highest level of nation's ritual ceremonies. Confucius

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that can still play music, wooden drums, and *Xun*, an ancient egg-shaped wind instrument made of clay, which is still used in China today. See Allan, Sarah (ed), *The Formation of Chinese Civilization: An Archaeological Perspective* (Yale University Press: 2002).

<sup>50</sup> Cao Meiyun, *Chinese Music History and Masterpiece Appreciation* (Zhejiang University Press: 2001), p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> The bells of Marquis Yi of Zeng, unearthed in 1978, can play harmony and half tones, demonstrating that the music of the Zhou Dynasty had reached a high level of sophistication. The tradition of government officials collecting folk songs probably started in the Zhou Dynasty. The practice of "royal officials collecting songs" is recorded in the *Book of Han*, a classical Chinese history finished in 111 A.D. The *Book of Songs* (*Shijing*), the earliest existing collection of Chinese poems, includes 305 poems divided into three categories, ballads (*feng*), odes (*ya*), and sacrificial songs (*song*). Most of the ballads in the *feng* category are folk songs collected from fifteen regions along the Yellow River. Since these were short and simple, many of them are still used in schools today as teaching materials for children. It was also believed that music theory was developed and treaties regarding pentatonic scale and the relationship between the pitches were written and codified during the Zhou dynasty.

considered the Zhou Dynasty to have had the best court system and ceremonial music ritual, and praised Shao music (one of the six grand works that had been adopted during the reign of Emperor Shun) as perfectly beautiful and good. He also described his standard of good music as “expressing joy but not debauchery, sorrow but not morbidity.”<sup>52</sup>

China was finally united in 221 B.C. by Qin Shihuang, beginning two millennia of imperial rule. Although he was responsible for the construction of two of China’s most famous landmarks—the Great Wall and the Terra Cotta Army near Xi’an—his reign lasted only a dozen years. The quick fall of the Qin Dynasty was attributed to his atrocities of “burning books and burying of scholars” (*fen shu keng ru*).<sup>53</sup> It was believed that during this event, the six grand works of music and dance from the earlier dynasties were all lost. The next four centuries, known as the Han dynasty (202 B.C.-220 A.D.), were relatively stable and prosperous; this period was roughly contemporaneous with the highpoint of the Roman Empire, and China engaged in trade with the West along the Silk Road. The Han dynasty established a large music institution (*yue fu*) that employed more than 1,000 musicians to collect folk songs, edit scores, compose music, and train performers.<sup>54</sup> After the fall of the Han Dynasty, China entered a period of political

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<sup>52</sup> Chapter three, *Analects of Confucius*. See <http://download.chinese-wiki.com/Learning-Confucius.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> Out of fear that the intellectuals would undermine his legitimacy, Qin Shihuang ordered the burning of many important classic books and had 460 scholars buried alive for owning the forbidden books, all in an effort to suppress dissenting intellectual discourse. The intellectuals buried alive were mostly Confucius scholars. For more about this event, see Frances Wood, *China's First Emperor and His Terracotta Warriors* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), p 33.

<sup>54</sup> For more detail, see Xia Ye, *Brief History of Chinese Ancient Music* (Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue chubanshe, 2004), p. 38-46.

instability, including the famous Three Kingdoms period (220-280 A.D.), which has been a rich source of stories and characters for Chinese literature and opera.

The Northern Wei Dynasty (385-557) was known as an era of political turbulence and social instability. During this dynasty, all members of the entertainment professions—which included not only musicians and performers but also sex workers—were relegated to a special “entertainers” caste (*yueren*), and they were forbidden to pursue other professions or to marry outside of their caste.<sup>55</sup> Thus, for the next millennium and a half, Chinese rulers maintained this system by keeping musicians at the imperial courts for ritual and entertainment purposes and exercised control over these who served in private and public, while the profession of being a musician was generally regarded as a “mean” occupation and musicians were trapped in roles that perpetuated their inferiority.<sup>56</sup> Musicians and their whole household were treated as outcasts, being registered and maintained in a servile or semi-servile position for generations.<sup>57</sup> Although these social restrictions on entertainers were removed by the Yongzhen emperor of the Qing dynasty in 1723, musicians and performers were still informally discriminated against until well into the twentieth century.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> This caste system was fully implemented in the fourth century A.D. and continued until the mid-eighteenth century.

<sup>56</sup> This may explain why and how the Chinese musical tradition was continued and sustained over thousands of years. It was carried out and spread out by live people (live-human beings) through generations of *yueren* (entertainers) under a severe *yueji* (musical residence) system.

<sup>57</sup> Theoretically, any male adult in China, regardless of his wealth or social status, could become a high-ranking government official by passing the imperial examination. The male musicians serving the imperial court were called “official musicians” (*guan shu yue ren*); females, usually called *yueji* (music prostitutes) performed a range of different functions at the imperial court and also in places of entertainment open to officials, including providing sexual services. Musicians could also been owned by other government officials, with the number depended on the official’s rank, and ranging from a handful to more than thirty.

<sup>58</sup> Although the Qing granted entertainers equal status with other citizens, they set up a new restriction on entertainers, namely that females were now prohibited from the stage. This had a

The Tang dynasty (618-907 A.D.) ushered in another period of prosperity and flourishing culture in literature, calligraphy, poetry, and music. Many of China's most famous institutions were developed during this time. The thousand-mile-long Grand Canal, linking the Yellow and Yangzi River basins, facilitated trade between the north and the south, in effect creating a national market for goods. The imperial examination, a system played a key role in the emergence of the scholar-officials, who came to dominate society, provided a gateway for the nation's greatest talents to enter into the highest levels of government irrespective of station of birth, were instituted during this time, a practice that continued until the twentieth century. Buddhism also became the predominant religion during this time period. China of the Tang dynasty was so technologically advanced that it had a great influence on the cultures of surrounding countries, especially Korea and Japan, which sought to emulate the Tang model.

Many scholars believe that Chinese classical music reached its zenith during the reigns of three of its early rulers who had an interest in developing court music. Emperor Taizong (598-649) was known to have sponsored the development of a form of courtly music and dance known as *datang yayue*.<sup>59</sup> Empress regnant Wu Zetian (690-705), the only woman in Chinese history to assume the throne, stimulated the development of Tang music, raised the social status of musicians, and encouraged scholarly involvement in music creation and the writing of music theory.<sup>60</sup> Emperor Xuanzong (712-755) not only showed great interest in the performing arts by establishing special training schools for actors and actress, known as the Pear Garden, but also took part in instructing them

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great impact on the future development of Beijing opera. See Anders Hansson, *Chinese Outcasts: Discrimination and Emancipation in Late Imperial China* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishing, 1996).

<sup>59</sup> The emperor composed music, designed the dance choreography, and edited the lyrics of the songs. For more detail, see Li Xilin, "The Contributions of the Three Emperors toward the flourishing of Tang music and their Limitation," *Symphony* (Xi'an Conservatory of Music Press, June 2003).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. Wu was involved in writing music treatises and was also excelled at writing poems, developing a new poetic style that was closely associated with music.



himself.<sup>61</sup> Emperors of the Tang dynasty inherited the *yuehu* (entertainer caste) system from earlier dynasties and strengthened it especially for musicians, who had to be registered as a family unit. All members of a musician's family were only allowed to marry people of their own class and to be exclusively engaged in entertainment professions such as singing and dancing. During this period, three Pear Gardens (*li yuan*) and five music academies (*jiao fang*) were established to train the musicians.<sup>62</sup> Through local and national competition, the talented young musicians (*yueren*) were brought to the capital to receive rigorous music training for four to six months each year during a span of fifteen years.<sup>63</sup> Also through competition, the best musicians would be chosen to work at the imperial court.<sup>64</sup> It was during this period that both folk and court music flourished and were written down, many of the pieces making their way into the *qupai* (music

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<sup>61</sup> The expression "Pear Garden" is still used in China to this day to refer to operatic social circles, and many stories from the reign of Xuanzong have been incorporated into the Chinese opera repertoire. Perhaps most famous of these is the traditional Beijing opera *The Intoxicated Concubine*, most famously performed by the twentieth-century female impersonator Mei Lanfang.

<sup>62</sup> Cao Meiyun, *Chinese Music History and Master Piece Appreciation* (Zhejiang University Press: 2001), p. 17.

<sup>63</sup> For more detail, see Xiang Yang's "Shanxi yuehu yanjiu" [Shanxi Yuehu Study], in which he explained the training system of the Tang Dynasty, which were called *lunzhi lunxun* (Rotation of Training and Duty).

<sup>64</sup> According to Kishibe Shigeo, a Japanese scholar who has written the most comprehensive study of the Tang musicians and the government agencies that provided entertainment, there were two kinds of government musicians with mean status: ordinary musicians and the more high-ranking "musicians of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices." The latter performed the traditional ritual music for state sacrificial ceremonies. They differed from the ordinary musicians in being allowed to marry outside their own rank and in being registered as residents of their home district rather than belonging to a government agency. For more detail concerning differences in rank and status, see Volume 2 of his work, which has a useful English summary. Kishibe Shigeo, *Todai ongaku no rekishiteki kenkyu* [Historical Research on Tang Dynasty Music] (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1960-61) Vol. 1, p. 167-216.

anthologies) of later dynasties and serving as a source of theater music up to the twentieth century.<sup>65</sup>

Four major dynasties followed the Tang, two of them established by foreign invaders. During the Song dynasty (960-1234 A.D.), imperial China reached its zenith in terms of science and technology, but despite this there were periods of political disunity.<sup>66</sup> Kublai Khan established the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368 A.D.), and it was during this time that Marco Polo made his famous visit to China. The Ming dynasty (1368-1644 A.D.), with its return to Chinese rule, was a prosperous period that saw the growth of cities and manufacturing; the government also actively engaged in world exploration, sending ships as far as the east coast of Africa. One of the signs of peace and prosperity was reflected in literature and music. One example of this was the creation of the *Yongle Encyclopedia*, the world's largest known general encyclopedia at the time; commissioned by emperor Yongle in 1403 and employing more than 2,000 scholars, this undertaking represented an attempt to record the entirety of Chinese knowledge, including music. The greatest achievements in performing arts and music were the rise of Kun opera and discovery of equal temperament by prince Zhu Zaiyu, who continued the Tang tradition of writing music treaties and was the first person in the world to twelve-step equal temperament through mathematical calculation.<sup>67</sup> China's last imperial

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<sup>65</sup> *Qupai* music will be discussed in detail later. The music achievements of Tang dynasty were recorded in the paintings of the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, China. Many music scores from the Tang dynasty were preserved in Japan.

<sup>66</sup> The rapid economic development of the Song dynasty was so dramatic that some scholars locate the start of "modern" China in that period. Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, *China in the 21st Century—What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 23.

<sup>67</sup> His system of equal temperament appeared in his book *A New Account of the Science of the Pitch-Pipes* (1584). Robert Temple, *The Genius of China: 3,000 Years of Science, Discovery, and Invention* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), p. 209. Also see Fritz A. Kuttner. "Prince Chu

dynasty, the Qing (1644-1911 A.D.) was established by Manchurian invaders, who nevertheless rapidly assimilated themselves to Chinese culture. It was also during this time that Beijing opera, under the sponsorship of the imperial court, rose to the status of national opera, while classical Kun opera receded to relative obscurity.

The Qing proved ineffective at dealing with the onslaught of the Western colonial powers of the nineteenth century, as China's territorial integrity and political sovereignty were repeatedly violated. When the Qing fell, the Republic of China (1911-1949) was established. A republic in name only, China was in fact divided among Chinese warlords and Western (and later, Japanese) colonial powers. The Guomindang (Nationalist Party), the nominal government, was corrupt and ineffective, making the prospect of a China liberated and united by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) an attractive option for many people.

The establishment of the People's Republic of China (1949-present) had massive popular support, and during the first few years after Liberation, the CCP instituted a number of social reforms that brought Chinese society on par with those of the West. Yet, within a few years of coming to power, the CCP was racked with internal power struggles, culminating in the decade-long Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), which only officially ended with the death of Mao Zedong. Since that time, however, the CCP has established an orderly succession of power and remains firmly in control of the country, which has entered into a new cycle of prosperity.

## A Brief History of Chinese Opera

Opera has been and remains a powerful force in Chinese social life. However, the term opera conjures up in the mind of a native English speaker something very different from the Chinese concept. In China, opera (*xiqu*) has traditionally been conceptualized as a performance spectacle “using song and dance to tell a story.”<sup>68</sup> As we have already seen, the roots of Chinese opera extend at least as far back as the “six grand works” (all combining song, dance, and instrumental music) of the Zhou dynasty (1046-256 B.C.) and literary references can be found from as far back as around the time of Confucius, twenty-some centuries ago.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the origin of Chinese opera goes back about as far as the time of the great dramatists of ancient Greece. Most scholars believe that stage representation had its origins in ancient religious ritual (probably shamanistic religious ceremonies) where costumed and masked performers acted out the desired activities of the impersonated deities.<sup>70</sup> In all probability, Chinese theater derived from oral tradition long before being recorded by historians and literati. The word *xiqu* (opera) first appears in literature of the Song Dynasty. Alongside the development of the commodity economy

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<sup>68</sup> Wang Guowei, *Wang Guowei Collection of Theater Writing* (Beijing: China Theater Publication, 1984), p. 163. The definition captures the essence of most Chinese theater, which is commonly known as singing (*chang*), recitation (*nian*), acting (*zuo*), and martial arts (*da*). Thus, Wang Guowei concisely defined Chinese theater as a combination of song (singing and reciting), dance (acrobatics and martial arts), and performance (gesture and acting).

<sup>69</sup> In *The Analects of Confucius*, chapter 7 verse 13, it is recorded: “While in the State of Qi, Confucius heard Shao music at a banquet, and he became so engrossed in the music that he forgot what he was eating. Confucius said, ‘I never imagined that music could attain such a height.’” Shao music was a combination of song, music, and dance, adopted during the reign of Emperor Shun.

<sup>70</sup> Chinese theater scholar Zhuang Yongping divided Chinese theater into five stages: emergence (Qin Dynasty B.C. 221-206 to Tang Dynasty 907), formality (Song Dynasty 960-1279), mature (Yuan Dynasty), zenith (Ming Dynasty), Popular (Qing Dynasty). Zhuang Yongping, *Theater History* (Shanghai Music Publication, 1990).

and urban population, the Chinese theater reached its first zenith in southern opera (*nanxi*). Performances took place indoors at venues sponsored by the local government to entertain the officials. Among many books about the history of Chinese theater, Colin Mackerras's writing seems to encapsulate the true picture:

[I]t is from the nan-hsi [*nan xi*, southern theater] of the Sung [Song Dynasty 960-1279] that the development of the regional opera can most readily be traced. The nan-hsi [*nan xi*] was the most completely formed of the pre-Yuan types of theater and contained elements which remained basically unchanged in the regional theater, and were taken over by China's most widely loved operatic form, the Peking Opera [Beijing opera].<sup>71</sup>

In the north, the theater performances were called *zaju* (variety plays), and these reached their zenith during the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368).<sup>72</sup> During this time, the Mongolian emperors suspended the imperial examinations, in effect barring Han intellectuals from entering the administration. Thus, many literati turned their talents to the arts instead. Notably, the works of four playwrights from that period are still regarded as classics today. One of these playwrights, Guan Hanqing (1210-1280), wrote over sixty *zaju* libretti and is often referred to as the Shakespeare of China. *Zaju* stories typically reflected the hardship of common people's lives and the oppressiveness of society in general. In sum, through the composition and performance of *zaju*, the upper-class intellectuals and the lower-class performers, who traditionally held each other in disdain, joined forces in subtle protest against the foreign invaders.

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<sup>71</sup> Colin P. Mackerras, *The Rise of the Peking Opera: 1770-1870, Social Aspects of the Theatre in Manchu China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> *Zaju* was typically performed by one principle singer supported by a number of other actors. It has a strict structure of four acts and a wedge, each comprising a suite of arias in the same musical mode. It sharply declined in popularity with the beginning of the Ming dynasty; it survives only as a genre of literature.

After the Mongol conquest of the south, the once popular southern opera (*nanxi*) lost popularity to the northern *zaju*, but it was revived after the fall of the Yuan Dynasty. At the time *zaju* was declining, the *nanxi* spread out in the countryside, merging with various folk musics and local dialects, and rose to prominence in many localities, with new local names such as Haiyuan, yiyang, and so on. Among them, was another regional folk opera form known as *kunqiang*. This new style of opera had its origins in the southern town of Kunshan, halfway between the ancient city of Suzhou, famous for its scholars and poets, and the modern city of Shanghai, which at that time was still little more than a market town. During the course of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), *kunqiang* rose from its humble origins to become an esoteric art form of the scholarly elite that we now know as Kun opera.

Kun opera can legitimately be called China's first national opera, and its rise to national prominence is quite understandable given the political, social and economic conditions of the Ming dynasty. With a return to Han rule in China, the imperial examinations were re-established, and Han literati once again took their place in the extensive national bureaucracy. This led to a renaissance of Chinese culture as the new Han government encouraged and supported the resurgence of traditional artistic activities.

In imperial China, music had long been divided into *ya yue* (formal music) and *su yue* (vulgar music).<sup>73</sup> Whereas courtly music was expressly composed for court rituals and ceremonies, folk music arose among, and was mainly consumed by, the illiterate masses. However, both kinds of music were performed in court. It had long been tradition

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<sup>73</sup> *Ya* means elegant, proper, pure, or proper; *su* means vulgar, crude, or improper; *yue* means music or entertainment.

in imperial China for the court to send scholars out into the provinces to collect folk music in order to read the pulse of the nation, and these melodies were also performed for the emperor. Furthermore, court musicians could use these folk melodies as inspiration for new courtly compositions. (On the other hand, folk music that displeased the court was often aggressively suppressed.) The Ming court resumed this practice, and the Han administrators, who were anxious to revive Han culture, enthusiastically supported the production of both courtly music and regional folk forms.

It had long been practice, in imperial China, for high-ranking government officials to be assigned personal musical ensembles to perform during social and ceremonial functions in their households. Yet during the Ming dynasty we see these administrators becoming actively involved in the collection of folk music and the composition of new works. Although these Han scholar-officials were generally not musical composers (this was left up to the musicians in their employ), they frequently set their hand to the composition of new opera libretti. The most famous of these was Tang Xianzu (1550-1617), a contemporary of Shakespeare, whose works are still performed in China today.

The Ming dynasty was a time of great prosperity for China, due in large part to its exports of tea and porcelain to Europe, greatly enriching the coffers of the state and the merchant class. And so Kun opera became a favorite pastime of wealthy commoners as well as of the court. It was this high-level patronage that drove the refinement of Kun opera. Although we have seen the literati engaged in the production of *zaju* during the Yuan dynasty, their purpose for getting involved in this “vulgar” art form was to unite with the Han masses in protest against foreign rule, and these operas were written at a

level the masses could relate to. But in the case of Kun opera, the literati had a different agenda. Instead of “stooping down” to the level of the masses, they were intent on raising this regional folk opera into a refined art form that appealed to the educated elite. Despite the fact that it was performed in the southern Wu dialect, Kun opera found more and more admirers among the gentry, officials, and scholars in the imperial capital of Beijing, but also in the regional economic and political power centers, and it is for this reason that we can say Kun opera was China’s first national opera.

The Ming dynasty had brought about a renaissance of Han culture, but as it entered its third century, the cycle of dynastic decay could be seen once more. By 1644, the Ming dynasty had collapsed, and the capital city of Beijing had already been looted by a peasant revolt. Seizing the opportunity, the Manchurians to the north rode through the open gates of the Great Wall and into the capital, establishing themselves as the new rulers of China. Naturally, the Han Chinese majority resented the occupation of their country by a former vassal state, but to their credit the Manchurians, unlike the Mongol rulers of the Yuan dynasty, rapidly assimilated to Chinese culture. They inherited many important institutions and political systems from the Ming dynasty, and they even reinstated the tradition of selecting civilian officials through civil service examinations, a policy which won them much popular support by ostensibly offering the Han people equal opportunities in the process of government, while true control of the inner court still lay in the hands of the Manchu. When the time became ripe, these concessions would give way to their own cultural preferences. Clearly, the early Qing emperors understood that the only way to hold on to power in China was to win the hearts of the vast Han majority, which represented 92% of the population, and that could only be done by



wholeheartedly embracing Han culture, including Kun opera and the various music traditions.

Indeed, it is generally believed that the Manchu rulers made great efforts to adapt themselves to the Han Chinese culture and ritual systems, in which music retained its importance in court life and theater art held a pre-eminent place in the performance of ceremonial ritual. Emperors Kangxi (1654-1722) and Qianlong (reigned 1736-1795) were especially known for their appreciation of the arts and sciences as well for their open stance toward Western culture. As a result, the period extending from the reign of Kangxi to the reign of Qianlong is considered to be one of the golden ages of Chinese culture, commonly known as “Kang-Qian Prosperous Age” (*kangqian shengshi*).<sup>74</sup> During this golden age, which lasted more than a century, the court ordered the compilation of a grand music encyclopedia and issued many policies to promote theater performance and diversity.<sup>75</sup>

Kangxi was especially known for promoting Kun opera, and he embarked on six southern tours between 1684 and 1707. During his first visit in Suzhou, he watched Kun opera every day, attending twenty performances in total. As Kun opera was considered

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<sup>74</sup> The *Kangqian* period involved three emperors. Between the reigns of Kangxi and Qianlong was that of Yongzhen (1678-1735). Yongzhen was notable for his abolition of the law requiring the registration of families involved in the entertainment business, thus relieving some of the social restrictions against them.

<sup>75</sup> This was the grand music encyclopedia known as the *Jiu gong dacheng nanbei cigong pu* (Grand Anthology of Southern and Northern Music Tunes in Nine Tonalities). Commissioned by the emperor Kangxi, it was not completed until 1746, during the reign of Emperor Qianlong. The Anthology is the greatest collection of music scores ever published in Chinese history, consisting of 82 volumes and including almost 5,000 tunes; it was notated in traditional Chinese notation called *gongchipu*. It not only included many Kun opera plays but also collections of music from earlier dynasties. It was not just the music of one generation but rather the culmination of music from many time periods. In 1975, Yu Huiyong used this book as the basis to create music for traditional poems. Kangxi even ordered the compilation of other books, including a Chinese dictionary known as the Kangxi Dictionary, which is still used today in China.

the highest art form by the elite Han literati, Kangxi's enthusiasm was seen as a positive gesture of respect for Han Chinese culture, and his visits sent out a strong message of his ongoing efforts to adapt Han Chinese culture and ritual systems, and music and theater held a pre-eminent place in his court. His court established a special bureau and royal theater academies combining training and performance, one of them called the Southern House (*nanfu*), which brought performers and instructors from the culturally sophisticated southern areas of China to teach and direct Kun opera, as it was regarded to have transcended any regional connotation despite its use of southern dialect.<sup>76</sup> The two most famous Kun operas, Hong Sheng's *The Eternal Palace* (1688) and Kong Shangren's *The Peach Blossom Fan* (1699), were created during this time. These two works are generally seen as the pinnacle of Kun opera.<sup>77</sup> However, as the art form became more refined, gradually moving away from its folk base and toward an elite form of court entertainment, the complexity and delicacy of its texts was pursued to the point of making Kun opera too difficult for both Manchu rulers and ordinary people to understand, and thus the eventual decline of Kun opera was inevitable.

Because of their Manchu heritage, the Qing emperors held a pluralistic attitude toward Chinese theater. To secure their long-term hold on power in China, the Manchu rulers had to not only curry favor with the Han elite, they also had to win the hearts of the

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<sup>76</sup> Two academies were called *nanfu* and *jingshan*, both established during Kangxi's reign. *Nanfu* had more than 1,500 performers who came from the South. They received monthly allowances in addition to daily supplies such as housing, clothes, shoes, hats and so on. The famous performers were allowed to bring their families to live with them in Beijing and had the opportunity to be hired as government officials. For more details, see Yao Shuyi, *Cheng Changgeng, Tan Xingpei, and Mei Lanfang*, p. 38-41.

<sup>77</sup> Many Chinese scholars believe that the Ming dynasty opera *The Peony Pavilion* (by Tang Xianzu) represented the first peak of Kun opera, and that these two works of the Qing dynasty represented the second peak of Kun opera. See Xia Ye, *Brief History of Chinese Ancient Music* (Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue chubanshe, 2004), p. 191.

Han masses. Thus, while supporting *ya* music and the elite Kun opera, the Qing emperors also showed interest in other regional folk operas, not only watching various plays during their sojourns in the south, but also allowing some folk operas to be performed in the palace.<sup>78</sup> What was less known is that Kangxi was also open to Western culture. In fact, the Jesuit priest Ferdinand Verbiest educated the young Kangxi Emperor in Western mathematics, music, and calendar techniques. Kangxi was interested in Western music and had a close relationship with Teodorico Pedrini, who remained in Beijing for 35 years (1711-1746) as a priest and composer.<sup>79</sup> Knowing the emperor's wide interests and tastes, the court established a department called the division of variety (*hua bu*), which dealt solely with the performance of regional operas, while another department, the division of elegance (*ya bu*), maintained the prominence of Kun opera.<sup>80</sup>

A notable example of this Qing patronage of the folk arts was the celebration of the Qianlong emperor's eightieth birthday in 1790, when the Sanqing theater troupe from southern Anhui province traveled to Beijing to perform for the court. The leading performer of this troupe was Gao Langting, a female impersonator (*dan*). The troupe's performances were well received both inside the court and in the capital at large; because

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<sup>78</sup> One type of folk opera, *yiyang qiang*, was regularly performed in the court and later called *jingdiao* (Beijing tunes). The origin of *geyang* opera was a southern opera in the Jiangxi style. Yao Shuyi, p. 9.

<sup>79</sup> Kangxi welcomed missionaries into the highest levels of state bureaucracy and allowed the first Catholic church, called Propaganda Fide, to be built in Beijing. Kangxi also allowed several Italian operas to be performed in the palace. For more detail about Kangxi, see Peter C. Allsop and Joyce Lindorff, "Teodorico Pedrini: The Music and Letters of an 18th-century Missionary in China."

<sup>80</sup> Opera from the variety division was also called *luan dan* (disorganized or unclassified performance). This phenomenon was recorded in the history as "competition between the elegant and the vulgar" (*hua ya zhi zheng*). At first, Kun opera was classified as formal theater to be performed for grand occasions. During less formal activities and entertainments, regional operas were sanctioned. From the mid-19th century, Beijing opera became the pre-eminent entertainment at the palace.

of this, the troupe decided not to return to Anhui but rather to remain in the capital. As the renown of this Hui opera company spread, five other Hui troupes made their way into the capital as well. Eventually these six Hui companies merged into four, each with its distinctive style. The original “Three Celebrations” (*sanqing*) troupe was best known for its repertoire of stories, while the “Four Happiness” (*sixi*) company was considered to have the most appealing arias. The specialty of the “Harmonious Spring” (*hechun*) company was its martial arts, and the “Spring Stage” (*chuntai*) troupe sported the youngest, most talented performers. These four companies also recruited performers from various operatic troupes, including Kun opera and *qinqiang*, an ancient theatrical form from Northern China that had arrived in Beijing even earlier than the Anhui troupes but was later banned from the capital due to the questionable morality of its content.<sup>81</sup>

Over the next few decades, a synergy developed among these four companies, and a new Beijing style of opera began to emerge.<sup>82</sup> In 1828, a theater troupe from northern Hubei province entered Beijing, and their performances of so-called Han opera received accolades from the denizens of the capital. When the Sixi company recruited the famous Han opera performer Yu Sansheng, a mixing of Hui and Han styles began to take place. Thus, Beijing opera was an amalgam of styles from different parts of the country, yet certain features of its performance technique can be traced back to one or the other of its progenitors. For example, Beijing opera has two different aria types, known as *xipi* and *erhuang*, which derive from the musical styles of Han and Hui opera, respectively. By 1840, Beijing opera had fully integrated the *xipi* and *erhuang* musical styles into a new

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<sup>81</sup> Zhang Yonghe, *Dakai jingju zhimen* [Opening the Door to Beijing Opera] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2009), p. 24-25.

<sup>82</sup> Although it was not until the twentieth century that this art form was referred to as Beijing opera.

form known as *pihuang*. When it came to deciding which dialect to sing in, however, Han opera had more influence in that the northern dialect it employed was much closer to that used in the capital than was the southern Anhui dialect originally used by the Hui opera troupes.

### **A Hero for Troubled Times**

The favorable trade balance China enjoyed with the West during the Ming era continued into the Qing dynasty. The Western demand for Chinese goods seemed insatiable, and yet there were few Western products that the Chinese were willing to buy. From the mid-eighteenth century, the British East India Company had gotten involved the production of opium, which it sold to Chinese smugglers. When the Qing government decided to crack down on the opium trade, it arrested the Chinese smugglers and seized the opium stocks of the British East India Company. In response to this violation of its citizens' property rights, the British Empire declared war on China in 1839, thus starting the First Opium War.

Throughout its long history, China had suffered repeated foreign invasion during times of political instability, but it had never before known a time when it was not more technologically advanced than any other nation it had dealings with. The Kang-Qian Golden Age had passed, and the Qing court, in its smugness, was willfully ignorant of the significant technological advances in Europe that had been brought about by the Industrial Revolution. The war with England ended in humiliating defeat for China. The following Treaty of Nanjing ceded Hong Kong to the British and opened several cities to foreign trade. Still unhappy with their limited access to Chinese markets, the British

initiated the Second Opium War in 1856, and the subsequent Treaty of Tianjin opened even more port cities to foreign trade and legalized the opium trade. Meanwhile, the Qing court was clearly losing its grip on the reins of power. In the south, the Taiping rebels—a heterodox Christian militia whose leader claimed to be the younger brother of Jesus—had control over much of the southern half of the country from 1851 to 1864, and it was only with the help of British troops that the Qing army was finally able to quash the rebellion.

It was during these times of internal strife and foreign encroachment that Beijing opera reached its zenith. Perhaps also it was because of this social instability that the *laosheng* (older male) role type came to dominate the Beijing opera stage. It was as if opera-goers were yearning for a strong heroic figure to provide escape back to the glory days of old, giving them solace in these times of national humiliation. From 1840, the male *laosheng* role-type gradually replaced female *dan* role-type (performed by men) in popularity. People started to favor the male role and distinctive masculine characteristics of male singing and performing. As love stories gave way to plays featuring emperors, ministers, and generals as protagonists, the *dan* roles were further reduced to supporting positions. Therefore, the transformation from Hui opera to Beijing opera was completely signified by its thematic change from love story to imperial narratives and major historical events, supplemented by change of the leading role—from female to male. Far from accidental, the rise of *laosheng* directly reflected the changing times, its social psychology, morals and the shifting aesthetic tastes of the time. Judging from the works performed during that period, its prevailing themes were patriotisms, heroism, and military glory, such as *Borrowing Arrows from the Enemy* (*Cao chuan jie jian*), *The Capture and Release of Cao* (*Zhuo fang cao*), and *Generals of the Yang Family* (*Yang jia*

*jiang*), dominated by heroic male performers.<sup>83</sup> These performances expressed the desire of the people for capable emperors, loyal officials and faithful soldiers to defend the country and deliver justice, vengeance, and change. These themes could hardly be rendered by the soft elegance of Kun opera. Therefore, *laosheng* in Beijing opera became the spokesmen of Chinese heroic image on behalf of the cultural psychology of the nation.

Three artists, collectively known as “The Three Excellences” (*sandingjia*), in particular came to be known as the first generation of *laosheng* performers: Yu Sansheng (1802-1866), Zhang Erkui (1820-1860), and Cheng Changgeng (1811-1880).<sup>84</sup> They established a solid base for the development of the male role-type, which represented the first peak of Beijing opera. These three helped shape Beijing opera into its unique form; in particular, they were instrumental in moving the language of Beijing opera away from the Anhui-variant of Mandarin to the local Beijing-variant. Among these three men, Cheng Changgeng was the most influential in Beijing opera’s future development. In addition to greatly expanding the Beijing opera repertoire, he also trained the second generation of *laosheng* performers, in particular Tan Xingpei (1847-1917), who is often accredited with raising the *laosheng* role-type to its highest artistic level. His singing style was idolized by all sections of Beijing opera and imitated by both professionals and amateurs. Yet as Qi Rushan commented, Tan’s novelty was based on his personal

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<sup>83</sup> These were based on stories from *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, a popular Ming Dynasty novel about war and tactics. It is regarded one of the four greatest classical Chinese novels, and many Beijing opera stories were based on stories from it. The novel created a variety of national iconic images, from the tactful Liu Bei and Zhu Gelian, to the faithful Zhang Bei and Guan Yu, and evil villain Cao Cao. *Generals of the Yang Family* is a folk story about a family that sacrificed almost all its men to the Song Dynasty’s war against invading barbarians.

<sup>84</sup> They represent, respectively, the three genres of Han opera, *Jingqiang* (a folk opera in the Beijing dialect), and Hui opera.

condition and not all of his reforms were effective and certainly his style did not fit all roles.<sup>85</sup>

Tan's success was partly due to his connections with the imperial court. He was one of the favorite actors of the Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908).<sup>86</sup> Cixi established her own palace Beijing opera performance troupe named Putian Tongqi (Celebration under Heaven), formed by 180 court eunuchs. She was not only involved in every aspect of production, she even directed and performed in some of these operas.<sup>87</sup> From the 1880s, Cixi became an active patron of Beijing opera, and it was in large part due to her interventions and influence that Beijing opera eclipsed Kun as the national opera of China.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, Tan must also be given credit for his efforts and innovations.<sup>89</sup> He

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<sup>85</sup> Qi Rushan, *Change of Beijing Opera* (Liaoning Education Publisher: 2008 [reprint of 1927]), p. 20.

<sup>86</sup> Once Tan was late for his performance for Cixi, which is a crime that normally will receive a death penalty. Everyone thought that they were expecting to see Tan die that day. But Cixi did not punish him but still reward him. Yao Shuyi, *Cheng wanqing xiqu de biange* [Changes in Theater during Late Qing] (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2009), p. 104-105.

<sup>87</sup> Yao Shuyi, *Cheng Changgeng, Tanxingpei, and Mei Lanfang—pingdai zhi minshu jingshi xiqu de huihuang* [Cheng Changgeng, Tanxingpei, and Mei Lanfang: Glories of Beijing Opera Masters from Qing to Early Republic] (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2009), p. 104-105.

<sup>88</sup> In 1888, Cixi personally adapted a well-known Kun opera to Beijing opera, writing the libretto herself and asking another Beijing opera performer, Chen Deling, to arrange the arias for it. Detailing the lives of members of the historical Yang military clan, the opera comprised a 105-part series. Performers from both the palace troupe and troupes outside the palace were involved in the project. Yao Shuyi, *Cheng Changgeng, Tanxingpei, and Mei Lanfang—pingdai zhi minshu jingshi xiqu de huihuang* [Cheng Changgeng, Tanxingpei, and Mei Lanfang: Glories of Beijing Opera Masters from Qing to Early Republic] (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2009), p. 258. The Empress Dowager's role in Beijing opera formation is notable not just because of the effect her efforts had at the time but also for the historical repercussions some eight decades later. As we will see, Mao Zedong's wife Jiang Qing played a central role in the reformation of Beijing opera in the years leading up to the Cultural Revolution. Both Cixi and Jiang were intelligent, strong-willed women skilled at behind-the-scenes political machinations, and the parallels between these two women were not lost on Jiang's detractors.

<sup>89</sup> Tan was from a musical family (*yuehu*) engaged in Han opera, but his father later became a member of the *sanqing* troupe (Hui opera). Tan's early training was in a folk opera known as *bangzi* (clapper) opera. He was not considered to have an appropriate voice for the *lao sheng* role type, so he was trained for the vocally less strenuous *wusheng* (military male) role-type. It was impossible for him to get a role in a Beijing opera company in the capital, thus he was compelled



served not only as star performer but also as impresario, and he traveled frequently to give performances in other cities such as Tianjin and Shanghai. He also starred in the first Beijing opera captured on film, *Dingjun Shan* (*Dingjun Mountain*, 1905). In fact, this was the first movie ever produced in China.

In 1911, the Qing dynasty finally collapsed, ending more than two thousand years of imperial rule. With the new Republican Era, the face of China changed—and so did the face of Beijing opera.

### **Significance of the Rise of Beijing Opera**

Viewed from a cultural perspective, the rise of Beijing opera signaled that Chinese theater had entered a new stage, replacing the literati-dominated Han culture with a more complicated multicultural system. The thousand-year-old tradition in which high culture dominated stage and literature was turned upside down, and elegant culture (*yawenhua*) gave way to a new culture premised on the preferences of the general population, thus undermining the social status and privilege of the literati. The first generation of *laosheng* performers provides one example of how the privileged position of the literati was eclipsed by those who rose from the lowest rungs society to celebrity status. These three virtuosos of the Beijing opera world were often referred to collectively as the *sandingjia* (three excellences), a term traditionally reserved for the scholars who attained the three highest scores on the yearly imperial exams. The use of a term that had

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to leave Beijing to join a wandering company in countryside of Hebei province. Tan returned to the capital in 1870 and joined the *sanqing* troupe. He learned techniques from different operatic forms, incorporated them, and formed his distinctive style.

long been solely associated with the ruling literati class in such a context clearly indicates a change of ideology and a shift in the perception of the relative status of the social classes in China.

Even some Han literati who had once looked down upon Beijing opera later changed their attitude from rejection to acceptance. Some even became amateur performers, and this entrance of the literati into what had originally been a folk art form drove the further refinement of Beijing opera into a more mature, balanced, and distinctive art form. In some cases, these literati amateurs even resigned their government posts to pursue their art full-time; one such person was Zhang Erkui (1820-1860). At first, Zhang associated himself with the Hechun Company as an amateur, but in 1845 the Sixi Company took him on as a main actor, and he resigned his official post. Zhang was from northern Hebei province and used the standard Beijing accent in his performances. This use of the Beijing dialect was warmly welcomed by Beijing audiences, and more and more performers adopted this practice, thus leading to the convention of singing Beijing opera in a more standard language (closer to Mandarin) as opposed to the southern Anhui dialect.<sup>90</sup> Unfortunately for Zhang, not all Han literati approved of their fellow intellectuals leaving government posts (the station in life to which all Han literati aspired), and Zhang's political enemies conspired to have him exiled to distant Tongzhou, where he died an early death.<sup>91</sup>

The transformation of Beijing opera exposed a radical underlying socio-political change. To Chinese intellectuals, Kun opera was not simply a theatrical genre but the

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<sup>90</sup> The pronunciation of the traditional Beijing opera was largely based on Beijing and Hubei dialects. The spoken dialogue has two styles, one for officials and another for servants. Cui Wei, *Jingju* [Beijing Opera] (Beijing: zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 2008), p. 22.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

very soul of the culture, representing its highest artistic aspirations. Therefore, the ascendancy of Beijing opera, especially at the expense of Kun opera, was not simply a new development in the art form but rather a cultural event of considerable significance with deep social and political implications. At the time that the Anhui troupes entered the capital, Qing authority was beyond question, government being shared by both Manchu and Han officials. However, this did not disguise the essential disparity of Manchu and Han cultures. Although the Manchu adopted Han Chinese systems of government and cultural traditions such as the use of traditional Han music for its rituals and celebrations, the artistic sensibilities of the Manchu officials accorded more with the common people. Naturally, then, the folk arts had greater appeal than the sophisticated Kun opera created by and for the Han literati. Yet Manchu officials still belonged to the noble or ruling class, and consequently they were more influential both in the palace and in society at large. Many regional theatrical groups were summoned to Beijing to provide entertainment for the court. Imperial favor during the formative years of Beijing opera definitely propelled it into a special position and gave it higher social influence above other folk forms. Beijing opera thus rose to the status of a national theater despite its provincial origins, placing it on par with Kun opera.

There are some important aspects that need to be emphasized. First, while the patronage of the Qing court led to the elevation in Beijing opera's social status from folk tradition to court art, Beijing opera did not belong to the emperor or the court, and there were no literati involved in the creation, at least not at the early stage of Beijing opera's

emergence.<sup>92</sup> Second, unlike Kun opera, which had abandoned its original folk audience to become an elite entertainment written by the literati for intellectuals (while performers were the tools), Beijing opera performers organized themselves into private opera companies with total creative control over their works; furthermore, they performed the same works whether before the court or before the general public. Third, there was not much pressure from the emperor and his Manchu nobles requesting higher literary and aesthetic quality.<sup>93</sup> In view of the connections between the emperors and performers, Qi Rushan quoted a famous Beijing opera performer Chen Delin, who described the interaction with the emperor from his own experience: “during the rehearsal or discussion of the opera, the actors and emperor were often together, talking and laughing... [, and] their behavior was like a family or like father and son.”<sup>94</sup> Later emperors such as Xianfeng, Tongzhi, Guangxu and the empress dowager Cixi, were all Beijing opera fans and were even involved in performance. Such personal interactions with the royalty, revealing that the emperor often shared cultural and aesthetic tastes closer to the common

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<sup>92</sup> In the twentieth century, there were intellectuals involved in Beijing opera’s creation and even performance, such as Qi Rushan and Tian Han, both of whom enter our discussion later.

<sup>93</sup> Empress Dowager Cixi was known to be “picky,” and she often gave suggestions for improvement. But those performers who had had the experience of performing for the court regarded her as an expert who “rewarded good performers generously, watched performances frequently and attentively, and was very encouraging.” Cui Wei, *Jingju* [Beijing Opera] (Beijing: zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 2008), p. 63.

<sup>94</sup> These traits emerge vividly from another story in Qi’s book told by a performer Li: Once he performed a story about the Han dynasty warlord Caocao (155-220), a classical villain in Chinese literature and theater. Li thought he had done a good job and expected to be rewarded. However, emperor Tongzhi got so angry after the performance that he sentenced Li to forty lashes with a bamboo cane, which was a rare punishment used for an actor. Li did not know why he was being punished, but he still had to thank emperor for it. It was then that Li realized that he received such punishment because he acted “too deceitful” in the play, as the emperor replied, “I bet you dare not to play that trick again.” The manager then told the emperor, “Li was acting a role of a evil character, and Li himself is not a deceitful person.” The emperor burst into laughter and admitted that he made a mistake. He asked Li how he wanted to be compensated, Li asked for ten ounces of silver for each lash, which the emperor promptly paid. Qi Rushan, *Change of Beijing Opera* (Liaoning Education Publisher: 2008 [reprint of 1927]), p. 328, p. 301.

people than to literati, provided fertile ground for the art form to flourish. One indication of the depth of personal connections between the court and Beijing opera performers was the abolition, in 1723, of the law of requiring the registration of families involved in the entertainment business. As a result, by the late nineteenth century many top Beijing opera performers were serving as government officials in the court.

In no sense did the patrons of Beijing opera deliberately suppress Kun opera. It was already in decline at that time and it was never successful from the angle of the performance market. Its specific artistic form and aesthetic pursuit limited itself as an esoteric art form appreciated only by the literati, which was but a small segment of the general population. Among the various regional operas, Kun opera was still highly regarded as “Mother of all operas” (*baixi zhi mu*) and respected as an art form of high social and cultural status.<sup>95</sup> Likewise, Beijing opera was nurtured by Kun opera and its performers, some of which later joined Beijing opera troupes. As Beijing opera matured, it increasingly appealed to the intellectual class as well, thus easing the tensions between the high and low culture and reducing their aesthetic differences. Such a process of change in the structure of Chinese cultural traditions was later paralleled by *yangbanxi* in its reconciliation of Chinese and Western culture as well as high and popular taste. At any rate, Beijing opera signified a new multiculturalism. The link of folk elements with a broad popular audience and accessible stylistic language enabled it to both serve aristocratic ideologies and appeal to the masses. In sum, through Beijing Opera, all members of Chinese society, regardless of social class, could find common ground and begin to view themselves as sharing a single national identity.

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<sup>95</sup> Guo Kejian, *xiqu jianshang* [Appreciation of Traditional Chinese Opera] (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2011), p. 143.

## Aesthetic Conventions of Beijing Opera

Beijing opera represented the quintessence of Chinese culture. It was the most influential and representative operatic form in China because it drew freely on pre-existing operatic forms and assimilated a good deal of their advantages into its repertoire, performance techniques, and music. Since it shared many common features with the various regional operas, it was an art form familiar and accessible to a wide swath of Chinese society, drawing aficionados from all regions of China and all walks of life, while at the same time offering its audiences a unique blend of features not found in other operatic styles.

There are three aesthetic principles that set Chinese opera apart from that of the West, and are widely applied in Beijing opera as well. Before we can understand the unique characteristics of Beijing opera, we first need to understand the general characteristics of the Chinese operatic tradition.

The first aesthetic principle of Chinese opera was its high degree of symbolism in terms of its performance technique or method.<sup>96</sup> We can think of this symbolism as a conceptualization of the relationship between the art and reality. The goal of the artist on the Beijing stage was not to emulate reality, at least in its physical form, but rather to attain an accurate representation of the spiritual essence of a situation.<sup>97</sup> These symbolic references were readily understood by Chinese theater audiences. One example of this kind of symbolism was in the stage setting of Beijing opera, which was typically a single

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<sup>96</sup> There were four main performing components and five techniques applied to most Chinese theaters, commonly known as *si gong* (four prerequisites): singing (*chang*), recitation (*nian*), acting (*zuo*), and martial arts (*da*) and *wufa* (five methods): hand, eye, body, hair, step.

<sup>97</sup> The difference between Chinese and Western painting reflects the same way of thinking.

table and two chairs, regardless of the setting being depicted. These pieces could serve their normal function as furniture, yet they could just as easily be used to symbolize geographical features, hiding places, or obstacles to be surmounted. Likewise, walking on the stage could symbolize a journey of a thousand miles, a whip in hand could symbolize riding a horse, and prancing about the stage with torso lifted high and steady could represent flying or floating

The second aesthetic principle of Chinese opera was stylization. Stylization refers to formulaic performance procedures and systems, such as choreography and gestures, which come from real life but are executed on stage in a more exaggerated and formulaic way. For example, the way to open and close a door varies in real life, but it became a fixed sequence of movements on the opera stage. Also, walking on stage was not the same as it was in real life, and characters on stage could be differentiated by gender, age and social status based on the way they walked.<sup>98</sup> Likewise, actors also modified their style of walking to fit the depicted location of action, such as on dry land or aboard a ship. Each of these walking styles was accompanied by percussion that emphasized the rhythm of movement. The purpose was to create a stage language that was aesthetically beautiful and visually understandable. Thus, from gait and the accompanying percussion rhythm, the audience could discern the characters' current inner state as well as his or her general personality.

Stylization can also be conceptualized in terms of ritualized behavior. For example, many Chinese operas were about the great generals and battles of history, and so it was not uncommon for an opera to include a scene in which the general suited up for

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<sup>98</sup> Likewise, the stylization of other gestures was also differentiated by the gender portrayed.

battle. Even in real life, such events were highly ritualized, as the general's aids strapped his armor upon him while he prepared himself mentally for war. On the Beijing opera stage, this event became even more ritualized, being performed only to the accompaniment of percussion and lasting, in some cases, up to forty minutes.

One more example of stylization in the Chinese opera tradition involved an element of costume known as *shuixiu*, literally “water sleeves.” These water sleeves were long strips of cloth that dangled from the actors’ arms. Through precise body movements, various rippling effects could be created with these water sleeves, and the patterns produced conveyed aspects of the character’s emotional state to the audience. Although it is impossible to trace the origins of all aspects of the performance techniques and gestures used in Chinese opera, it is likely that most of them came from the folk and court dance of the ancient time, when song, dance, and music were not separated. There were undoubtedly changes over the periods and it took the direction of refined performance technique and the arts of the stage, making them more complicated and integrated into the totality of the each opera. Beijing opera made wide use of different dance techniques in conjunction with water sleeves to enhance the effect. For example, Cheng Yanqiu, one of the most famous twentieth century Beijing opera performing artists, was known for his extraordinary water sleeves technique, notably in his opera *Huangshan Lei* (Tears of the Deserted Mountain), which included more than forty water-sleeve movements and utilized more than ten new techniques.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> For more about Cheng’s performance technique, see Huang Jun, ed., *jingju xiaocidian* [Beijing Opera Little Dictionary] (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2009) p. 27-28. Mei Lanfang also widely applied different dance movements in his performance, such as sword dance, hoe dance, scarf dance, and so on. (See Huang Jun, p. 23-24) Mei’s friend Qi Rushan, studied the



The third aesthetic principle of Chinese opera was synthesis, which is the most salient characteristic for Chinese opera. That is to say, as an art form, Chinese opera was more than just telling a story on stage through song but rather, through a combination of singing, dancing, acrobatics, gymnastics, mime, and even magic.<sup>100</sup> As an amalgam of various regional operatic forms, Beijing opera adopted this full range of performance techniques and integrated them into a new art form with unique characteristics. Thus, Beijing opera performers had to be trained in all these areas, as all of these elements quite frequently appeared on the Beijing opera stage. For example, one of the most difficult performing techniques in Chinese opera was martial arts, which were developed to a high level of artistry in Beijing opera. Fighting includes varied skills similar to acrobatics and gymnastics, which require years of rigorous body training and practice from a very young age. Acrobatics had been a major form of entertainment in folk operas: somersaults and other gymnastics techniques were used in portraying military events. Beijing opera was especially noted for absorbing various kinds of acrobatics and martial arts styles and integrating them into complex performance techniques. The climax of a Beijing opera was often a battle scene, which was executed with extremely difficult movements incorporating rapid and numerous cartwheels, somersaults, and kicks as well as intricate sword and spear action. All of these techniques had to be executed with accuracy, beauty, and perfection, and performers required years of rigorous training to learn how to execute these moves precisely to the rhythm of the accompanying percussion ensemble.

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pictures and description of Tang dynasty dance and designed dance choreography for Mei in a new opera *Tiannu Sanhua* (Flowers from the Heaven), which incorporates a scarf dance.

<sup>100</sup> Four main performing components are: singing (*chang*), recitation (*nian*), acting (*zuo*), and martial arts (*da*). See note 47.

While Beijing opera shared these features with other operatic forms, it was this conglomeration of features that singled out Beijing opera from the hundreds of related regional operatic styles in China. Furthermore, it was its ever-changing music style that set it ahead. The regional operas had rich traditions that also had a solidifying effect upon them. In contrast, Beijing opera was clearly seen as progressive because it was a newly evolving art form not yet constrained by convention or tradition.

### **Stage Art of Beijing Opera**

The stage art of Beijing opera was also highly symbolic and stylized, and its purpose was largely to provide audiences with information about the characters. As in performance technique, the purpose of stage art was not to create a sense of realism, but rather to portray the underlying essence of the characters and situations on stage. The colors and designs of costumes or face paint were numerous but always bearing meaning discernible to the audience; likewise stage props were used to suggest actions and events with no attempt at realism.

The first aspect of Beijing opera stage art to consider is the costumes, which were colorful and highly symbolic. There was no attempt to make the costumes appropriate to the time period or season portrayed; rather, the aim was to provide audiences with information about the character's personality, social status, and position. For example, a yellow costume embroidered with open-mouthed dragons indicated the character was an emperor. On the other hand, a costume embroidered with a closed-mouth python

indicated a high government official engaged in serious business.<sup>101</sup> Also, different costumes come in different colors, each associated with a different personality type or temperament. In all, there were hundreds of differently designed costumes in use, conveying subtle distinctions in character and social status. For example, an official's costume was embroidered with an animal design to indicate the official rank. The highest rank was indicated by a crane, the second by a golden peasant, the third by a peacock, and so forth. In addition, four colors were used to further distinguish social status: from high to low: purple, red, blue, and black. Beijing opera companies required a number of wardrobe managers to keep track of all these costumes as well as the various accessories worn with the costumes that conveyed further information to the audience about the character portrayed. In sum, the role of costumes in Beijing opera was not to lend a sense of reality but rather to convey information about characters.<sup>102</sup>

The second aspect of Beijing opera stage art to consider is face painting. There is a long history of face painting in the Chinese performing arts, and this practice probably derives from an even earlier tradition of using facemasks. The various regional operas differed in the degree to which face paint was used as well as its complexity. For example, face paint was a major feature of Sichuan opera, and changes in temperament could be expressed through changes in face paint that were done on stage and incorporated into the action of the stories. In Beijing opera, only two role types, the supernatural *jing* and the clown *chou*, made use of extensive face painting. In addition to

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<sup>101</sup> The python robe was the standard garb for Ming dynasty officials. Therefore, this costume could be interpreted as having a political meaning, namely a longing for the return of the Han-ruled Ming dynasty (when performed during the Qing dynasty).

<sup>102</sup> For more detail, see Zhang Yonghe, *Dakai jingju zhimen* [Opening the Door of Beijing Opera] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), p. 220-233.

the various colors, which conveyed the same meanings as costume colors, various shapes and patterns, including the forms of animals, could be included as well. All these conveyed to the audience the personality, morality, and status of the character. Although Beijing opera employed makeup artists to do hair and makeup for female role-types as well as hair and beards for male role-types, face painting was usually done by the performer himself. Indeed, the use of face paint indicates the extent to which Beijing opera relied on symbolism and convention to portray characters, as opposed to representing characters in a realistic fashion.

Finally, we need to consider the use of props on the Beijing opera stage. We have already seen that the stage was furnished in a minimalist fashion, with little more than a back curtain, a table, and two chairs, which could be used in a symbolic fashion to represent landscapes and obstacles. Generally speaking, props were kept to a minimum. Beijing opera companies, especially in the early years, were traveling troupes, and so they needed to limit their baggage. Of course, this was true of the other regional opera styles as well, and no doubt this need to travel lightly was a factor in developing a minimalist style on stage. As many Beijing opera heroes were military men, the typical climax was a battle scene, and this naturally entailed the use of sabers, daggers, and spears. Therefore, there are hundreds of the various weapons; and like costumes, there was no attempt at historical accuracy.<sup>103</sup> But again, realism was not the issue, and even a modern sword could have been used in a story set fifteen centuries before. Perhaps most telling of the symbolic nature of props on the Beijing opera stage was the use of the

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<sup>103</sup> Traditionally, most of these weapons were not real. But starting in the twentieth century, some Beijing opera companies started using real weapons to attract audiences. After the establishment of the People's Republic, the use of real weapons on stage was forbidden.

horsewhip. Held in hand, the horsewhip represented that the character was riding on horseback. Thus, we see the guiding principle of symbolism in the use of props on the Beijing opera stage as well.

### **Beijing Opera Role Types**

One of the major differences between Western and Chinese opera is in the categorization of role types. In Western opera, role types are largely classified by vocal range. Thus, it is convention in Western opera for the role of hero to be performed by a tenor and the heroine by a soprano; if there is a villain, he is more likely to sing in the bass range. However, in Chinese opera vocal range is not a determining factor in the categorization of role types. Instead, role types are classified according to the gender, social status, and function of the character portrayed; in other words, role types presented on the Chinese opera stage are intended to reflect the stratification of traditional Chinese society as well as the relationships among these strata.

Role types in Chinese opera, which were called *hangdang* (literally, profession), were determined on the basis of four factors. The first factor involved the natural attributes of the character, such as gender and age. The second factor represented the social status of the character, such as general, emperor, scholar, beauty, or servant. The third factor had to do with the moral quality of the character as either virtuous or evil. Lastly, the fourth factor distinguished roles by the particular performance techniques that

were required; thus, primary roles emphasized vocal skills, but secondary roles often placed more emphasis on martial arts, acrobatics or comic relief.<sup>104</sup>

The precise number of role types varied by time period and regional style. Opera in the Tang dynasty made a simple two-way distinction into primary and secondary role types, but by the Song and Ming dynasties, it was not uncommon to distinguish twelve or more role types. Early Beijing opera made a ten-way distinction, but these were then collapsed into the four role types recognized throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>105</sup> Each of these four role types is further subdivided into more specific roles; the color and patterning of the costume and the face paint, if any, readily identify these subtypes. Because each specific role has associated with it a particular personality type, knowledgeable audience members can immediately identify the specific role of each actor on stage, and thus they can make quick judgments about the underlying motives driving that character's behavior.

The main male characters in Beijing opera are assigned to the *sheng* (male) role type, which is finely divided into a variety of subtypes. Generally, the central male character is represented by the *laosheng* (old male), which is used to portray generals, statesmen, emperors, noted scholars and other men, generally middle aged or older, with high social and moral status. Another subtype is the *xiaosheng* (young male), typically a handsome young man who may be effete or foppish but definitely not a hero. A third

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<sup>104</sup> Chi Jun, "Xian yanhang, Zai Yanren" [First Present Profession, then Present the Character], *Jingju xue chutan* [Original Search for Beijing opera], ed. Fu Jin, (Beijing: Wenhua yinshu chubanshe, 2010), p. 153.

<sup>105</sup> Beijing opera role type system came from Hui opera, which has nine role types, and Han opera, which has ten role types. What we call Beijing opera is the product of Hui opera and Han opera, which were merged in mid 19th century. See Zhang Yonghe, *Dakai jingju zhimen* [Open the Door of Beijing Opera] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), p. 23.

subtype is the *wusheng*, or martial male, and is mainly involved in combat scenes; actors taking on this role type must be well trained in martial arts as well as singing. In addition to these three, there are several other subtypes; given the central position of males in traditional Chinese society, it is not surprising that the *sheng* role type is the most finely graded in terms of subtypes. Furthermore, within this category, the *laosheng* subtype also can be further broken down into subcategories depending on the particular type of character, such as scholar or general, that is being portrayed.<sup>106</sup>

Female characters in Beijing opera are all classified as *dan*, and four major subtypes are recognized. The lead female role is likely to be a *qingyi* (literally, blue clothes), which represents a virtuous woman of high social status; this subtype is also referred to as *zhengdan*, which can be roughly translated as “proper lady.” In contrast to the proper lady is the lively maiden known as *huadan*, roughly meaning “flower girl”; this character may be a princess or a servant girl, and though she is vivacious, she is not necessarily virtuous. A third subtype is the Mulan-like warrior woman known as *daomadan* (literally “sword and horse woman”). Like the *wusheng* warrior males, the *daomadan* had to be skilled in both vocal and martial arts. Finally, old women were portrayed by the *laodan* (old female) role type.

Although the *dan* role type portrayed female characters, they were invariably played by male actors, at least until the mid-twentieth century. During the reign (1722-1735) of Qing emperor Yongzheng, the law requiring the registration of families involved in the entertainment business was annulled, thus ending the social and legal

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<sup>106</sup> For details about role types, see Elizabeth Wichmann, *Listening to Theatre: The Aural Dimension of Beijing Opera* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991) p.7-12.

restrictions that had been placed on these people for generations.<sup>107</sup> In part, the emperor was trying to curb prostitution by disbanding the entertainer caste. To this end, he also banned women from entertainment establishments, both on stage and in the audience. As a result, female characters had to be played by male actors, and over the next two centuries a number of techniques were developed to help male performers impersonate women.

In addition to the male *sheng* and female *dan* role types, there were two additional male role types distinguished not only by their costumes but also by their face paint. (*Sheng* and *dan* did not wear painted faces.) The *jing* was a painted-face male role representing a forceful character that was somehow larger-than-life, whether human or supernatural. The *jing* needed to have a strong voice and display exaggerated movements. He may have been a primary or secondary character, but his purpose was often to drive the narrative forward in some way. The other painted-face male role type was the *chou*, or clown. Always a minor character and generally affable, if foolish, his purpose was simply to provide comic relief, often by way of acrobatics. He was readily identifiable on stage by his white-painted nose.

Since the Beijing opera *hangdang*, or role types, were intended to reflect the social stratification of the real world, the prominence of the various *hangdang* shifted over time in response to changes in contemporary Chinese society. In the eighteenth century, when Beijing opera was first coalescing as an independent art form, the nation was politically stable and economically prosperous. Opera audiences were looking for light-hearted or uplifting entertainment, and many Beijing operas from this time period

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<sup>107</sup> Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: Norton, 1990) p. 88-89.



gave prominence to the virtuous lady (*qingyi*) role type. But in the nineteenth century, as the country was racked by internal rebellion and foreign encroachment, there was a nostalgia for the glory days of old. In response, Beijing opera of that time largely recounted historical tales of victorious generals and righteous emperors.<sup>108</sup> As a result, the prominent role type of this period was the elder male (*laosheng*) role type. By the early twentieth century, the Western-educated urban middle-class became the main consumer of Beijing opera. Furthermore, females were once again permitted in theaters, and they had strong ideas about the status of women in modern society. Once again, Beijing opera accommodated the demands of its viewers, and famed female-impersonators such as Mei Lanfang and Chen Yanqiu developed a new *dan* subtype known as *huashan* (literally, flower shirt). The *huashan* role type combined the virtuous qualities of the *qingyi* with the youth and vigor of the *huadan* as well as the strength and determination of the warrior *daomadan*.<sup>109</sup>

The role types of Beijing opera were intended to reflect the stratification of Chinese society, and, given the dominance of men in traditional China, it is not surprising to see that three of the four role type designations were male. Yet we also see a reflection of the Chinese view of human nature in the association of a set personality with each specific role subtype. That is to say, people are expected to behave according to the role they are assigned in society and the situation in which they find themselves.<sup>110</sup> Thus, a *laosheng* is not just an older man of high social status; rather, audiences know this is a

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<sup>108</sup> See Wang Ping, *Jingju Laosheng liupai jueqide shehui xinli yanjiu* [Social Psychology in Rise of the Beijing Opera Male Role Type] (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju shubanshe, 2010).

<sup>109</sup> Chou Hui-ling, "Striking Their Own Poses: The History of Cross-Dressing on the Chinese Stage," *The Drama Review*, Vol. 41, Iss. 21, 1997, pp. 130–152.

<sup>110</sup> Richard Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Thinking Differently... and Why*, (New York: Free Press, 2003) pp. 152-155.

character that will conduct himself with virtue and honor and decorum. And so it is with every role subtype, clearly delineated by the costume and face paint the performer wears. In this sense as well, the Beijing opera stage is a reflection of traditional Chinese society.

### **Beijing Opera Music Conventions**

Beijing opera shares many stage conventions and performance techniques such as gestures, costumes, and makeup, as well as similar stories with hundreds of Chinese folk operas. Therefore, musical style is the main factor distinguishing these operatic forms. Like its Western counterpart, Beijing opera music includes recitative, aria, and instrumental music.

As with its performance conventions and stage arts, Beijing opera music is also highly symbolic and formulaic. Beijing opera speech, as part of its four main performing components, singing (*chang*), recitation (*nian*), acting (*zuo*), and martial arts (*da*), is an important part of vocal expression and requires rigorous exercise and training like other techniques. There are two kinds of recitative in traditional Beijing opera. One is called *yunbai* (rhymed speech), which is a stylized speech that rhymes at the end of each sentence and has particular rules for pronunciation; it is used for characters of high social status by role types such as *laosheng* and *qingyi*.<sup>111</sup> The other kind of recitative is called *jingbai* (colloquial speech, easy to understand), which is not rhymed and is pronounced according to the everyday Beijing dialect; it is commonly used for lower class characters

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<sup>111</sup> We may call it a stage language, which uses a mixture of tones and accents from places such as Beijing and Hubei, and is very different from daily language and difficult for an unseasoned audience to understand.

of the role types such as clown and *huadan* (flirtatious female). Both speech styles were accompanied by percussion, and the performers use change of speed, rhythm, dynamics, and timbre of the speech to create the image and personality of the character. Therefore, spoken parts, as stylized recitative, also indicate the character's social status.

Aria is the most important aspect of Beijing opera music.<sup>112</sup> More details regarding Beijing opera music including aria will be discussed in Chapter Four. For right now, we only need to know that Beijing opera aria is an amalgam of various regional forms and that its two major aria-types, *xipi* and *erhuang*, represent the musical traditions of the north and the south, each with its formulaic conventions and requirements.<sup>113</sup> Because of this mixture of two musical styles, Beijing opera for a long time was known as *pihuang* (that is *(xi)pi* plus *(er)huang*) opera.<sup>114</sup> The basic form of Beijing opera aria is a two-phrase structure known as *banqiang*, which is a genre of theatrical music. *Ban* refers to the metrical type and *qiang* refers to the melodic phrase. Beijing opera arias are designated by their aria-type (*qiang*) and beat (*ban*).

Beijing opera instrumental music, on the other hand, was largely drawn from existing composed melodies known as *qupai* (labeled tunes). This stock of classical music was an accumulation of music from earlier periods, extending at least as far back as the Tang dynasty as well as from Kun opera. There were two main sources of *qupai* music. One was from the composed music of earlier dynasties, especially the Tang and

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<sup>112</sup> The best voice will be trained in laosheng role. Those who do not have good voice will then be trained to play the accompaniment.

<sup>113</sup> It is common believed that *xipi* derived from the north and *erhuang* derived from the south.

<sup>114</sup> In fact, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that the term *jingju*, or Beijing opera, became widely used. *Jing* refers to Beijing and *ju* means opera. Throughout the course of Beijing opera history, many names were used. For example, from 1911 to 1949, Beijing was called Beiping, and therefore Beijing opera was called *pingju*; the first Beijing opera company established in Yan'an was called the *Pingju Yuan* (Pingju Company).

Song. The other came from a large set of poems known as *cipai*. These ancient poems had particular melodies associated with them, and these melodies were also available for opera performers to use, although with new words attached. In fact, many melodies in Kun opera came from this *qupai* collection, and Kun opera music was generally known as *qupai* music. Thus, the practice of “one tune fits all” was not a unique feature of Beijing opera but rather a common characteristic of Chinese folk and traditional music in general. For example, no matter whether it was Beijing opera, Kun opera, or Sichuan opera, the ensemble usually played a particular piece of *qupai* music to indicate that emperor was about to appear on stage.<sup>115</sup>

The traditional Beijing opera ensemble consists of only six players, and its main function is to accompany arias and action scenes.<sup>116</sup> The instruments include percussion instruments such as drum and cymbal, and bowed and plucked string instruments. The drummer serves as conductor. The main instrument is the two-stringed *jinghu*, and its player is often called “master,” as it is his responsibility to help the performer to develop new arias as well as to support the singer, especially in places of highly technical improvisation. The instrumentalists were usually trained as Beijing opera performers when they were young and only became instrumentalists if they could not sing or

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<sup>115</sup> This particular piece of *qupai* music was also played when the real emperor came to watch a performance. Mei Lanfang recalled an experience while performing at the palace theater to celebrate the former empress’s birthday in 1922 (this was during the Republican period, but the former imperial family was still installed in the palace). During the middle of the performance, he heard someone backstage announce the arrival of the emperor, and the ensemble started playing this piece. Yao Shuyi, *Cheng Changgeng, Tanxingpei, and Mei Lanfang—pingdai zhi minshu jingshi xiqu de huihuang* [Cheng Changgeng, Tanxingpei, and Mei Lanfang: Glories of Beijing Opera Masters from Qing to Early Republic] (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2009)

<sup>116</sup> In 1923, Mei Lanfang’s ensemble added one additional person to play *jin-erhu*; and later another performer added one extra percussion player. Thus the ensemble grew to eight persons until the 1960s, when even more instruments were added during the period of *yangbanxi* development.

perform. Each of them has to be able to play three or four instruments in the ensemble; for example, a string player also has to be able to play wind instruments and percussion. In the Chinese operatic tradition, new operas were not composed but rather were developed during rehearsal, drawing from a common stock of *xipi* and *erhuang* melodies.<sup>117</sup> The construction of traditional Beijing opera was a collaborative effort mainly between the lead performers and the *erhu* accompanist. Because of this practice of recycling melodies, regular patrons of Beijing opera would already be familiar with the music, as well as the stories; then again, audiences were not coming to appreciate new music but rather the virtuoso performances of the actors.

In sum, Beijing opera is both an aural and a visual art in which the fundamental Chinese aesthetic principles are widely applied in virtually all aspects. As a highly synthesized opera, music was the most crucial part and carries the most salient characteristics along with the rest of the performance practice. First, Beijing opera was a collective creation; all works were created and perfected during rehearsals by the performers. Second, the music of Beijing opera was not newly composed but rather was drawn from a large stock of classical and folk music; furthermore, the transmission of works was through oral tradition, and there was no notated score or written down scripts. Third, Beijing opera featured a unity of composition, performance, and creation, in that new operas created in rehearsal were constantly being revised through performance. Fourth, Beijing opera made use of highly stylized performance techniques, formulaic arias and instrumental packages.

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<sup>117</sup> There were more than thirty folk operas use *xipi* and *erhuang* aria style. Guo Kejian, *Xiqu jianshang* [Appreciation of Traditional Chinese Opera] (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2011), p. 121.

## **Beijing Opera Reform in the Republican Period (1911-1949)**

Beijing opera continued its domination of Chinese theater throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The political instability of the Republican period as well as encroaching Western influence drove significant changes in Chinese society, especially in the major cities of the eastern seaboard. These social changes were also reflected in new developments in Chinese theater practice. In particular, a major reform of Beijing opera was undertaken during this time period, largely due to the efforts of a new generation of talented actors such as Mei Lanfang (1894-1961) and Cheng Yanqiu (1904-1958). These performers were influenced by progressive intellectuals, many of whom had studied abroad, and they were willing to adjust to social change while upholding the artistic integrity of an old tradition.

The 1910s was a watershed period in Chinese history as the nation shifted more toward the Western model on both the political and social levels. One of the most important turning points was the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, ending two millennia of imperial rule. However, the revolution was in many respects a failure. China did not become a united and democratic nation as the revolutionaries had hoped, but rather was in fact divided up by a number of regional warlords competing for power, leaving the nominal central government powerless in the face of further foreign encroachment. As a result, many Chinese intellectuals began regarding their own culture, and in particular Confucianism, with a critical eye, calling instead for the creation of a new Chinese culture based on global and Western standards. Reflecting the desire of Chinese intellectuals to adopt Western practices in the reformation of Chinese education and society in general, various reforms occurred in fields of theater and literature. For

example, well into the twentieth century official and academic documents were still written in a classical style that was only understood by the educated elite, but in 1916 the American-educated scholar Hu Shi (1891-1962) led a movement to replace it with the standard vernacular intelligible to all.

Likewise inspired by Western example, Beijing opera became a target for change in theater. From early on in the twentieth century, there was much discussion about the need to reform Beijing opera. Many Chinese intellectuals wanted to use opera to arouse a sense of political unity and patriotism among the Chinese masses, which historically tended to identify themselves more with province than nation. Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), soon to ascend to a leadership role in the fledgling Chinese Communist Party, wrote in a 1904 essay that opera was the only medium with universal appeal, which “even the deaf could watch and the blind could listen to.”<sup>118</sup> But at the same time, many intellectuals considered Beijing opera a vulgar pastime and tried to reform it to meet their ends, such as excising it of superficial and sexual content in order to achieve the desired educational benefits.<sup>119</sup>

Gradually, two opposing camps emerged. Although both criticized the traditional theater, the one that used Western culture and thought as absolute standards tended to deny the legitimacy of Chinese folk culture and wanted to eliminate the old theater and replace it with new Westernized spoken drama. This group was represented by Hu Shi, Qian Xuetong and Liu Bannong. Qian and Liu considered Chinese theater as a symbol of

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<sup>118</sup> San Ai (Chen Duxiu), “Lun xiqu” (On drama), originally in *Anhui Suhuabao* 11 (September 10, 1904) and reprinted in Chen Duxiu, *Chen Duxiu zhuzuo xuan* (Selected important works by Chen Duxiu), (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1993), 1:86–90.

<sup>119</sup> Many considered the language of Beijing opera to be incoherent and grammatically incorrect. Zhou Jianyun ed. *Juxue luntan* (Discussion on Theater Studies) (Shanghai: Shanghai jiangtong tushuguan, 1918), pp. 5-7.

barbarianism with no value and compared it with the foot binding required of women and the braids required of men during the Qing dynasty. Qian also stated that “China should have real theater (*xi*), that is, Western style theater.”<sup>120</sup> Hu Shi called on Chinese theater to totally abolish the singing part.<sup>121</sup> Fu, from aesthetic point of view, criticized Chinese theater as having no beauty or value. He claimed that the old theater should be overthrown so that a new theater could be established. He stated: “The story and performance were all bad, and therefore it all depended on singing to attract an audience. If the story and performance were good, it would no longer need music.”<sup>122</sup>

The other group wanted to protect the traditional theater and preserve the essence of Chinese culture while recasting it into a form on par with the opera of the Western world.<sup>123</sup> The debates revealed different concepts regarding national theater. Many mainstream intellectuals wanted the spoken drama to be the national theater, while most left-wing intellectuals wanted Beijing opera to represent the national theater.<sup>124</sup> Ironically, it was largely the foreign-trained scholars who argued for Beijing opera reform, while those who called for the abolition of Beijing opera were mainly those without experience abroad.

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<sup>120</sup> Liu Bannong and Qian Xuetong, “Jin zhi suowei pingjujia” [Who is this so-called critic?], *New Youth*, Vol. 5: 2, p. 186-188.

<sup>121</sup> See Hu Shi, “wenxue jinghua guannian yu xiju gailiang” [Thoughts on Literature Evolution and Theater Reform], *New Youth*, Vol. 5: 2, p. 312.

<sup>122</sup> Fu Sinian, “zailun xiqu gailiang” [Regarding Theater Reform], *New Youth*, Vol. 5: 4, p. 349-350.

<sup>123</sup> According to Li, most members of this group eventually joined the left-wing group (see Li Xiaodi, *The Theater Reform in the Republic Era* [minchude xiju gaige] (Taiwan: Central Research Academy Modern History Institute, 1993), p. 281).

<sup>124</sup> Zhong Ming, “Chui Zhu Chenfu” [Who Determines], *Jingju xue chutan* [Search for Beijing opera], ed. Fu Jin (Beijing: Wenhua yinshu chubanshe, 2010), p. 98.



One influential figure in the reform movement was dramatist and educator Zhao Taimou (1889-1968), who had studied theater at Columbia University in the United States and later served first as the president of the Shandong Experimental Theater Academy and then as president of Qingdao University.<sup>125</sup> His observation on the state of Beijing opera reflected the consensus of his generation of foreign-trained scholars: “The biggest and most difficult problem for Chinese theater is music.... However, this problem cannot be resolved without a genius like Wagner.”<sup>126</sup> But Zhao highly praised Chinese theater for its artistic and aesthetic quality, especially its symbolic and stylized movement, and he asserted the value of Chinese theater as undeniable; furthermore, he argued that art should show its own nationality and individuality. Another expert, Yu Shangruan, who was Zhao’s colleague and who also studied theater in the U.S., echoed Zhao, stating that although there was not yet a play that had reached a perfect synthesis in singing, dancing, and music in Chinese theater, “it was possible to reach such level in the future.”<sup>127</sup> This sentiment regarding the weakness of Beijing opera music reverberated throughout the first two thirds of the twentieth century; this was precisely Jiang Qing’s evaluation of Beijing opera and the early revolutionary operas as well, and it was the

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<sup>125</sup> Jiang Qing seemed to be Zhao’s favorite student. Jiang studied at both schools when Zhao served as president. Jiang later married Huang Jing, student leader at the Shandong University and Zhao’s brother-in-law.

<sup>126</sup> Li Xiaodi, *The Theater Reform in the Republic Era* [minchude xiju gaige] (Taiwan: Central Research Academy Modern History Institute, 1993), p. 295.

<sup>127</sup> Li Xiaodi, *The Theater Reform in the Republic Era*, p. 295. Another expert, Yu Shangruan, who was Zhao’s colleague and who also studied theater in the U.S., echoed Zhao, stating that although there was not yet a play that had reached a perfect synthesis in singing, dancing, and music in Chinese theater, it was possible to reach such level in the future.” (Quoted in Li Xiaodi, *The Theater Reform in the Republic Era*, p 296. Yu Shangyuan, “jiu xi pingjia” [evaluating old theater])

reason she needed the talents of Yu Huiyong to finally achieve the synthesis Zhao and Yu had dreamed of.

Social reform during the early Republican era (1911-1949) led to a profound change in Beijing opera. Women were now allowed to attend Beijing opera performances, and they did so in large numbers.<sup>128</sup> As a result, there was a change in aesthetic tastes. Female opera patrons had little interest in tales of combat and political intrigue, the mainstay of the *laosheng*-dominated Beijing opera of the nineteenth century; instead, they desired stories in which women played a more prominent role, thus giving rise to the new *qingyi* (elegant lady) female role-type.<sup>129</sup> Paradoxically, these newly created leading female roles were performed by males, thus giving rise to the flourishing careers of the great female impersonators such as Mei Lanfang and Cheng Yanqiu. In spite of their newly acquired social equality, the time was not yet ripe for women to be fully accepted on the Beijing opera stage. Nevertheless, the modern women with minds of their own that these men portrayed paved the way for female performers to assume similar roles after Liberation in 1949.

In major cities like Beijing and Shanghai, a number of attempts were made to reform Beijing opera, which resulted in a marked increase in the direction of a new practice called “civilized opera” (*wenming xi*).<sup>130</sup> One of the key members responsible for promoting the civilized opera in Shanghai (for both modern theme Beijing opera and

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<sup>128</sup> Ma Shaopo, Ed., *History of Beijing Opera* (Beijing: China Theater Press, 1999), p. 86-87.

<sup>129</sup> Ma Shaopo, Ed., *History of Beijing Opera* (Beijing: China Theater Press, 1999), p. 187.

<sup>130</sup> Civilized opera can be further classified into three categories, such as “Fashioned opera,” which was about modern theme and the performers wearing modern day clothes, instead of traditional costumes, “Old-fashioned new opera,” in which the story was new but the performers wearing the same old costumes, and Costumed new opera, in which the performers wearing the same costume in new opera..

early spoken drama) was Ouyang Yuqian (1898-1962), who went to high school and college in Tokyo Japan. He gathered overseas Chinese students there to form the first Chinese theater association called the Spring Willow Society (*chunliu she*). Inspired by Western theater, the society adapted the Western literature and created new theater style later known as “spoken drama.” Their first performance was *The Black Slave’s Cry to Heaven* (Heiren yu tian lu), based on the story *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. After returning to Shanghai in 1911, Ouyang led several performing groups, self-performing and self-directing in both Beijing opera and spoken drama in promoting revolution and anti-feudalism themes, which was called “civilized opera.”<sup>131</sup> Because he performed leading *dan* roles in Beijing opera, he was as famous as Mei Lanfang at one point, and the rivalry between them was commonly referred to “North Mei, South Ou” [*bei mei nan ou*]). Later in his career, he moved on to film acting and directing.<sup>132</sup>

Within this category of *wenming xi* (civilized opera) were the subcategories *guzhuang xi* (old costume opera), whose content was historical or mythological, and *shizhuang xi* (new costume opera), whose stories were set in modern times. Clearly influenced by the newly emerging genres of spoken drama and film, these works employed realistic costumes, scenery and movement, as well as focusing more on recitation than singing and using less percussion in the accompaniment.

During the Republican period (1911-1949), a number of Beijing opera performers gained celebrity as female impersonators and many of these teamed up with scholars who

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<sup>131</sup> Cai Dengshan, *Mei Lanfang yu Meng Xiaodong* [Mei Lanfang and Meng Xiaodong] (Hefei: shidai chuban chuanmei, 2009), p. 106-112.

<sup>132</sup> . Cai Dengshan, p. 106-107.

could serve both as librettists and impresarios.<sup>133</sup> For instance, Mei Lanfang, the most celebrated *dan* of that time, performed many new operas, such as *Nie Hai Bolan* (*Waves of the Sea of Sin*, 1913), which dealt with the evils of prostitution, and *Chang'e Ben Yue* (*Chang'e Flees to the Moon*, 1915), a story from Chinese mythology about a woman who steals the elixir of immortality from her husband and escapes to a palace on the moon.<sup>134</sup> Unlike traditional Beijing opera, these new works presented themes relevant to contemporary society. Meanwhile in Shanghai, famous “civilized opera” performer Wang Zhongxian invited thirteen progressive scholars to organize the first theater association, called the Popular Theater Society (*minzhong xiju she*).<sup>135</sup>

It was common practice during the Yuan and Ming dynasties for scholars to achieve fame through the writing of libretti for opera; however, in the twentieth century practice of civilized opera, it was always the actor, not the librettist, who was the focus of

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<sup>133</sup> For more detail see Beijing and Shanghai Art Academy, *Beijing Opera History: The New Development of Beijing Opera Libretti* (Beijing: Zhongguo xiqu chubanshe, 1999).

<sup>134</sup> *Waves of the Sea of Sin* was Mei's first “new costume opera,” based on a real event reported in the press about a woman who was sold into prostitution by her mother-in law but eventually escaped. *Chang'e Flees to the Moon* was Mei's first “old costume opera,” but it portrayed the mythological heroine as a modern liberated woman. These works were inspired by “civilized opera” in Shanghai and created after Mei returned to Beijing from his first 50-day sojourn in Shanghai in 1913, when he for the first time saw this new style of Beijing opera and the spoken drama that was performed by the Spring Willow Society. Cai Dengshan, *Mei Lanfang yu Meng Xiaodong* [Mei Lanfang and Meng Xiaodong] (Hefei: shidai chubanshe, 2009), p. 90.

<sup>135</sup> These scholars included many renowned persons. One was Xiong Foxi, who had studied theater in the United States and served as president of the Shanghai Theater Academy after 1949. Another was Ouyang Qianyu, who had studied in Japan and was an active performer in Beijing opera, film, and spoken drama. After 1949, he became the president of Central Experimental Institute and National Theater Academy. “Civilized opera” was in fact aimed toward the urban elite and middle classes, as opposed to the earlier proposal of theater reformers such as Chen Duxiu, who had called for serving the lower classes of society. This situation was changed during the war against Japan, when both Chinese theater and spoken drama were truly turned toward the masses as a vehicle for propaganda.

attention.<sup>136</sup> Instead, these new scholar librettists worked behind the scenes, even though they also often served as directors and producers. For example, Qi Rushan (1875-1962) not only wrote more than twenty libretti for Mei Lanfang, but also gave performance suggestions and even arranged several overseas tours for Mei Lanfang. Breaking with tradition, these performers and their collaborators claimed intellectual property rights to their works, preventing other artists from copying them. In this sense, the civilized opera trend marked the beginning of modern theater practice in China.

The collaboration between Mei Lanfang and Qi Rushan exemplifies this trend. Qi was a typical scholar from an upper-class family who had studied in Europe for many years and was familiar with French and German culture.<sup>137</sup> After attending Mei's performance of a traditional Beijing opera *Fenghe Wan* (*Fenghe Bay*) in 1913, and still long before the two had met, Qi wrote Mei a letter suggesting ways to improve his performance. For example, performers on the traditional Beijing opera stage who were not currently singing were expected to stand motionless and expressionless, but Qi suggested Mei react emotionally to his co-performer's arias, and Mei incorporated this recommendation into subsequent performances.<sup>138</sup>

After an exchange of over a hundred letters, Mei and Qi finally met. Following Qi's advice, Mei not only accepted roles of modern characters in contemporary costume

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<sup>136</sup> During the Yuan and Ming dynasties, wealthy literati wrote operas to be performed by artists under their employ; thus, the librettist was the central figure in the production of the opera. However, in the early twentieth century, the situation was the opposite. That is, famed performers such as Mei Lanfang hired librettists to write operas for them to perform; thus, it was the lead performer that was largely responsible for the production of the opera.

<sup>137</sup> After returning to China from study in Europe, Qi was active in promoting theater reform and served as the president of the National Opera Association, often giving lectures to Beijing opera performers.

<sup>138</sup> Qi's letter also analyzed the singing, dividing it into nine portions, each with detailed performance suggestions.

but also adopted changes in expressive movements including dance, which previously had not been a part of Beijing opera, into new works such as *Chang'e Flees to the Moon*.<sup>139</sup> Under Qi's tutelage, Mei developed Beijing opera performance techniques that appealed to the rapidly expanding class of educated city dwellers, but this gain was achieved only at the expense of alienating the uneducated rural masses that had been the main consumers of Beijing opera for two centuries. Thus, contemporary writer Lu Xun sharply commented: "Sure, it's elegant now; but most people don't understand it, don't want to watch it, and don't feel they're worthy to see it."<sup>140</sup> After twenty years, the collaboration between the Mei and Qi fell apart; Mei Lanfang moved to Shanghai in 1933 and returned to performing traditional Beijing opera.<sup>141</sup> From that time onward, it can be said that the Mei focused on the refinement of established operas rather than reform.

Although the practice of civilized opera died out, such collaborations helped raise the artistic level of Beijing opera as a whole. Even the traditional repertoire was overhauled with more sophisticated lyrics, modified singing, and improved performance

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<sup>139</sup> For more of Mei's works that incorporated dance movements, see Huang Jun, ed. *Jingju Xiaocidian* [Pocket Dictionary of Beijing Opera] (Shanghai: Shanghai Chishu Chubanshe, 2009), p. 260.

<sup>140</sup> This comment was specifically aimed to criticize Mei Lanfang's performing style. Lu also criticized scholars such as Qi Rushan who "took him [Mei] from the barbaric and put him inside a glass cover with a beautiful wooden case. They teach him to speak a language that most people do not understand, slowly spreading the *Flowers from the Heave* and awkwardly (*Daiyu*) *Buries the Flowers*. Before he was making drama, now drama is made for him. All the new librettos are made for Mei Lanfang, the ideal Mei Lanfang in the heart of the intellectuals." Lu Xun, "Luelun Mei Lanfang ji qita" {About Mei Lanfang and Others}, *Zhonghua Ribao* [China Daily], October 26, 1934. [Jingju discussion (Theater Academy 2011), p. 708] The libretti of both *Flowers from the Heaven* and (*Daiyu*) *Buries the Flowers* were created by Qi Rushan.

<sup>141</sup> A letter from Qi in 1933 expressed his regrets at the end of their collaboration: "I had been writing to you for twenty years... All of my energy was spent on you, and I saw you making artistic progress every day. But it stopped from today." Qi Rushan, *Memories of Qi Rushan* (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe 1989), p.187.

techniques; in fact, most of the traditional Beijing operas we know today are updated twentieth-century versions.<sup>142</sup>

However, it is important to keep in mind that the main impetus for change in the early twentieth century came from leading Beijing opera performers, and thus Beijing opera changed from performance-oriented troupes to star-centered companies by this time. In order to catch the attention of audiences, each Beijing opera troupe tried to build a name for itself by promoting its own star performer and emphasizing its own unique style distinctive in terms of repertoire, performance, costumes, and singing style. Each of the four great female impersonators (*si da ming dan*), owned his own performance company and was supported by dedicated fans who provided both monetary and technical support.<sup>143</sup> According to Zhong, there were more than one hundred newly created Beijing opera works by a group of writers for Xun Huisheng, one of the four great *dan* performers.<sup>144</sup> Mei Lanfang's rival, Cheng Yanqiu, teamed up with a group of scholars

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<sup>142</sup> Cai Dengshan, in his book *Mei Langfang and Meng Xiaodong*, gives a detailed account of how a traditional work was recreated among new performers in the company with the help of Qi Rushan. After the performers had decided on the story of the next work, they selected five different opera versions of the same story and brought them to librettist Qi Rushan, who wrote a libretto based on these different versions. After a month of rehearsal, they invited friends to watch the dress rehearsal and give suggestions. One critic reportedly commented: "No wonder Mei Lanfang can produce better operas than the earlier masters, with carefully rewritten libretti and spot-on suggestions from experts." Cai Dengshan, *Mei Lanfang yu Meng Xiaodong* [Mei Lanfang and Meng Xiaodong] (Hefei: shidai chuban chuanmei, 2009), p. 54.

<sup>143</sup> These four *dan* stars were selected by audiences in 1927 in a contest sponsored by the Japanese newspaper *Suntian Daily*. These four stars were: Mei (Mei Lanfang 1894-1961), Shang (Shang Xiaoyun 1900-1975), Cheng (Cheng Yanqiu 1904-1958), and Xun (Xun Huisheng 1900-1968). Each had a large entourage of supporters, who were more than just fans; many of them were politically and financially powerful people.

<sup>144</sup> Zhong Ming, "Chui Zhu Chenfu" [Who Determines], *Jingju xue chutan* [Search for Beijing opera], ed. Fu Jin (Beijing: Wenhua yinshu chubanshe, 2010), p. 90.

who guided him, just as Qi Rushang had done for Mei.<sup>145</sup> Cheng also actively advocated for opera reform and incorporated new techniques, often drawn from Western opera, into his performances.<sup>146</sup> In a way, we can say Cheng picked up where Mei left off, and thereby continued the process of Beijing opera reform.

Both Mei Lanfang's and Cheng Yanqiu's European tours were arranged by their supporters, but the meaning and purpose for each of them was different. Mei saw his tour as little more than a commercial venture, even though his collaborator Qi Rushan's ulterior motive for arranging this trip was to bring Chinese opera to the world stage.<sup>147</sup> Beijing opera scholar Fu Jin remarked: "Visiting America was not Mei Lanfang's need but the need of Qi Rushan and those intellectuals who were caught between Eastern and Western cultures."<sup>148</sup> Indeed, after this tour, Mei broke off his collaboration with Qi and returned to more traditional performances. It appears that Mei had learned little during his time abroad that he considered worthy of incorporating into his art. Cheng's purpose for touring Europe was altogether different; that is, it gave him the opportunity, while he was there, to study European art and culture. He stayed for fourteen months and, after his return, modified his performance style based on what he had learned there. Many of Cheng's most famous works, such as *Suo Lingnang* (*Lock of Lingnang*), were created

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<sup>145</sup> Cheng also had a group of influential supporters. One of the most important is Luo Yinggong who paid the ransom to release Cheng from his apprentice and arranged tutors to teach him Chinese literature and art.

<sup>146</sup> Shang Xiaoyun performed forty-one, Xun performed forty, and Cheng Yanqiu performed twenty-five new-style operas. Colin Mackerras, p.66.

<sup>147</sup> Qi Rushan, *Memories of Qi Rushan* (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe 1989), p.127. Interestingly, Qi suggested that the performances should emphasize traditional operas over the newly created civilized operas, many of which Qi had created.

<sup>148</sup> Fu Jin. *Jingjuxue qianyan* [Introduction to Beijing Opera Studies] (Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2011), p.117.



after his trips to Europe and were collaborations with professional librettist Weng Ouhong, who later became one of the main writers of yangbanxi libretti.<sup>149</sup>

During the second quarter of the twentieth century, the two brightest stars in Beijing opera were undoubtedly Mei Lanfang and Cheng Yanqiu.<sup>150</sup> While Mei had descended from a long line of opera performers, Cheng had been sold into the profession as a child and had worked his way to the top through sheer talent and effort. Perhaps this explains why Mei took a conservative stance on Beijing opera reform, whereas Cheng advocated a thorough modernization of the art. Differences between these two artists could be seen in the libretti and types of roles they chose to perform. Mei typically portrayed classical women from the upper classes, such as the Tang Dynasty beauty Yang Guifei, a favored imperial concubine of legend, or Lin Daiyu, the sickly beauty in the Qing dynasty classical novel *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. On the other hand, Cheng was known for his impersonation of unfortunate but virtuous women of the working class in contemporary stories. Theater commentator Zhang Dezhi praised the characters Cheng portrayed as “the most precious female role models in Chinese history.”<sup>151</sup> Whereas Mei clung to traditional Beijing opera role types, Cheng explored new roles that were later more fully developed in yangbanxi.

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<sup>149</sup> Weng taught at the China Theater Music Academy where Cheng was the headmaster. He later became one of the librettists of the yangbanxi *The Red Lantern*.

<sup>150</sup> Chinese musicologist Hai Zheng stated in his book that the Mei and Cheng were the most influential and representative of the Beijing opera dan styles. From the music perspective, the really innovator was Cheng Yanqiu. There was no big difference between the three: Mei Lanfang, Shang Xiaoyun, and Xun Huisheng in their arias. Hai Zheng, *Xiqu yinyue shi* [A Music History of Chinese Shang Traditional Opera] (Beijing: wenhua yinshi chubanshe, 2003) p. 208.

<sup>151</sup> Zhang Dezhi, “Wo suo renshi de Cheng Yanqiu” (My understanding of Cheng Yanqiu). *Cheng Yanqiu Zhuanji* (Anthology of Cheng Yanqiu) 1938. Quoted in Jiang Jin, p. 35.

Cheng Yanqiu wanted to preserve the Chinese essence of Beijing opera while employing techniques from European opera that could strengthen the art form and make it more accessible to twentieth-century audiences. After his return from Europe, Cheng wrote a report advocating for the development of new operas by design, that is, through the use of professional librettists, composers and directors, as opposed to the traditional approach of allowing new operas to evolve through rehearsal and improvisation.<sup>152</sup> He also called for the adoption of Western musical techniques such as harmony and counterpoint. Thus, it can be said that Cheng had an early vision of what later came to be known as yangbanxi. It is also quite likely that Jiang Qing's thinking on the subject was greatly influenced by Cheng, as he visited her in Moscow during her convalescence there, and they discussed the need for Beijing opera reform at length during that time.<sup>153</sup>

### **New Directions for Beijing Opera in the Twentieth Century**

Revolutions in the early twentieth century had transformed China's thousand-year-old theatrical tradition, and a socially conscious theater reform gradually spread through all aspects of the art form, including methods of training. Spearheaded by reform-minded theater scholars who had recently returned from extended sojourns in

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<sup>152</sup> Cheng Yanqiu, *Report of Investigation on European Theater and Music by Chen Yanqiu* (Beijing: Shijie bianyiguan, 1933).

<sup>153</sup> Cheng visited Jiang in January 1957 when he was touring the Soviet Union and other five socialist countries. Zhang Yihe, *Linren Wangshi* [Past Stories of Performers], (Changsha: Hunan Wenyi Shubanshe, 2006), p. 353. Cheng was very excited after meeting Jiang, saying, "Jiang is indeed an expert." Both Jiang Qing and Zhou Enlai were fans of Cheng. Zhou and Cheng were also very close and Zhou even recommended Cheng for membership in the Communist Party in 1957; however, Cheng died the next year, and his membership was established posthumously.

Japan or the West, a program to establish a system of government-sponsored theater academies was established.

Funded by the provincial government and established in April 1929, Shandong Experimental Arts Academy was one of the earliest and most highly regarded in the nation at the time.<sup>154</sup> The president was Zhao Taimou, dramatist and educator who, as mentioned above, was trained in theater at Columbia University. There were over twenty students recruited in the first year, mainly from the cities of Beijing, Tianjin, and Jinan; Jiang Qing was the youngest, at age fifteen, among three girls in the class. The academy was a boarding school, and students were provided with training mainly in spoken drama, also including Beijing opera and Kun opera, but general education included piano, ballet, literature and theory, as well as many performance opportunities.<sup>155</sup>

The new art academies offered an entirely different academic experience from that offered by the traditional Beijing opera training schools, known as *keban*. These training schools took students as young as seven years old, and the instructors held the power of life and death over these students. Indeed, this was exactly the case regarding the brother of the famous *dan* performer Shang Xiaoyun, who was beaten to death in such a training school.<sup>156</sup> Even in 1960s Hong Kong, the situation was much the same. Hong

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<sup>154</sup> There were other famous training institutions in the nation at the time. Southern China Art Academy was established in 1928 by Japan-returned left-wing dramatist Tian Han; China Theater Academy was established in 1930 sponsored by government, led by famous Beijing opera performer Cheng Yanqiu. Another is a government-funded theater project at a rural district of Dingxian, Hebei Province in 1932, led by another America-trained Xiong Foxi (1900-65), who later became head of the Shanghai Municipal Experimental School of Dramatic Art in 1946.

<sup>155</sup> Collection of Cultural and Art Materials, Vol. IV [*wenhua yishi zhi ziliao huibian*] (Jinan: Internal Reference, 1984), p 195-207.

<sup>156</sup> Shang Xiaoyun (1900-1976) was one of the four great *dan* performers. According to his son Shang Changrong (1940-), he was beaten by his master to the point of losing consciousness on

Kong-born movie actor Jackie Chan, who trained as a Beijing opera performer during that time, noted that training was “really arduous, taking place up to 18 hours a day and included stretching, weapons training, acrobatics, martial arts, and acting... We hardly had enough to eat, enough clothes to keep warm, training was extremely tiring, and Master could cane us anytime!”<sup>157</sup>

This period saw many contending schools; the most influential is *haipai* (Shanghai school), a style of Chinese art/new culture centered in Shanghai. For centuries, there had been a rivalry in China between the northern culture, centered on the Yellow River valley, and the southern culture, centered on the Yangzi River valley. As we have already seen, one of the appealing aspects of Beijing opera in the eighteenth century that thrust it into the status of national opera was that it incorporated aspects of both northern and southern operatic styles. By the twentieth century, this north-south rivalry had centered on China’s two largest cities, Beijing in the north and Shanghai in the south. Beijing had been the political center for centuries, but Shanghai had emerged, by this time, as the economic and cultural center of China.

Shanghai faces the East China Sea and is situated in the delta of the Yangzi River, the longest river in Asia and the third longest in the world. Shanghai’s strategic position made it an ideal location for trade with the West since the early nineteenth century. After the First Opium War (1839-1842), Shanghai was one of China’s treaty ports, where foreign powers had been granted concessions. As the largest of these treaty ports,

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several occasions when he was at the training school. Interview with Shang Changrong in June 2011.

<sup>157</sup> Jackie Chan described his experience in a 2008 interview. “Attending Wushu Premiere, Sammo Hung and Jackie Chan Reminisce Their Past and Reveal Future Projects” Wu-jing.org. Retrieved 2013-04-25.

Shanghai was also China's most Westernized and progressive city, and it became a cross-cultural melting pot where new ideas were welcomed and nurtured. In turn, Shanghai's economic power gave rise to a new middle class that supported a new style of art known as the Shanghai school (*haipai*).

The term "Shanghai school" was first used to refer to Shanghai-style artists such as Wu Changshuo (1844-1927), who integrated elements from various traditional visual arts with Western techniques to produce a new style that was both Chinese and modern. Later, the term became associated with all of the arts that were centered in Shanghai, from film to literature to art. Likewise, Shanghai became the center of the Chinese theater world as well. In addition to a thriving spoken drama and film industry, Shanghai also nurtured the development of various new regional opera styles, such as Hu opera, originating in the Shanghai area, and Yue opera, originating in neighboring Zhejiang province.<sup>158</sup>

In view of its large foreign population and close contact with various cultures, it was not surprising that Shanghai might have a culture of its own, one more influenced by the West and less tied to its past than any other city in China.<sup>159</sup> As Stock pointed out, the "incoming Western and rural forms cross-fertilized in novel ways" and the

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<sup>158</sup> According to Stock, the forerunners of Hu opera performers adapted stories from Shakespeare and also from popular Hollywood films in 1930s. Stock, Jonathan P.J. *Huju: Traditional Opera in Modern Shanghai* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 23.

<sup>159</sup> In the first decades of the twentieth century, Shanghai, as an open city, was a refuge from political turmoil in other parts of the world. Thousands of Russians fled to Shanghai in the aftermath of the October 1917 Revolution in Russia, and with the rise of Nazism in Germany, upwards of 50,000 Jews resettled in Shanghai. Many of the refugees were professional and amateur musicians, and they enlivened the musical culture of Shanghai as faculty members of universities and members of various orchestras in the city. Pan Guang, "Jewish in China: From Pan's Lecture at Harvard University," *Jiefang Ribao* [Liberation Daily], Shanghai, February 22, 2005, front page.

“heterogeneous mixture of Shanghai’s population (Chinese as well as foreign) was reflected in the city’s vibrant and diverse cultural life.”<sup>160</sup> Indeed, Western opera and symphonic music as well as Western-influenced spoken drama were performed in Shanghai long before they were seen elsewhere in China. Even Shanghai dialect was not based on the dialect that the native people in Shanghai speak, but more based on the dialect of Ningbo (of Zhejiang province), many of which were entrepreneurs owning factories and shops in Shanghai or merchants. In addition, there were more foreign words, known as *yangjingbang*, used among people in Shanghai.

Over the last century, Chinese culture has aligned itself along the two poles of Beijing and Shanghai. Beijing, as the historic power center, represented conservative thinking and adherence to traditional practices. While Shanghai, as the nation’s economic power and international center, not only attracted Westerners but also Chinese scholars returning from overseas as well as immigrants from other regions of China. Thus, Shanghai represented new ways of thinking and a preference for novelty. The Shanghai school, as a whole, was more innovative by comparison. As the pioneer of a new culture, it integrated art forms from various countries and cultures, and it had no set guidelines for arts. Furthermore, progressive ideas in Shanghai about women’s rights in the modern world influenced the Shanghai school, and we see both a marked increase in female audiences as well as more roles for female protagonists on the opera stage. It was in Shanghai that the first generation of female performers was born and began to make a name for themselves around the mid-1920s.<sup>161</sup> Indeed, in the case of Yue opera, this originally all-male opera form from Zhejiang region not only turned into an all-female

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<sup>160</sup> Stock, Jonathan, p. 23.

<sup>161</sup> A number of female writers also flourished in Shanghai during that time.

opera, but also became the most popular operatic form in Shanghai from the end of the 1930s, with its audience numbers surpassing those of the national Beijing opera and Shanghai regional Hu opera.<sup>162</sup> As we shall see in the following chapters, both Hu and Yue opera lent their influence to the development of yangbanxi in the years leading up to the Cultural Revolution.

In such a culturally rich environment, the Shanghai school of Beijing opera readily absorbed new ideas and techniques, both from Western spoken drama and film as well as from other regional operatic forms.<sup>163</sup> The Shanghai school of Beijing opera, led by Zhou Xinfang (1895-1975), developed its own style of Beijing opera that was more creative and diverse, concerning itself with modern themes reflecting current changes in society.<sup>164</sup> Gradually, the innovative center of Beijing opera shifted from the northern capital, where it had originated, to the new metropolis. Indeed, Shanghai became the testing ground for Beijing opera performers, and it was often said: “no Beijing opera

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<sup>162</sup> According to a 1947 Shanghai tour guide, there were 34 movie theaters, 32 Yue opera theaters, 6 Beijing opera theaters, 5 Hu opera theaters and 5 spoken drama theaters in Shanghai. Most of the newspaper advertisements were about Yue opera performances. At the same time, Kun opera had totally disappeared from Shanghai stages. The rise of Yue was quick, from an unknown folk opera from villages in Zhejiang to the major and most popular opera form in Shanghai and southern China. Its success was best captured by Yuan Xuefen, founder and lead-actress of Yue opera, who stated that “Kun opera and spoken drama was the two wetnurses of Yue opera.” Jiang Jin, *Performing Women in Republican Shanghai* [minguo shanghai nuxing wenhua jiedu] (Shanghai: shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2010) p. 230 and p. 316. For more detail regarding Yue opera, see Jiang Jin, *Women Playing Men: Yue Opera and Social Change in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2009).

<sup>163</sup> In the book *Mei and Meng Xiaodong*, it recorded that Mei Lanfang first saw the civilized opera (*wenming xi*) in Shanghai in 1913 when he first came to perform. He was impressed and inspired by it as well as spoken drama performed by the Spring Willow Society (*chunliu she*). He returned to Beijing after 50 days performance in Shanghai, and started creating new operas such as.

<sup>164</sup> Zhou Xinfang was the most famous *laosheng* actor active in Shanghai. His stage name was *qilin* (unicorn), which is homophonous with “seven-year-old,” the age at which he first appeared on the Beijing opera stage. Zhou was associated with left-wing artists such as Tian Han (whom we shall meet again in Chapter Two), and he also performed spoken dramas as well.

performer can claim himself famous if he has not performed in Shanghai.”<sup>165</sup> Thus, performing in Shanghai, being acclaimed by Shanghai audiences and critics, and recording in Shanghai were the signs of success for any Beijing opera performer of that time period.<sup>166</sup> This Shanghai school of art tradition continued after 1949 and its spirit was invigorated in yangbanxi.

## Conclusion

Opera has a long history in China, extending thousands of years back to classical times. It has also played, for most of its history, a central role in Chinese culture. Opera in China is not a singular concept, but rather an extensive category of various performing art forms that can be distinguished in terms of regional musical styles and language forms as well as by the social classes that constituted its audiences. The core characteristic of Chinese opera is that it is a performance spectacle incorporating both music and dance to tell a story. But over the millennia, hundreds of distinct operatic forms have evolved, both competing with and influencing each other.

We have also seen how Beijing opera enjoyed particular characteristics and circumstances that drove it to the level of national opera. As an amalgam of northern and southern styles, Beijing opera offered a performance style with appeal across the various

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<sup>165</sup> The real fame of all of these famous *dan* stars began in Shanghai where they were invited to perform and many of them spent a considerable time in Shanghai. For example, Mei Langfang, who started performance in Shanghai from 1913, and moved to Shanghai after 1934. Song Zhanyou, “Tianzhan Theater House and *Haipai* Beijing opera.” (Song, a researcher at the Shanghai Social Science Academy, was kind enough to share this unpublished manuscript with me.)

<sup>166</sup> Yao Shuyi, *Cheng Changgeng, Tanxingpei, and Mei Lanfang—pingdai zhi minshu jingshi xiqu de huihuang* [Cheng Changgeng, Tanxingpei, and Mei Lanfang: Glories of Beijing Opera Masters from Qing to Early Republic] (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2009) p.349.



regions of China. Beijing opera had its roots in folk opera, and thus it appealed to the tastes of the masses. But as the favored operatic style of the Qing court, Beijing opera was also granted a legitimacy that encouraged the literati to become engaged in its further refinement, both as composers and as performers. And thus Beijing opera became the one art form that could unite China in its mass appeal, extending across regional differences in language and taste, and spanning the gap between social classes.

Beijing opera also proved to be a flexible art form, constantly reforming itself to adapt to the rapid social changes of China in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During the prosperous early years of the Qing dynasty, the repertoire of Beijing opera, much like its predecessor Kun opera, focused largely on classical tales of love and melodrama. But during the tumultuous years of the nineteenth century, when China suffered the humiliation of foreign encroachment, Beijing opera shifted its repertoire to heroic tales of famous generals, statesmen, and emperors from China's glorious past, reminding its audiences of their nation's greatness and reassuring them that one day these hardships would be overcome as well. In the early decades of the twentieth century, a Western-educated middle class began to emerge in the coastal cities, and Beijing opera reshaped itself to match the demands of a new society. The status of women, at least in the cities, was improving, with rising female celebrity in art fields including authors, directors, film stars, and lead actresses, following the trends of the Western nations. This new role of women in Chinese society was reflected on the Beijing opera stage; ironically, women were still subordinate, if they were allowed to perform at all. But the demand for stories about women for women led to the rise of the great female impersonators, such as Mei Lanfang and Cheng Yanqiu.

By the end of the third decade of the twentieth century, both internal and external pressures had fractured the nation. The Japanese were occupying the eastern seaboard, the Nationalists controlled the south, and the Communists the north; the conflict engulfing the globe was also being fought just as fiercely on Chinese soil. Once again, Beijing opera needed to adapt to new social and political realities, in part by reshaping itself along new trends being set by the Shanghai school as well as by incorporating key elements of the newly emerging and highly popular Hu and Yue operatic styles. Finally, Beijing opera needed to respond to the fact that China was a nation at war, and as such it needed to redefine its repertoire in terms of this state of affairs.

The change in Chinese society was reflected in the rapid rise of regional forms in Shanghai. At the same time, the anti-official and anti-Confucian content of the Shanghai school of theater reflected the attitude of the rising middle class, whose social norms were gradually turning away from Confucian morality, as shown by the disappearance of Kun opera and the gradual decline of Beijing opera. The political implications of these processes will become clear in Chapter Four. There, we will examine attempts by the Chinese Communist Party to reform Beijing opera into a revolutionary art form that could serve as an effective vehicle for political propaganda and social influence, an instrument that could both educate the masses about the virtues of socialism and arouse their passion for the revolution.

## CHAPTER FOUR: REVOLUTIONARY BEIJING OPERA

For two millennia, opera has been an integral part of Chinese society. Taking its stories from the collective consciousness of folk history and legend, and incorporating both folk and court music into its repertoire, opera is tightly woven into the fabric of Chinese art. Yet, opera in China is not a monolithic concept; rather, hundreds of regional operatic forms have emerged over the centuries, all having in common the idea of telling a story through music and movement, but with each developing its own performance techniques and musical conventions. This is not to say that the various regional forms were autonomous, for there was a constant process of evolution and interaction among them, creating a web of opera tradition in China extending across both space and time.

Likewise, China was ruled for two millennia under a series of imperial dynasties, each rising and falling in turn. Thus, the Chinese often view history as cyclical. A similar cyclical view can be taken of the history of opera in China as well. Over the centuries, the various regional operas have vied for the hearts of the masses, the approbation of the elite, and the protection of the court. Some of these forms have thrived for centuries, while others have lost favor with the people or the government and gone extinct. And a few, over the course of history, have risen above their peers to the status of national opera. However, just as no imperial dynasty lasts forever, the same can be said for operatic dynasties.

We can count three dynasties in the history of Chinese opera. The first operatic dynasty was ruled by a theatrical form known as *zaju*. Originating in northern China

during the Song dynasty (960-1279 A.D.), it rose to national prominence during the Mongol-controlled Yuan period (1271-1368 A.D.). The popularity of *zaju* was due at least in part to the patronage of the intellectual class. Blocked from public service under the Mongols, the Han literati turned their attention instead to the arts, including *zaju*. With their knowledge of Chinese history, literature and music, these scholars molded *zaju* into an elegant performing art; this endeavor also provided them with an outlet for venting their frustration with foreign rule. However, *zaju* declined with the rise of the new Ming dynasty (1368-1644). The second operatic dynasty to arise was that of Kun opera. Beginning as a regional opera in the southern city of Kunshan during the Yuan dynasty, Kun opera became the new beloved art form of the Han literati during the Ming period. With China once again under Han rule, the imperial exams were reinstated, and the doors to government appointment for the intellectual class opened anew. It was their patronage of, and participation in, this new opera form that drove its ascendancy to national status. While it would be simplistic to attribute the fate of various operatic styles to the rise and fall of imperial dynasties, it was nevertheless the case that Kun opera began its decline shortly after the ascent of Manchu-led Qing dynasty (1644-1911). This time, a hybrid form including features from both northern and southern operatic conventions gained national prominence. This third operatic dynasty marked the heyday of Beijing opera.

In China, history is cyclical, even within dynasties. Some emperors rule wisely, and the nation prospers; other emperors squander the resources of the country and bring it to the brink of ruin. Thus we can see that, even during the reign of Beijing opera as the nationally favored performing art form, there have been high points and low points in its

development. Regional opera in China has largely been folk art, produced by and for the great masses of common people. But for any particular operatic form to remain in national prominence, either governmental or intellectual patronage has always been required. The same is true for Beijing opera.

In its course from the Qing dynasty through the twentieth century, we can point out three peaks in Beijing opera development. The first peak came during the tenure of empress dowager Cixi (1835-1908). Intelligent and strong-willed, Cixi worked behind the scenes to achieve her political agenda in a male-dominated China. As an avid fan of the art form, Cixi provided the patronage necessary for Beijing opera to flourish, both in the court and nation-wide. The second peak in Beijing opera came during the late Republican era (1911-1949), when once again the disenfranchised educated class turned their talents to the arts. By this point, the Western influence on Chinese culture was considerable, and in an effort to demonstrate that Chinese opera was on par with that of the West, intellectuals such as Qi Rushan (1877-1962) devoted their careers to refining the art form. The third peak in Beijing opera came during the period known as the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Because of its status as the nation's premier performing art, Beijing opera was the obvious vehicle of propaganda for the communist government to instruct and influence its largely illiterate population. But to do so, a reorganization of the art form along socialist lines was needed. Spearheading this reform was another intelligent and strong-willed woman, this time in the form of Jiang Qing, using her influence as Chairman Mao's wife to achieve her own political agenda. And thus, Beijing opera once again reclaimed the heart of the nation under its new incarnation as revolutionary model Beijing opera, or *yangbanxi*.

## **Mao's Art Policy**

Shanghai's openness proved attractive not only to foreigners but also to Chinese intellectuals, even Communists. The Communist Party was established in Shanghai and most of its early members were radical intellectuals, many of whom had studied abroad in their youth and returned to Shanghai. However, the Chinese Communist Party has its roots in the May 4 Movement of 1919. Dissatisfied with the corrupt and ineffective Republican Government, upset with the humiliating terms of the Treaty of Versailles ceding even more territory to the encroaching foreign powers, and enamoured with the October Revolution of 1917 in Russia, young intellectuals took to the streets of Beijing in protest. A number of these met again two years later in Shanghai to establish the Chinese Communist Party. Unlike many of the founders of the CCP, like Zhou Enlai (1898-1975) and Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997), who had attended university and studied abroad, Mao Zedong (1893-1976) was self-educated and had traveled little even within China. Yet Mao was a skillful and ruthless politician who quickly rose through the ranks, especially during the chaos of the Long March (1934-1935) and after the establishment of the so-called "Red Capital" in Yan'an in 1936. It was there in Yan'an that Mao gave a now infamous speech that both solidified his position as party leader and redefined the role of the arts in socialist China.

Mao's famous Yan'an talk of 1942 addressed the leaders of the Communist movement on the role of revolutionary writers, artists and musicians in educating the people about the benefits of the socialist cause. The purpose of his talk was to "ensure

that literature and art become a component of the whole revolutionary machinery.”<sup>167</sup>

Mao regarded art in socialist China as the “screw” that held the revolutionary machinery together. More specifically, literature and art were to serve as tools to unite and educate people on the one hand, and as weapons to attack and destroy the enemy on the other.

The role of the artist, then, was to serve the masses and to help them “achieve solidarity in their struggle against the enemy.” To this end, Mao urged artists, writers, and musicians to give the highest priority to getting to know the people in order to understand how they thought and felt. In this way, socialist artists could create works that would be welcomed by the masses. “The thoughts and emotions of our workers in literature and art,” Mao exhorted his listeners, “should become one with the thoughts and emotions of the great masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers.” Finally, art had to serve a political purpose. However, Mao would not be satisfied with propaganda poorly dressed as art, but rather demanded the “unity of revolutionary political content and highest possible perfection of artistic form.” According to Mao, most people in literature and art were leftovers from the old society, who needed to have their thoughts rectified and life style corrected. In order to conform to the interest of the masses, we would have to “go deeply into life,” that is, go into the factories and farms to live among the workers and peasants to learn from them. Mao also called on art workers to adopt a new method of artistic creation, which is the unity of the realism and romanticism.

Mao’s Yan’an talk was the most important contribution to the development of socialist art theory in China, and it became the basic guiding principle for Chinese art

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<sup>167</sup> All English translations in this section are McDougall’s unless otherwise indicated. See Bonnie McDougall, *Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art: Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 1980.

after 1942. Although dressed in the language of socialist ideology, Mao's theory was in fact a modified Confucian ideology regarding the function of music, which was considered a tool for didactic purposes that had to be put under state control.<sup>168</sup> For example, in the Confucian text *The Book of Rites*, we find the following passage:

When the early rulers formed the rituals and music, their purpose was not to satisfy the ... ear and eye, but rather to teach the people to moderate their likes and hates, and bring them back to the correct direction in life.”<sup>169</sup>

In other words, music was for education, not entertainment. This was exactly Mao's view of art as well:

[L]iterature and art [are] a component part of the whole revolutionary machinery, so they can act as a powerful weapon in uniting and educating the people while attacking and annihilating the enemy, and help the people achieve solidarity in their struggle against the enemy.<sup>170</sup>

For Mao, the purpose of socialist art was to point people in the direction of the new socialist order he was striving to achieve for China.

Because of the role of music in educating the public within Confucian ideology, it had long been incumbent upon the central government of China to provide guidelines for, and oversight of, all musical activity, be it for popular entertainment or court ceremony.

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<sup>168</sup> About 2500 years ago, Confucius designated six subjects as necessary for education. According to their importance, the first was ritual and the second was music.

<sup>169</sup> *Book of Rites (Liji)* is one of the five Chinese classics of the Confucian canon. It describes the social forms, governmental system, and ancient ceremonial rites of the Zhou Dynasty (c. 1050-256 BC). The original text is believed to have been compiled by Confucius himself. Translation from Liang Mingyue, *Music of the Billion* (New York: Heinrichshofen, 1985), p. 171.

<sup>170</sup> Mao Zedong, “Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Art and Literature.” Translation by Bonnie McDougall, McDougall, Bonnie. *Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art: Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 1980p. 114.



Thus, when Mao insisted that art, including music, must be subordinate to politics, it is clear that his thinking was influenced by traditional Confucian philosophy as well as the standard practice of past imperial governments. Likewise, when Mao called on artists to get to know the people properly in order to create truly proletarian works welcomed by the masses, he was also following traditional governmental procedure. Imperial governments in China typically established state music bureaus whose role, in addition to providing ceremonial music at court, was to go out to the provinces and collect regional folk songs. These collections were then presented to the imperial court so that it could gauge the temperament and sentiment of the people. Selections from these compilations also served as raw material for the composition of new court music. The Lu Xun Art Academy established at Yan'an served a similar purpose, in that it sent its music students into Communist-held areas to collect some two thousand folk songs for the similar purpose of getting a measure of the daily life of the common person.<sup>171</sup> Folk music that resonated with the populace was then modified for propaganda purposes.

However, Mao did break with the past in his treatment of musicians. Generally speaking, performers in imperial China were relegated to the lowest level of society, classified together with sex workers. In other words, they were expected to entertain both musically and bodily, much as were the geisha of Japan, and their activities were largely confined to certain city districts known as *goulán washe*, which were run by the local government. These entertainers were disenfranchised until the Qing dynasty, when they were given the right to choose other professions or marry outside their class; however,

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<sup>171</sup> This practice is recounted in the 1984 film *Yellow Earth* by Chen Kaige, one of the so-called Fifth-Generation Chinese Filmmakers. The film tells the story of a Communist soldier sent to the countryside in the spring of 1939 to collect folk songs for the Communist Revolution while living with a poor family.

they were still largely stigmatized by society. In Communist-held Yan'an, though, musicians were classified as “art workers” along with writers and painters, viewed as important tools for raising the political awareness of the masses. In traditional Chinese society, writers and painters belonged to the intellectual elite; now included in this group of art workers, musicians saw their social standing greatly increased under Mao's regime.

### **Opera Reform During the Yan'an Period**

Yan'an not only produced Marxist-Leninists but also artists. Lu Xun Art Academy was like a magnet attracting many writers and artists from all over China, and the academy nurtured many writers and artists. The Chinese Communist Party at Yan'an strongly supported the development of all socialist arts, especially revolutionary Beijing opera. Indeed, the yangbanxi of the Cultural Revolution period can be said to have its roots in Yan'an. After Liberation, socialist art reform continued to be a high priority for the CCP, to the extent that power struggles behind closed doors were even played out on the Beijing opera stage, as we will see in several instances leading up to the Cultural Revolution.

The first revolutionary Beijing opera to be produced in Yan'an was *On Songhua River* (*Songhua Jiang Shang*), which premiered in July 1938, three months after the establishment of the academy. The female lead role was performed by Jiang Qing, who was the political director at the Lu Xun Art Academy in Yan'an. The male lead role was performed by A Jia, an art student in the academy at the time, who was later chosen by

Jiang to direct the early model opera *The Red Lantern* (*Hong Deng Ji*, 1964).<sup>172</sup> In some respects, this opera was unremarkable. First, it was performed by amateur Beijing opera performers, not professionals. This observation does not necessarily imply, however, that the performance was amateurish, as Jiang at least had already had considerable acting experience. Second, *On Songhua River* hewed closely to the traditional Beijing opera style, and there was nothing revolutionary at all about its form. In fact, it was largely a parody of the well-known traditional Beijing opera *The Fisherman's Tale* (*Da Yu Sha Jia*), based on a tale from the classic novel *Outlaws of the Marsh* (*Shuihu Zhuan*). On the other hand, this opera established a significant milestone in the development of revolutionary Beijing opera. First, the plot was set in modern times and its theme was relevant to all who had gathered at Yan'an. That is, the story recounted the heroic efforts of fishermen on the Songhua River fighting against the Japanese invasion.<sup>173</sup> Second, this performance likely marks the first time a woman played a major role on the Beijing opera stage. Although the Qing moratorium on female performers had long been rescinded, it was still the custom for males to assume female roles, especially major characters. All told, probably the most important political ramification of this opera is that it brought Jiang Qing and Mao Zedong together. It is said that Mao attended every performance; two months later, they married.

Perhaps the most successful Beijing opera after Mao's Yan'an talk was *Driven Up Liang Mountain* (*Bi Shang Liang Shan*, 1943). The story was based on the classical novel

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<sup>172</sup> The supporting role was performed by Cui Wei, who later became a famous film director.

<sup>173</sup> While no socialist themes were presented in this work, it is also important to keep in mind that the first order of business for the CCP at this time was to repel the Japanese, even if it meant collaboration with the Nationalist party. The fight for control of China would come after the invaders were defeated.

*Legend of the Marsh (Shuihu Zhuan)*, but what made it an appropriate work for a new socialist society was its glorification of the peasant class in its struggle against ruling class oppression. A Robin Hood tale, the opera revolves around the struggles of Lin Chong, an honest and patriotic government official who, frustrated with rampant corruption, flees his post and joins a band of outlaws whose slogan is “Kill the Rich, Help the Poor.” What was especially noteworthy about this opera was its focus on a heroic group as opposed to a single individual, breaking radically with Beijing opera tradition. After watching *Driven Up Liang Mountain*, Mao wrote to librettist Yang Shaoxuan and director Qi Yanming, praising their work as an epic achievement and calling it the beginning of the revolution against the old theater:

History is created by people. However, on the old theater stage people became dregs, and the stage was controlled by masters and mistresses. History is turned upside down. [...] You have turned this back and restored the truth of history. [...] This is the beginning of a revolution in the theater. I hope you create and perform more and more works, form a culture, and spread it through the whole country.<sup>174</sup>

Thus, it can be said that *Driven Up Liang Mountain* was the first opera to fulfill Mao’s requirements for a socialist theater. This was probably the most successful Beijing opera produced in Yan’an, given that it was subsequently transplanted into Kun opera and five other local opera forms. It was also revived in 1976 and 1977.<sup>175</sup>

A significant departure from the traditional Beijing style during this time was the folk opera *The White-Haired Girl (Bai Mao Nü, 1945)*. Based on a popular folk legend

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<sup>174</sup> Mao Zedong, “Letter to Yang Shaoxuan and Qi Yanming (9 January 1944),” *Selected Writings and Letters of Mao Zedong* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1983), p. 222.

<sup>175</sup> Zhang Yonghe, *Opening the Door of the Beijing Opera* (Beijing : Zhonghua chuju, 2009), p. 276.

from the Yan'an region, this work in many ways exhibited more characteristics of Western opera than traditional Chinese styles. Its music was drawn largely from local folk ballads and regional theater music, and it was sung throughout, unlike Beijing opera. Furthermore, the orchestra consisted of a mixture of Western and Chinese instruments, foreshadowing the decision by Yu Huiyong to employ a mixed orchestra in the yangbanxi he composed. However, while the style of singing was traditional Chinese, the opera did employ such Western techniques as duets, chorus, interludes and overtures.

According to Chinese musicologist Liu Zaisheng, *The White-Haired Girl* was a direct product of Mao's Yan'an talk and foreshadowed the future direction of Chinese artistic development in the People's Republic of China.<sup>176</sup> The original legend was about a white-haired fairy secretly living in a local temple, but the opera develops the story behind this legend, telling the tale of a young peasant girl who, after being abducted and raped by an evil landlord (the stereotypical villain in Chinese socialist drama), hides in the temple to escape being sold into slavery, while her father, bereft by the loss of his only child, commits suicide by drinking poison. Although the theme of the opera was about the oppression of the peasantry by the landed class, it still portrayed the common person as essentially helpless against this kind of brutality. In 1964, the opera was reworked as a ballet at the Shanghai Ballet School under the guidance of Jiang Qing and Zhou Enlai, and it was later counted as one of the eight original yangbanxi. However, this time the socialist revolutionary message was much stronger. In the ballet version, the father fights against the evil landlord but is overwhelmed by his thugs, and his daughter escapes to the temple to avoid further abuse.

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<sup>176</sup> Liu Zaisheng, *History of Chinese Modern Music [Jindai yinyueshi jianshu]* (Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2009), p.489.

After Liberation in 1949, the new socialist government enacted a number of liberal social reforms. Among these were the banning of footbinding, arranged marriages, polygamy, and the brideprice, as well as the promulgation of laws guaranteeing equal rights for women and promoting universal literacy. These social reforms were also celebrated by several operas composed during this time.

Caught up in the euphoria of Liberation in late 1949, the young Yu Huiyong composed the comic opera *Kua Nǚxu* (*Praise the Son-in-Law*, 1949) while still a student at the Shanghai Conservatory. Like *The White Haired Girl*, the music for this opera was based on folk tunes rather than traditional opera melodies, and it was also unusual in that it was a comedy, rare among Chinese operas. In the opera, two daughters compete for their parents' attention by regaling them with tales of glorious deeds performed by their husbands, who are both soldiers in the People's Liberation Army. In addition to portraying family life under the new socialist order as happy and fulfilling, it also met Mao's requirement that art should serve the people. Yu, as composer, librettist, director and lead actor, took his small troupe to various farming communities, factories, and army bases to perform the opera, in addition to more formal performances at the Shanghai Conservatory and other venues in that city. Thus, Yu showed from an early time his commitment to the new socialist-realist art program as outlined by Mao in his Yan'an talk, and it is little wonder Yu caught Jiang Qing's eye later on when she undertook the task of completely reshaping Beijing opera in the socialist mold.

Although produced in the local Shanghai dialect, the opera *Luohanqian* (*The Registry*, 1952) became popular nation-wide, with several of its arias entering the popular music repertoire of the time. The opera outlined the effect of the new marriage law across

generations by telling the story of two young lovers who wished to marry against the wishes of their families. The young woman's mother reminds her that she herself had not been able to marry the man she had wished to, but then later she laments the loss of her own youthful love and supports the daughter's choice. But with the promulgation of the new marriage law, the couple no longer needs the consent of their elders and is free to marry as they wish.<sup>177</sup> Unlike *Praise the Son-in-Law*, which was an amateur work and only incidentally dealt with the new social reforms, *The Registry* was produced by the leading Shanghai Hu Opera Company and directly took on the new marriage law as its major theme. In that sense, it was the first opera to fully incorporate Mao's "unity of revolutionary political content with the highest possible artist form."<sup>178</sup> Encouraged by the top Chinese leadership, this company later produced the opera *Among the Reeds* (1960), which under the leadership of Jiang Qing was subsequently developed into one of the earliest yangbanxi.

Although these two revolutionary operas reflected the new socialist reality, by and large Beijing opera continued in its traditional path through the first decade of the People's Republic. Mao lamented this lack of progress by complaining, "If nothing else is done, the Ministry of Culture should be renamed the Ministry of Emperors, Kings, Generals, Ministers, Scholars, and Beauties, or else the Ministry of Foreign Things and the Dead."<sup>179</sup> But then in 1961 a new opera was produced that shook China to its political

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<sup>177</sup>The New Marriage Law was enacted in May 1950.

<sup>178</sup> *The Registry* was well received by both the authorities and Shanghai audiences and received numerous awards, including one for the leading actress Ding Shi'e. In 1957, a black-and-white film version was made by the same performers. Jonathan Stock, *Huju: Traditional Opera in Modern Shanghai* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 180.

<sup>179</sup> Bo Yibo, *Reflections on Some Major Decisions and Events* (Shuogan zhongda jueche yu shijian de huigu), (Beijing: Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe, 1993), p. 1226.

foundations; on account of this, many historians consider *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* (*Hai Rui Ba Guan*, 1961) to be the opening shot in a political battle that led to the Cultural Revolution.

### **Jiang Qing and Early Beijing Opera Reform**

In a male-dominated country like China, women rarely played any role in politics or art. Yet, if a woman was cunning enough and ruthless enough, she could have significant influence on the course of events, as long as she was willing to operate behind the scenes. The empress dowager Cixi was a perfect example of this. For nearly half a century, Cixi was the virtual ruler of China; though technically no more than the widow of a deceased emperor, Cixi used machination and subterfuge to steer the court in the direction she saw appropriate. Historians may debate, on the political front, whether she extended the life of the Qing dynasty or rushed it toward early death. Nevertheless, it was her patronage of Beijing opera that drove it to its first peak of excellence. Half a century later, another strong-willed woman was also manipulating the course of events in China. Riding on the coattails of her husband, who now had more power than many emperors, this former movie starlet from Shanghai was not satisfied to control events from behind the scenes; instead, she would insist on thrusting herself center stage.

Born in Shandong province in 1914, Jiang Qing entered the world at a time of political and cultural upheaval. After the death of her father in 1926, Jiang moved to the major city of Tianjin to live with her sister. There she had the opportunity to see movies and operas, including a performance by the renowned Mei Lanfang. However, because of Japanese aggression in 1928, she evacuated to her uncle's home in Jinan, capital of



Shandong province. Always a wild child, Jiang ran away from home and joined a small traveling Beijing opera troupe, rising quickly within its ranks. However, when her uncle found her a year later, he brought her back home. Soon afterward, Jiang was accepted as a student at the newly formed Shandong Experimental Arts Academy funded by the provincial government. At the academy, she studied, among other things, voice, piano, and dance as well as Beijing opera and theater performance. In 1930, Jiang joined a performance group sponsored by the academy that traveled to Beijing to present several theater and Beijing opera works.<sup>180</sup> Returning to Jinan the following year, she briefly married a local socialite, but divorced him to attend university in Qingdao. There, Jiang met some of China's most progressive intellectuals, many of which were involved in the communist movement. Although a student of Chinese literature, she was also active in a student performance group. She became romantically involved with one of the members of this group, who introduced her to the Chinese Communist Party. But when he was arrested in 1933, Jiang fled to Shanghai.

The following five-year period in Shanghai was a very productive time for Jiang, both as an actress and as a political activist. In addition to building a career as a stage and screen actress, she also published five short novels and numerous essays laden with Marxist ideology. Active in the Communist movement, she volunteer-taught at an adult-education program sponsored by the party; these activities led to her brief arrest in 1934. The high point in Jiang's acting career was the role of Nora in a Chinese version of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, a part that dovetailed with her crusade for women's rights in

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<sup>180</sup> The Beijing *Morning News* (*Chen Bao*) published the following advertisement on January 22, 1931: "Shandong Wang Posheng Kun Opera Company has come to Beijing, with Li Yunhe performing *Yu Chun Tang*." Li Yunhe was one of Jiang Qing's formal names.

China.<sup>181</sup> This accomplishment marked the beginning of the most successful period of her acting career and led to several important movie roles, followed by a highly publicized marriage to well-known screen writer and film critic that ended in divorce a year later.<sup>182</sup> With Japanese aggression now shifting to Shanghai, Jiang left the city for the newly founded Communist base in Yan'an.

Jiang arrived in Yan'an in August 1937. She had come to join the revolution, but her Communist party membership was not recognized by the CCP authorities in Yan'an, even though many of her party comrades from Shanghai were now in Yan'an as well. This issue was not resolved until her former lover from Qingdao, who had originally introduced her to the Communist movement and who was now a high-ranking party official, vouched for her status as a full-fledged party member. After her credentials were verified, Jiang was admitted to the Marxist-Leninist Academy, and it was there that she got to know Mao.

Mao and Jiang had complementary backgrounds. Whereas Mao had grown up in the countryside and focused his thoughts on the plight of the peasant masses, Jiang had spent most of her life in the major cities of China, mingling among the intellectual elite, and was well versed in literature, theater, and music. Mao was familiar with Jiang's essays on women's rights and with new trends in the arts, and they continued discussions on these topics in Yan'an. During this time, Jiang also took the lead in producing several

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<sup>181</sup> In his *Madame Mao*, Terrill quoted several reviews. One said: "Miss Lan Ping (Jiang Qing) has made us know the real Nora for the first time. When she cried, everybody everybody felt miserable; when she smiled, the whole theater was happy." Another said: "In the Shanghai Theater, 1935 was the year of Nora." P. 57.

<sup>182</sup> Jiang Qing and Tang Na were married in a joint ceremony with two other young couples in the film business. All six of them were famous and made headline news in Shanghai. When the marriage foundered, Tang attempted suicide three times, which again captured the news headlines.

informal operatic and theatrical performances and garnered praise for her first appearance in the spoken drama *Massacre of Shanghai* (*Xueji Shanghai*, 1938), a play dealing with the Japanese invasion of that city. The play was highly acclaimed by the Communist authorities and ran twenty consecutive nights. The central government even organized a banquet to celebrate this success, and it was on this occasion that Mao announced the establishment of the Lu Xun Art Academy in Yan'an.<sup>183</sup> No doubt Jiang had played a major role in raising Mao's awareness of the role the arts could play in driving the revolutionary movement forward, and she also played an important administrative role in the early years of the academy.

To commemorate the one-year anniversary of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident (7 July 1937), the official beginning of the Anti-Japanese War, the Lu Xun Academy presented a pair of works. One was the play *Behind Enemy Lines* (*Liukou Duezhang*, 1938), and the other was the Beijing opera *On Songhua River* (*Songhua Jiang Shang*, 1938), with Jiang playing a leading role in each. The following month, Mao appointed Jiang as Central Committee secretary in spite of protests from other committee members, and shortly after that they were married, again in spite of protests and only after Mao threatened to leave Yan'an otherwise.<sup>184</sup> Still, Jiang acted as Mao's personal secretary after this, and in this capacity she certainly had significant influence over his thinking.

For the next eight years, while the Communist Party was based in Yan'an, Jiang refrained from overt political activity, but we can clearly see her hand behind the scenes. One example of this was the establishment of the Yan'an Beijing Opera Company in

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<sup>183</sup> Lu Xun, pen name of Zhou Shuren, (1881-1936) was one of China's most renowned and influential writers of the early twentieth century, and he is especially known for his biting social commentary.

<sup>184</sup> Ross Terrill, *Mao: A Biography* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 307.

1942, which produced new revolutionary works as well as a number of traditional operas. However, the only new work produced during this time that had lasting influence was *Driven Up Liang Mountain (Bi Shang Liang Shan, 1942)*, based on the classical novel *Outlaws of the Marsh (Shuihu Zhuan)*.<sup>185</sup> Later in 1942, Mao also gave his famous Yan'an talk at the Lu Xun Art Academy, in which he outlined his vision for the role the arts and literature should play in building a new socialist culture. Certainly Mao's thinking on this was greatly influenced by his wife's ideas and experiences.

With the Japanese defeated in 1945, the uneasy truce between the Nationalist Party (Guomindang) and the Communist Party gave way to all-out civil war. In 1947, Yan'an was evacuated, and Mao and Jiang spent the next two years moving about the country as the war progressed. According to Witke, Jiang played an instrumental role during this time serving as Mao's secretary on the front line.<sup>186</sup> Jiang accompanied Mao to Beijing when the capital was liberated in March 1949; the rest of the mainland was liberated by October of that year, and the People's Republic of China was established.

In line with Mao's Yan'an talk, theater reform was high on the agenda for the new Communist government, and a new Theater Reform Bureau (*Xi Gai Ju*) was established the day after the founding of the People's Republic of China. The bureau was given the task of establishing new theater policies, leading theater reform, and screening theater works for political content. However, the bureau was disbanded the following year after widespread protests by performing artists, including the renowned Cheng Yanqiu, who, in a play-on-words in Chinese, infamously called it the "Theater Slaughter Bureau" (*Xi*

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<sup>185</sup> *Driven Up Liang Mountain* was adapted into several regional operas and was performed right after the Cultural Revolution in 1977.

<sup>186</sup> Roxane Witke, *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977).

*Zai Ju*). In 1950, the first national theater academy was established in Beijing, and the following year Premier Zhou Enlai announced a new theater reform policy known as the “Three Reforms,” namely “reform the theater, reform the artists, and reform the system.” Over the next few years, performing artists were politically indoctrinated, while opera companies across the country were nationalized. Jiang Qing was given the relatively minor position of Film Bureau Chief, but poor health kept her from actively pursuing this role.

However, Jiang did engage, during her tenure in office, in three skirmishes in the struggle for establishing the standard for socialist art. The first involved the Hong Kong movie *The Inside Story of the Qing Dynasty Court* (*Qinggong Mishi*, 1950). Jiang considered it unpatriotic and wanted to ban it; however, her opinion as Film Bureau Chief was not taken seriously by the rest of the party, and the movie was allowed to be distributed nationwide. Her attempts to publish negative critiques of the film were also thwarted until she at last got Mao to take a stand against it.<sup>187</sup> The second battle occurred in 1951 over the Shanghai movie *The Story of Wu Xun* (*Wu Xun Zhuan*, 1951). Jiang’s objections that the film glorified the wealthy landed class at the expense of the peasantry were dismissed by the party until Mao once again intervened.<sup>188</sup> The third battle involved

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<sup>187</sup> There was not a single article criticizing this movie until four years later when Mao pointed out in a letter to the top leaders that “we haven’t criticized *Inside Story* yet,” clearly showing Mao’s frustration and standing on this matter. Bo Yibo, 1225.

<sup>188</sup> Again, Jiang’s objections were ignored until Mao penned the pivotal article himself and published it on May 20, 1951, in *The People’s Daily*, titled “We Need to Pay Attention to the Discussion of the Movie *The Story of Wu Xun*.” The article was published as an editorial, but everyone knew it had been written by Mao, because of its style. To validate his points, a thirteen-person investigation group was formed to further the research. Jiang was among the group under her pseudonym Li Jin. (Li Jiaji, Yang Qingwang, “Following Jiang Qing for Wu Xun Historical Investigation,” *Bainian Hu Zazhi* June 2007). One month later, a long report (by her and two

not film but rather the role of literary criticism in the development of socialist art. Having read a new literary interpretation of the classic novel *Dream of Red Mansions* (*Hong Lou Meng*) by two young scholars at Shandong University,<sup>189</sup> she asked the editor of *The People's Daily* to republish it, but he refused on the grounds that the party newspaper was not a forum for free debate. And for a third time, Mao spoke up on Jiang's behalf. Describing Jiang's situation, Terrill states: "Every position Jiang occupied during the 1950s she had to wrench from extremely reluctant hands...[all] tried to hold her down to private life. Only Zhou Enlai encouraged her, and later she thanked him publically for it."<sup>190</sup> Apparently poor health was not the only obstacle Jiang struggled with during this time, for clearly the party leaders were simply not taking her seriously, even actively sabotaging her career.<sup>191</sup>

Jiang spent much of the next decade in Moscow seeking medical treatment for various ailments.<sup>192</sup> Although this drew her away from involvement in political activities back in China, her experiences in Moscow were nonetheless formative in her evolving ideas on Beijing opera reform. Using her title as China's Film Bureau Chief, she managed to gain access to a wide variety of movies banned to the Soviet public, including the most recent Hollywood productions; thus, Jiang kept herself well-informed

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other authors, edited by Mao) was published in the *The People's Daily* July 23-28. The battle ended with Zhou Enlai's self-criticism. Terrill, p. 176.

<sup>189</sup> Where Jiang Qing had attended classes and worked as a librarian in the early 1930s.

<sup>190</sup> Ross Terrill, *Madame Mao: The White-Boned Demon* (Stanford University: California, 1999, p. 167.

<sup>191</sup> Terrill points out that "a crisis had arisen that was more than medical. Jiang was forced out of the job on the recommendation of her superior, the head of the General Office [of the Central Government], Yang Shangkun." Ibid., p. 178. [Yang was purged from his position in late 1965.]

<sup>192</sup> Jiang Qing's illness was serious and recorded in many books. In Gu's book, it wrote, "During the [seven] years from 1955 to 1962, Jiang Qing almost spent her life on the hospital bed, a good period of time was spent in a hospital in Moscow." Gu Baozhi, *Yangbanxi shutai neimu* [Inside Story of Yangbanxi], (Beijing: zhonghua gongshang lianhe chubanshe, 1994), p. 15.

on new trends in Western film. She also met with noted Beijing opera performer Cheng Yanqiu while in Moscow, and the two exchanged thoughts on Beijing opera reform; furthermore, she praised Cheng for his portrayal of working class characters.<sup>193</sup> During her sojourns in Moscow, Jiang also had ample opportunities to see Western operas. On her return trips home, she mainly stayed away from Beijing and its politics, spending most of her time in southern China.

As her health gradually returned, Jiang resumed an active interest in opera reform. During her recovery period, she had frequently attended local opera performances as she traveled through southern China, and she read over a thousand libretti.<sup>194</sup> Among these, she handpicked four that she would later develop as model operas for theater reform. In 1963, after watching a performance of the Shanghai-style Hu opera *Hong Deng Ji* (*The Red Lantern*), a story about the anti-Japanese resistance movement, Jiang obtained a copy of the libretto and asked A Jia, the director of the National Beijing Opera Company, to develop the work into a revolutionary modern Beijing opera, that is, a work set in modern times and portraying socialist themes. Jiang played an active role in revising the libretto and selecting the cast. Later that year, she asked the Beijing Municipal Opera Company to develop another Shanghainese Hu opera, *Among the Reeds* (*Shajiabang*), which dealt with the struggle between the Nationalists and the Communists during the Anti-Japanese War, and she likewise played an active role in its production. In that same year, she also asked the Shanghai Beijing Opera Company to develop a new opera, which was

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<sup>193</sup> Cheng was Jiang's favorite Beijing opera performer. Jiang told Cheng that both she and Mao loved his performance and that she had especially recommended his works to Mao. Zhu Zhongli, *Empress's Dream: A Profile of Jiang Qing* (Eastern Publishing House Internal Distribution *Neibu faxing*) p.162. Zhu was a doctor trained and stationed in Moscow, who was with Jiang Qing most of the time during her treatment there.

<sup>194</sup> Ross Terrill, *Madame Mao: The White-Boned Demon* (Stanford: California, 1999), p. 217.

eventually named *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (*Zhiqu Weihu Shan*), based on the novel *Lin Hai Xue Yuan* (*The Snowy Forest*), recounting the liberation of Northern China.

In 1964, the two-month Modern Beijing Opera Trial Performance Convention, the first of its kind, was held in Beijing, with performances of more than two hundred operas. Among them, these three developed under Jiang Qing's leadership received high praise, at a time when her reputation within the Communist party was not very high.<sup>195</sup> Thus, these works helped establish her as a central figure in the field and ensured the future of her arts program. Soon after this political vindication, she saw the regional Huai opera *Morning on the Docks* (*Haigang de Zaocheng*) about the life of workers on the Shanghai docks, and clearly seeing the value in this opera as a model for socialist theater reform, she asked the Shanghai Beijing Opera Company to produce a revised version. The composer for this new version was Yu Huiyong, and *On the Docks* became the first of many acts of collaboration between Jiang and Yu.

### **Beijing Opera Reform After Liberation**

Shortly after Liberation, the new Communist government nationalized the opera companies, with both positive and negative consequences for those involved in the art. On the bright side, opera performers saw their social status rise from the lowest rung of society to valued art workers entrusted with educating the masses about the socialist

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<sup>195</sup> Furthermore, during the convention Jiang Qing was permitted to give her famous talk "On Beijing Opera Revolution." Although Jiang was among the five major speakers (Premier Zhou, Mayor Peng, Minister of Propaganda Lu Dingyi, and Kang Sheng) at the convention, she did not appear in the photograph of the national leadership on the platform at the closing ceremony. (See *Xiju Bao*, 1964, July 14-17). While the other speeches were published soon after the convention, Jiang's was not until three years later, in May 1967. It was only at this time that Jiang's contribution to Beijing opera reform was acknowledged.



cause. On the dark side, however, these performers lost the freedom to pursue their art as they saw fit. Now, as government employees, they were expected to perform works chosen by bureaucrats for whom politics trumped artistic quality. Two such administrators were Tian Han, who now directed the Theater Reform Bureau, and Zhou Yang, former president of the Lu Xun Academy in Yan'an who now served as Deputy Minister of Culture and Propaganda. Tian and Zhou hewed closely to the Maoist line of requiring all the arts to serve the cause of the revolution, and they clearly saw the propaganda value of Beijing opera. However, neither tolerated dissent among the art workers, stifling the expression of any contrary opinions.<sup>196</sup> Their approach mainly involved censoring any existing operas that did not have a socialist theme, which meant in effect that very few operas could be performed. In addition, neither man seemed to have a clear vision of what revolutionary opera should look like. Zhou Yang even suggested serving a broad audience of “workers, peasants, soldiers, intellectuals, students, staff members and commercial workers,” rather than Mao’s proposal to serve only the workers, peasants, and soldiers.<sup>197</sup> As the first decade and a half of the People’s Republic progressed, Mao became more and more dissatisfied with the lack of true theater reform, and both Tian and Zhou numbered among the first political victims of the Cultural Revolution.

In fact, Mao Zedong was engaged with Liu Shaoqi in a power struggle over control of the Chinese Communist Party during the years leading up to the Cultural

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<sup>196</sup> Mei Lanfang was forced to make a public self-criticism in 1949 because he advocated more gradual reform. Cheng Yanqiu’s most celebrated opera *Suo Lingnang* was banned under Tian’s leadership. Wu Zhuguang, film director and playwright, was politically persecuted for pointing out that the censorship of the Theater Reform Bureau had left so few classical operas on the stage.

<sup>197</sup> “A Collection of Zhou Yang’s Counter-Revolutionary Revisionist Speeches,” *Selections from China Mainland Magazines* 646:14 (March 1969).

Revolution, and this was played out on the Beijing opera stage as well. Beijing mayor Peng Zhen (1902-1997), who was allied with Liu, also saw the propaganda value of the performing arts in a nation that was largely illiterate. During the Modern Beijing Opera Trial Performance Convention (*Jingju Xiandaixi Guanmo Yanchu Dahui*) in 1964, Peng opened his talk with a call for Beijing opera reform, stating:

The first criterion of judging Beijing opera is whether it serves workers, peasants, and soldiers; otherwise, there is no future for Beijing opera.... The revolutionary ideological content must be integrated with the special artistic characteristics of Beijing opera. It is here that the difficulty of reform lies.<sup>198</sup>

Peng's speech essentially echoes the main points of Mao's Yan'an talk. Clearly, there was consensus about the need to integrate revolutionary ideological content into Beijing opera; however, the question was who would lead the process of reform and what the final product would look like. No doubt Peng saw himself as the one who should spearhead this reform, but he also miscalculated just how formidable an opponent Jiang Qing could be.

A few years before the onset of the Cultural Revolution, Peng had also involved himself in producing a revolutionary Beijing opera, an early production of *Azalea Mountain*.<sup>199</sup> However, his heavy-handed approach to restructuring the opera along revolutionary lines had caused considerable discord within the company, leading at one

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<sup>198</sup> Peng Zhen, "Talk on the Modern Beijing Opera Trial Performance Convention" *Red Flag*, 1964, no. 14.

<sup>199</sup> Ironically, this was picked by Jiang Qing after she saw the stage drama *Azalea Mountain* (*Dujuan Shan*) in Shanghai in 1963.

point to a fistfight among the performers.<sup>200</sup> When Mao called for a dismantling of the Ministry of Culture in 1964, Peng responded by forming the so-called Cultural Revolution Five-Man Group, whose job was to enforce the socialist line in all of the arts, including implementing revolutionary Beijing opera reform, and he named Zhou Yang as one of its members.<sup>201</sup> Earlier in the decade, Peng had sponsored the production of the Beijing opera *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, and when Shanghai newspapers began criticizing the opera as an attack on Mao in 1965, he had the Five-Man Group publicly deny the allegations.

This power struggle by proxy came to a head at the Modern Beijing Opera Trial Performance Convention in 1964. Jiang Qing, working with the Shanghai Beijing Opera Company, had become involved in the production of several revolutionary operas, including an early version of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, which was performed at the convention. However, Liu's ally Peng Zhen threw his support behind the Shandong Beijing Opera Company's production of *The Raid on the White Tiger Regiment*. A battle of tigers ensued as Peng arranged for the official Beijing newspaper *The People's Daily* to publish an article criticizing the Shanghai *Tiger* and praising the Shandong *Tiger*. Jiang retaliated by manipulating Mao and his entourage into missing a scheduled performance

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<sup>200</sup> Interview with Beijing opera performer Tan Xiaozeng. Produced by Hong Kong Star TV. Retrieved from: <http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/G45OKqd4g7Q/>

<sup>201</sup> Zhou Yang (1908-1989) was a Chinese literary and CCP theorist. Apparently, he lined up with Liu Shaoqi and Peng Zhen, even though he knew Jiang Qing back in Shanghai in the 1930s. Zhou joined the CCP in 1927 when he was a university student in Shanghai, and after graduation he went to Japan to study in 1928. He returned to Shanghai in 1931 and became one of the founders of the League of the Left-Wing Writers, leading the left-wing activities and movements in Shanghai, as well as serving as underground CCP secretary and chief editor of a left-wing journal. He arrived in Yan'an in 1937, serving as president of the Luxun Art Academy in Yan'an, and then later as president of Yan'an University. After 1949, he served as vice minister of propaganda, vice minister of culture, and chair of the National Literature Association. His most famous work was his translation into Chinese of the famous Russian novel *Anna Karenina*, written by Leo Tolstoy.

of Peng's favored Shandong *Tiger* and making an appearance at her Shanghai *Tiger* instead. With this act, Mao gave his tacit support for Jiang's line of Beijing opera reform.

Although she clearly had the credentials, with her experience in both Chinese and Western performing arts, to spearhead a modernization of Beijing opera, Jiang was not taken seriously by the male-dominated Chinese Communist Party in the early years of attempted opera reform. No doubt this was in large part due to long-standing male-centric attitudes in Chinese culture. Thus, although the male communist leaders paid lip service to the notion of gender equality, a change in underlying attitudes was far more difficult. Chinese history has had its share of powerful women, with the empress dowager Cixi as a prime example; nevertheless, these had been matriarchal figures would manipulated events behind the scenes, letting the males play out their roles on the political center stage. However, Jiang Qing really bought into the idea of the socialist woman that was strong, capable, and on an equal footing with her male comrades; indeed, she had been expressing just such ideas in the articles and books she had published during her early days in Shanghai. Thus, many of leaders of the cultural establishment—who were all males—did not welcome her involvement in their affairs and dismissed her interest as the hobby of a bored housewife.<sup>202</sup> Beijing mayor Peng Zhen, “who felt Jiang had no right to make destabilizing forays into the theater of ‘his’ city,” especially was a thorn in her side

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<sup>202</sup> It seems that Zhou Yang did not like Jiang Qing from the start. As early as 1952, Jiang Qing came across a story she wanted to turn into a modern Beijing Opera, but “Zhou Yang would not permit its completion (later a film was made about the same character but no mention of Jiang Qing occurs in the credits).” Terrill, *Madame Mao: The White-Boned Demon* (Stanford University: California, 1999), p. 181. Zhou also complained to Liu Shaoqi and others that “when Jiang Qing is present, work is difficult.” Liu told Zhou to raise the issue with Mao and Zhou did. “Jiang was forced out of the job on the recommendation of her superior,” Terrill wrote, “[and] it seems that Jiang's loss of her posts was strongly determined by the Mao-Zhou Yang conversation.” Terrill, *Madame Mao*, p. 178-179.

and tried to sabotage her agenda at every opportunity through his control over the media and venues in Beijing.<sup>203</sup> However, when Mao set off the chaos of the Cultural Revolution to wrest control of the party from Liu Shaoqi, he needed his wife's considerable social connections to aid in the struggle, and as Mao's enemies fell one by one, there was no one left who dared to interfere with Jiang's plan for revolutionary reform of Beijing opera.

### **The Cultural Revolution**

The official start of the Cultural Revolution was in 1966 when the Chinese Communist Central Committee Politburo issued a document known as the "May 16 Announcement."<sup>204</sup> However, some scholars, such as Spence, suggest that the 1965 criticism of *Hai Rui* marked the opening shot of the Cultural Revolution. But perhaps we should even look back to the 1961 premier of this opera, since Peng Zhen and his cronies believed they could launch this veiled attack against Mao with impunity. Although they did remain unscathed for several years, they ultimately misjudged the extremes to which the Chairman was willing to go to hold on to power, and they were eventually brought down one after another. At any rate, the Cultural Revolution clearly has roots going back several years prior to the official starting date. Indeed, Mao was losing his grip on the CCP after 1962, and he was struggling to regain control of the party at the same time that

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>204</sup> The "May 16 Notification" shows that politics had already entered a new phase of shifting power. Along with this announcement, Peng Zhen, Luo Ruiqing (minister of public security and secretary general of the Military Affairs Commission, Lin Biao's rival), and two other top leaders were denounced as anti-party elements and revisionists. They were immediately replaced by other leaders.

other party leaders were endeavoring to steer the country away from the hard-core Maoist line. The most interesting aspect of this extended power struggle was that the behind-the-scenes political maneuvering was publicly expressed as a debate over the nature of socialist art policy.<sup>205</sup>

In 1962, Mao launched an attack on the Ministry of Culture, warning against counter-revolutionary tendencies in the arts.<sup>206</sup> This criticism came to a focus around the new Beijing opera *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* (*Hai Rui Ba Guan*, 1961), written by Beijing deputy mayor Wu Han, a former Chinese history professor at Qinghua University. The play, set in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), tells the story of the virtuous government official Hai Rui who lost his job because of sincere but unflattering remarks he made to the emperor. Mao clearly saw this opera as an allegorical attack against him, portraying him as the corrupt emperor, and Peng Dehuai, who had been purged after the

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<sup>205</sup> In early February 1966, Peng Zhen and the other members of the Cultural Revolution Five-Man Group had a five-day meeting in Beijing, producing a report of their meeting, later known as the *February Outline*, that was distributed in the form of a central document by the Communist Party General Office. The document was intended as a defense against Yao's criticism of the Beijing opera *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*. Two months later, another document known as the "Minutes of the Conference on Army Literature and Art Work called Comrade Lin Biao on behalf of Comrade Jiang Qing" started to circulate. Interestingly, the nineteen-day conference also had only five members and was held during the same month, although the location was in Shanghai. The "Minutes," revised by Mao three times in eleven places, was issued by the same central Office, claiming that Chinese art society had been ruled by a "dictatorship of the black-line" for 17 years since 1949 and it is time to cut off this "black-line" and let the socialist art and proletarian occupy the Chinese cultural sphere. Bo, p. 1238-39.

<sup>206</sup> He stated at the same meeting: "To overthrow a government, one has to work on the ideology starting with public opinion. The revolutionary class does it, and so does the counter-revolutionary class." Zhang Shude, *Hongqiang* [Red Wall] (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2005), p. 354. Jiang Qing quoted this phrase in her famous speech on 23 June 1964, during the Modern Beijing Opera Trial Performance Convention. Jiang Qing's speech was printed and first circulated among the leaders. Chairman Mao made the following comment on Jiang's lecture on 26 June: "Read it. Well done." Shi Weijian, *The Unknown Stories of Jiang Qing* (Hong Kong: Xiefeier Chuban Youxiangongsi, 2008), p. 195. Jiang's talk was officially published as "Tan jingju geming"[On the Revolution in Beijing Opera] in Chinese (*Red Flag*, May 1967) and English (Foreign Language Publishing House, January 1968).

1959 Lushan Conference, as the virtuous official. Although Mao initially said nothing publicly after watching this opera, he asked Jiang Qing to work behind the scenes to arrange articles to criticize the opera. As the media was controlled by Beijing mayor Peng Zhen and his collaborators, Jiang could find no outlet for publishing negative critiques of the opera in Beijing. In early 1965, Mao permitted Jiang to solicit help in Shanghai, and Yao Wen Yuan, a young editor of a prominent Shanghai newspaper *Wenhuibao*, was given the task of writing an article criticizing the play.<sup>207</sup> In November 1965, Yao's lengthy article, which was revised three times by Mao himself, was published in the Shanghai newspaper *Wenhuibao*. Yao labeled *Hairui* a "poisonous weed," arguing that as a feudal government official, Hai Rui "could not be regarded as some sort of proto-revolutionary and defender of the common people against the abuses of the dynastic state."<sup>208</sup> Although it appeared, from a superficial reading of the newspaper articles, to be a discussion of the socialist merits of a new opera, in fact this was a cover for a behind-the-scenes power struggle between Mao and Liu, whose supporters had produced *Hai Rui*.<sup>209</sup>

Many scholars have blamed Jiang Qing for orchestrating this drama and misleading Mao into launching the Cultural Revolution right after that. In *Reflection on Some Major Decisions and Events*, published by the Press of the Party Academy in 1993, it was recorded that only one month later, in December 1965, Mao had said to his aide:

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<sup>207</sup> Yao was 33 years old then and had already won the respect of Mao for the quality of his anti-bourgeois polemics in the Shanghai press. Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 14.

<sup>208</sup> Clark, Paul. *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 20.

<sup>209</sup> This event was described as follows: "Mao Zedong sent his wife Jiang Qing to Shanghai on an undercover mission to light the first spark of the Cultural Revolution." Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 14.

“Yao’s article was good because it named names; however, it missed the target. The crucial point about the play is the dismissal from office: the Jiaqing Emperor dismissed Hai Rui from his office, and we dismissed Peng Dehui from his office in 1959. Peng Dehuai is Hai Rui.”<sup>210</sup> Ironically, while stating that “criticizing *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* was carefully plotted by Jiang Qing under extremely abnormal conditions,” the author also acknowledged that Mao was acutely aware of the allegory in the Beijing opera and single-handedly instigated an event to end this show, as Mao told delegates from Albania in May 1967:

At a certain point, a certain department of our country was tightly controlled by the revisionists... I suggested Jiang Qing put together some articles to criticize the play *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, but it was impossible in that ‘Red City’ (referring to capital Beijing).<sup>211</sup>

At any rate, we see Beijing opera once again playing a role in politics, this time mirroring on the stage the political machinations currently going on within the Chinese Communist Party and Mao’s struggle to retain his grip on power.

Frustrated that the Ministry of Culture did not promote socialist art and was moving to the side of the revisionists, Mao called for the dismantling of the ministry in August 1964.<sup>212</sup> Liu’s allies responded by forming a Cultural Revolution Five-Man

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<sup>210</sup> Bo Yibo, *Reflection on Some Major Decisions and Events* (Ruogan zhongda jueche yu shijian de huigu), (Beijing: Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe, 1993), p. 1232.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 1233.

<sup>212</sup> Mao said to Bo Yibo on 20 August 1964: “The Ministry of Culture should be called the Ministry of Emperors, and even better we should disband it altogether.” Later, in November 1964, Mao said: “The whole Ministry of Culture is corrupt.” Bo Yibo, *Reflection on Some Major Decisions and Events* (Ruogan zhongda jueche yu shijian de huigu), (Beijing: zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1993), p. 1227. The duties of the ministry were carried out by the Cultural Group until 1975, when it was re-established with Yu Huiyong as minister.



Group, which would ostensibly carry out Mao's socialist art policies, but instead attempted to refute Yao's claims and defend *Hai Rui* as healthy academic discussion. With Beijing clearly under the control of Liu Shaoqi and Peng Zhen, Mao sent Jiang Qing to Shanghai to elicit help from Lin Biao, who had replaced Peng Dehuai as defense minister, and was thus politically indebted to Mao. Lin called on his allies to be at the disposal of Jiang, who set up a three-week-long forum on socialist art policy in 1966; the end product of this meeting was a party document reinforcing the need to follow Mao's art policy and establishing Jiang's leadership in this effort. To further escalate his attack on Liu and his supporters, Mao had the Central Committee issue the so-called May 16 Announcement, which called for the need to purge the party of revisionists. This announcement is generally seen as the formal declaration of the Cultural Revolution.

Mao was truly a master politician whose strength was in fomenting unrest and using the ensuing chaos and an appeal to the masses to seize power, while letting others crush his enemies. Although he did not attend the May 16 meeting (chaired by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping) that denounced Peng Zhen and other senior leaders, Mao revised the "May 16 Notification" that came out of the meeting and added the following message to the document:

Those representatives of the bourgeoisie who have sneaked into the party, the government, the army, and various spheres of Culture are a bunch of counter-revolutionary revisionists. Once conditions are ripe, they will seize political power and turn the dictatorship of the proletariat into a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Some of them we have already seen through; others we have not. Some are still trusted by us and are being trained as our successors, persons like Khrushchev, for example, who are

still nesting beside us. Party committees at all levels must pay attention to this matter.<sup>213</sup>

Following this meeting, Peng and his cronies were removed from the Cultural Revolution Five-Man Group and replaced with a group loyal to Mao and led by Jiang Qing. By the following year, Liu Shaoqi and his supporters had been removed from power as well. In this way, Mao regained total control of the CCP, and Jiang total control of art reform in China.

The Cultural Revolution was a multidimensional phenomenon involving all aspects of society. Most scholars inside as well as outside China consider the Cultural Revolution to have lasted ten years; however, this is still being debated. One reason is that Mao officially declared it ended in 1969 when government authorities were fully restored in all walks of life as China's economy regained its strength. However, the main reason the Cultural Revolution is argued to have continued beyond 1969 is that some radicals such as Jiang Qing and her clique who rose to power as a result of the Cultural Revolution were still in active and were still trying to push radical policies in education, literature, art, and all disciplines of intellectual endeavor.<sup>214</sup> At any rate, it was through continuing political struggles, far more complicated than right or wrong, good or evil, that yangbanxi would take shape.

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<sup>213</sup> Bo, p. 1243.

<sup>214</sup> These close associates (such as Zhang Chunqiao, who helped Beijing opera reform in Shanghai, and Yao Wenyuan, who wrote the article criticizing *Hairui*) are those who helped her in 1960s, all from Shanghai. After Mao's death in 1976, Jiang and her associates were named as the "Gang of Four" or "Gang of Shanghai."

## Usage of Term Yangbanxi

Yangbanxi, commonly translated as “model opera,” is a term specifically designated for stage works, including ballet, symphony and Beijing opera, which were approved by Jiang Qing and other government leaders during the Cultural Revolution. *Yangban* means “model” or “prototype” in Chinese, while the word *xi* refers to any sort of performance. The Chinese term yangbanxi is preferable because the term “opera” does not have the broad meaning of the Chinese word *xi*; thus, model opera is misleading. Some writers refer to these works as “revolutionary Beijing opera” or “modern Beijing opera,” but these terms are equally problematic because there were many revolutionary Beijing operas or modern Beijing operas in China but not all of them can be called yangbanxi. In particular, the recently produced Beijing operas in China can also be called “modern Beijing opera” but not “yangbanxi.” Thus, yangbanxi is the only term that clearly defines the character of this category of artwork as it was developed during the specific time period of the Cultural Revolution.

The term was first used in reference to revolutionary opera in the Shanghai newspaper *Liberation Daily* on March 16, 1965, calling *The Red Lantern* “an excellent model (*yangban*) for revolutionary Beijing opera.” Two months later, Yuan Xuefen, the president of Shanghai Yue Opera, wrote for a Beijing newspaper, “The comrades of the National Beijing Opera Company set a good model (*yangban*) for us with their hard work.”<sup>215</sup> The first official use of the term appeared on November 28, 1966, when party

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<sup>215</sup> Yuan Xuefeng, “The Model of Excellence,” *Guangming Daily*, March 22, 1965. On the same year, *The Drama Monthly* (No. 3.) also used the word “model” in an article titled “Compete, study, surpass, and help: Performing revolutionary modern works.”

official Kang Sheng named eight revolutionary works, including five operas, two ballets, and one symphony as *yangbanxi*. One month later, *The People's Daily* published an editorial titled, "The Glorious Model of Carrying out Chairman Mao's Art Line" on December 26, 1967, which named these eight works as the "revolutionary art model nurtured by Jiang Qing."

This is probably where the common saying "eight operas for 800 million people" (*ba yi renmin ba tai xi*) came from. However, this saying is often misunderstood to imply that there were only eight theater works performed during the Cultural Revolution. In fact, these eight works were all created in the few years leading up to the revolution,<sup>216</sup> and by the end in 1976 there were nineteen yangbanxi in performance with several more in development.<sup>217</sup>

The term yangbanxi was officially designed as the name for this new category of revolutionary performing art in May 1967, when an editorial in the Chinese Communist Party ideological journal *Red Flag* declared: "Yangbanxi is not only an excellent model for Beijing opera, but also for all fields of the Cultural Revolution."<sup>218</sup> Thus, the meaning of model opera went beyond the realm of theatre, entering the political realm as the

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<sup>216</sup> Jiang Qing in 1975 claimed there were eighteen yangbanxi. But in a guest lecture at Shanghai Conservatory in November 2010, Dai Jiafang, one of the leading scholars of yangbanxi research, concluded: "There were in total nineteen yangbanxi by 1976." Interview with Dai in November 2010.

<sup>217</sup> Lu Zaiyi, Chair of the Shanghai branch of the China Musicians Association and one of the yangbanxi composers, told me "there were several nearing completion when the Cultural Revolution ended." Lu was the principal composer and in charge of the last model work, *Miaoling Fenglei* (Trials and Hardships of Miaoling), which was completed and in rehearsal by October 1976, the month when the Cultural Revolution ended. Before this, Lu was one of the composers of another yangbanxi, *Panshi Wan* (Panshi Bay), which was finished and made into a film in 1975. Interview with Lu Zaiyi in Shanghai in May 2006.

<sup>218</sup> Jiang Qing's 1964 talk "On Beijing Opera Revolution" was published on the same May 1967 issue of Chinese Communist Party organ *Red Flag*, together with an editorial titled, "Acclaim the great victory of Beijing Opera Revolution."

prototype for all other revolutionary art forms to emulate, acting as a major influence on the entire literature and artistic world throughout the Cultural Revolution.

### **Development of Yangbanxi**

From around the turn of the twentieth century, China embarked on a process of modernization that included both economic and political restructuring as well as adaptations in Chinese society. To the extent that the arts are a reflection of society, there were pressures on these to modernize as well, and Beijing opera was no exception. In Chapter 4, we will examine in more detail the various attempts at modernizing Beijing opera, culminating with the inception of yangbanxi during the years leading up to the Cultural Revolution. In Chapter 5, we will undertake a careful analysis of several of these yangbanxi works to see how Yu Huiyong was able to apply his theory to the practical task of creating a revolutionary art form that clearly had its roots in traditional Beijing opera but was nonetheless both relevant and appealing to the twentieth-century masses. In this section, however, we will consider the overarching sociopolitical themes relevant to the development of yangbanxi.

The twentieth century had seen many attempts at modernizing Beijing opera, but it was only yangbanxi that took root in Chinese soil and blossomed. Certainly part of the reason for this was that the Communist Party, now in control of China, saw Beijing opera as an effective propaganda tool, and this is why the government provided it with such massive support. Although Mao had called for Beijing opera to adapt to the new socialist realism as far back as his Yan'an talk in 1942, none of the attempts at reform had received the degree of governmental support that yangbanxi did under the leadership of

Jiang Qing. With Jiang fully in control of artistic development during the Cultural Revolution period, artists who were sympathetic to the cause were sheltered from political vicissitudes and in general enjoyed a stable and relatively prosperous lifestyle.<sup>219</sup>

The rise of yangbanxi was accompanied by new plays centered on workers, peasants, and soldiers as main protagonists on the stage, which created a new dimension in Beijing opera and changed both its repertoire and its acting style. For instance, the language of Beijing opera had become highly stylized over the centuries. Although Beijing opera was originally a popular art form, as it had become more refined, its language evolved into a form that was neither literary nor vernacular; hence it was criticized as crude by the literati while at the same time becoming inaccessible to its popular base.<sup>220</sup> Yangbanxi, on the other hand, adopted standard spoken Mandarin; thus, as the official lingua franca of China, it used a language that was viewed as prestigious to the educated and yet still accessible to the working class. Likewise, the characters portrayed in yangbanxi appealed to twentieth-century audiences, unlike those in traditional Beijing opera, who represented a lifestyle completely irrelevant to contemporary conditions, and hence much more difficult to relate to. Finally, traditional Beijing opera performance consisted of four types—singing, recitation, performance, or

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<sup>219</sup> The original yangbanxi performance troupes received special benefits similar to those given units of the People's Liberation Army, such as food, clothing, housing and entertainment, including the viewing of foreign films not accessible to the general public. Ju Qihong, *Music History of the People's Republic* (Beijing: Central Conservatory of Music Press, 2010), p. 120.

<sup>220</sup> For example, contemporary writer Lu Xun sharply commented: "Sure, it's elegant now; but most people don't understand it, don't want to watch it, and don't feel they're worthy to see it." This comment was specifically aimed at Mei Lanfang's performing style. Lu Xun, "About Mei Lanfang and Others" (*Luelun Mei Lanfang ji qita*), *Zhonghua Daily*, October 26, 1934.

martial arts—with different operas emphasizing different techniques.<sup>221</sup> However, the various yangbanxi operas more fully integrated all four techniques into single works than was the case with the traditional Beijing operas that had preceded them.

To ensure that the new proletariat art form met her exacting artistic standards, Jiang personally selected librettos, composers, and performers; she even specified the number of arias and the size of the orchestra in some of the works.<sup>222</sup> Despite Jiang's overwhelmingly negative reputation after the Cultural Revolution, for many who worked with her or knew her work, she was an extremely knowledgeable in all areas of Beijing opera and was respected as such. For example, Zhang Zhengtao, a violinist for a Beijing opera company during the Cultural Revolution, reminisced:

Comrade Jiang's directions were precise, detailed and very professional, from aspects of lighting, the arrangement of props, and costume design to the specific movements of the actors in a scene.... She really knew what she was talking about.<sup>223</sup>

This view of Jiang is typical of those who had worked with her in the development of yangbanxi.

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<sup>221</sup> Traditionally, any given Beijing opera could be classified as either a singing opera (*changgong xi*) or a performing opera (*zuogong xi*). But from the twentieth century, the category of martial arts opera (*wuda xi*) was added. For example, the opera *San Chakou* (*Fork in the Road*) is an opera that consists entirely of martial arts movements without any speaking or singing. On the other hand, many of the "civil" operas contained more speech than song.

<sup>222</sup> Yu Huiyong's wife Ren Ke told Yu that Yu had written several movements for *Taking Tiger Mountain* and that Jiang made the decision to choose just one of them, now used in Act V. Also, according to Ren, Jiang told Yu to add several arias to four of the earliest model operas, such as *The Red Lantern* and *Tiger Mountain*, to enrich the characterization. Interview with Ren Ke in Beijing in July 2010.

<sup>223</sup> Interview with Zhang Zhengtao in July 2006. Zhang was the president of the Music Research Institute at the National Art Academy.

Despite all the negative aspects of Jiang Qing's legacy, it should be noted that yangbanxi, for the first time in Beijing opera history, developed stories and characters on a large scale that the common person could identify with.<sup>224</sup> In the words of Jiang Qing: "Since as long ago as the Paris Commune, the proletariat had not resolved the problem of its own direction in literature and art; only since our work with revolutionary model opera from 1964 has this problem been resolved."<sup>225</sup> As Mao had pointed out, the Beijing opera stage was dominated by "emperors, kings, generals, ministers, scholars, and beauties," but the yangbanxi stage was instead populated with "workers, peasants, and soldiers" struggling with the same problems ordinary people in China were facing. Furthermore, yangbanxi allowed, for the first time, the development of true leading female characters, performed by women, as opposed to caricatures of women performed by male actors impersonating females. Certainly this level of gender realism was appealing to the masses, and it helps account for the widespread popularity yangbanxi enjoyed during its heyday and even now. In a sense, the expression "eight works for eight hundred million people" was true, especially in the early days of the Cultural Revolution. Because the Communist government supported yangbanxi at the expense of other performing arts, there was little else on stage for the people to watch. Nevertheless, it is hard to explain the sustained enthusiasm among the masses for these works in terms of simple political conformity. Clearly, these works resonated with the people, and popular involvement in the art form transcended political considerations. Amateur yangbanxi groups sprang up across the nation, performing portions or even full-length versions of the various

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<sup>224</sup> Mei Lanfang and Cheng Yanqiu both portrayed characters from the lowest classes of society, but they performed for elite urban audiences, not the rural masses.

<sup>225</sup> As cited in Editor, "Huanhu jingju geming de weida shengli" [Praise the Great Victory of Beijing Opera Revolution], *Hongqi* [Red Flag] (10 May 1967).



revolutionary works in schools, factories and villages. Music from yangbanxi was commonly sung or performed at amateur recitals as well as forming the basis for new amateur compositions. Local governments also provided support in the form of financial or technical assistance.<sup>226</sup>

At the outset of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government gave massive support to the production of yangbanxi performances. These were lavish, well planned and well publicized. For example, to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Mao's Yan'an talk, a month-long campaign of yangbanxi performances was conducted, consisting of over two hundred performances to a total audience of more than three hundred thousand people. By the middle of the decade of the Cultural Revolution, professional Beijing Opera companies from Beijing and Shanghai were taking yangbanxi works on tour throughout the northern and southern provinces of China.<sup>227</sup> Furthermore, during the early years of the Cultural Revolution, the Ministry of Culture arranged a series of classes in which the original yangbanxi troupes trained a new generation of rising young talent culled from various regional opera companies across the country, in

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<sup>226</sup> An Ge, *Brother is not Lying* (*Gege bushi chuiniupi*) (Guangzhou: Huacheng shubanshe, 2009), p. 117-120. An tells of his experience being sent with a group of urban youth to remote Yunnan province to help with the rubber harvest. While there, these youth formed an amateur yangbanxi group. Many of those active in this group later went on to celebrated careers; included in this group were: Yu Zhigang, professor of Central Conservatory of Music; Yang Liping, a well-known dancer; and Chen Kaige, noted film director. Interview with Yu Zhigang in Beijing in May 2011.

<sup>227</sup> See the report entitled, "Ba ge yangbanxi zai jing huiyan shengli guilai" (Eight yangbanxi returned home after performance in Beijing), *People's Daily*, June 17, 1967. Also see the article of August 26, 2006 on the website of the prefectural government of Anxian (Sichuan Province): <http://jyfwzx.my.gov.cn/anxian/798825983904841728/20060826/116766.html>

effect creating the formative experiences for a generation of musicians and performers still active today.<sup>228</sup>

After the original eight yangbanxi had become filmed versions around 1972, there was a new movement to “transplant” yangbanxi into local operatic forms. Numerous performing companies nationwide, including in remote areas such as Tibet and Xinjiang, got into the act.<sup>229</sup> Perhaps one of the most successful was the Xinjiang Uighur opera version of *The Red Lantern*, which itself was made into a motion picture in 1975.<sup>230</sup> By this time, there were a total of forty-eight yangbanxi transplants throughout China, thus clearly establishing yangbanxi as the true revolutionary art model, expanding from the cities to reach the majority of the population in the remote countryside.<sup>231</sup>

Generally speaking, yangbanxi libretti were drawn from earlier works, either literary or dramatic. For example, the yangbanxi *The Red Lantern* was based on the Shanghainese Hu opera of the same name, which in turn was based on the film *Revolutionary Successor* (*Geming Ziyou Houlairen*, 1963). The yangbanxi *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, on the other hand, was developed from the novel *Lin Hai Xue Yuan* (*Through the Snowy Field*, 1957). However, the original stories were adapted to meet the needs of the new socialist art form.

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<sup>228</sup> In an interview with the author, Yang Nailin, composition professor at the Central Conservatory of Music, vividly recalled his experience of attending such a yangbanxi training class in 1974 as well as his first-hand observation of Yu Huiyong directing a rehearsal of *Azalea Mountain*. Interview with Yang Nailin in Beijing in June 2011.

<sup>229</sup> Ma Shaobo, gen. ed., *Zhongguo Jinju Shi* (A History of China's Beijing Opera), (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1999), p.1994.

<sup>230</sup> Interview with Wulan Jie in Beijing in July 2011. Wulan served as president of the Xinjiang Song, Dance and Drama Company (Xinjiang gewu huaju yuan).

<sup>231</sup> Xi Yuan, “New Products of Art Revolution: Transplanted yangbanxi during national art performances,” *People's Daily*, December 2, 1975.

In particular, there was a tendency to exaggerate characters, with heroes being larger than life and villains demonized. For example, several versions of *The White Haired Girl* were produced in the 1940s and 1950s, and the story revolves around a poor peasant who is forced to sell his daughter to an evil landlord to settle a debt. In pre-yangbanxi renditions, the daughter resigns herself to her fate, and the father kills himself out of remorse. However, in the yangbanxi version, the father dies at the hands of the landlord's thugs while trying to rescue his daughter, who does eventually escape, thus creating a positive image of a working class that was not powerless against the abuse of the wealthy landowners. From the beginning, the landlord had been portrayed as a villain, but, to further demonize the landed class, his wife was developed in the yangbanxi ballet as a particularly insidious character. While going through the pretenses of being a devout Buddhist, the wife nonetheless abused her servants physically and emotionally, in clear violation of the tenets of her faith. No doubt this was also intended as an illustration of the insincerity of religious practices in general, in line with Marxist theory. This polarization of characters, and the changes in plot that were necessary to accommodate these new heroes and villains, was needed to emphasize new revolutionary themes, particularly Mao's call for continuous class struggle.

The evolution of yangbanxi can be divided into three stages according to the quality and maturity of its musical composition. The first stage includes works such as *The Red Lantern* and *Among the Reeds* (*Shajiabang*, 1964). Most of the music in these early works was composed prior to their inclusion in the Modern Beijing Opera Trial Performance Convention of 1964, and except for minor changes, this is the music still known today. The middle stage is represented by works like *Taking Tiger Mountain* by

*Strategy* and *On the Docks*, which underwent extensive revision from 1965 to 1969.<sup>232</sup>

The final stage refers to original works created after 1969, such as *Ode to Dragon River* and *Azalea Mountain*.

The early reforms, as exhibited in such works as *The Red Lantern* and *Among the Reeds*, primarily focused on performance technique and less on musical innovation. The major challenge was to solve how to represent working class heroes in a classical tradition. Two examples can serve to illustrate the innovations of this early stage. First, *shuixiu* (water sleeves), one of the most distinguishing characteristics of traditional opera, would have appeared absurd in the new theater program emphasizing revolutionary realism.<sup>233</sup> Instead, the actors wore costumes that reflected the dress of everyday people. Likewise, *suibu* (broken steps), which the basic walk for female roles in traditional Beijing opera and represented the outdated and outlawed custom of foot binding, was similarly deemed inappropriate in modern opera. Women in socialist China, at least in theory, were equal to men, and their steps should be no less strong and confident than those of their male counterparts.<sup>234</sup> However, *The Red Lantern* and *Among the Reeds* still maintained traditional Beijing opera's musical vocabulary.

The most significant musical innovation of these early stage works was in the design of their arias. There was a shift from the traditional musical arrangement of *yiqu duoyong*, in which one melody could be recycled throughout the opera for multiple

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<sup>232</sup> However, both works were under continuous revision until 1972, when they were made into films.

<sup>233</sup> The term "water sleeves" refers to the long ornamental sleeves of traditional Beijing opera costume as well as to a performance technique of manipulating the flowing motions of these sleeves to express various emotions. Both Cheng and Mei were renowned for their skillful use of the water sleeve technique.

<sup>234</sup> These Beijing opera performers were taught how to act as revolutionary modern characters by Shanghai Hu opera performers.

scenes and characters, to the contrasting *zhuanqu zhuanrong*, in which a different melody is written for each character and scene—much like that in Western opera. *The Red Lantern* and *Among the Reeds* are the earliest examples in which music was closely tied to character in Beijing opera. Few changes were made to these early yangbanxi from their first staged productions in 1964 to the time they were made into movies in 1972.<sup>235</sup>

### Role of Yangbanxi During the Cultural Revolution

Chinese musicologist Ju Qihong, in his book *Surpass and Reconstruct*, called the Cultural Revolution a movement of “creating God” and interpreted the musical activity of that period as a “divine culture.”<sup>236</sup> In the same vein, Stephen Feuchtwang, author of “Chinese Religions” said, “The Cultural Revolution can itself be viewed as a secular or civic religion, and a ritualization for revolution.”<sup>237</sup> In order to justify exploring the Cultural Revolution as a religious system, one need not turn to Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. According to Durkheim, “A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things...which unites [a people] into one single moral community.” If the Cultural Revolution, with its cult of Mao, can rightly be viewed as a religion, then clearly yangbanxi served as its major liturgy.

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<sup>235</sup> The biggest change was that these two operas were requested by Jiang Qing to be reduced to two hours for the film version, from their original three-hour length for performance on the stage. Jiang Qing’s original statements were: “Working class people are hard workers. They have to work the next day. It is not desirable to make a long movie.” Interview with Dai Jiafang in Beijing in October 2010.

<sup>236</sup> Ju Qihong, *Surpass and Reconstruct*, (Shandong, China: Shandong Art Press, 2002), p. 287.

<sup>237</sup> Stephen Feuchtwang, “Chinese Religions,” in Linda Woodhead, ed., *Religions in the Modern World: Traditions and Transformations*, (London and Routledge: 2002), p. 99.

Following these terms and definitions, many social practices during the Cultural Revolution seem to fit Durkheim's description. Typical elements of a religion include a god-head, sacred texts, fixed expressions, praying, devotion, saints, and hymns. During the Cultural Revolution, Mao was portrayed as a god and savior. Mao's writings were taken as sacred texts and many of his quotations were frequently used as fixed expressions.<sup>238</sup> Furthermore, during the early period of the Cultural Revolution, there was a practice called "morning pleading and evening report," which had many of the aspects of prayer in other religions. Thus, in the mornings people were expected to plead to the Chairman to give them wisdom and guidance throughout the day; in the evenings they were expected to report back to the Chairman what they had done that day for the socialist cause. Likewise, Mao's quotations were made into songs that were sung in a daily fashion similar to that of religious hymns.<sup>239</sup> Indeed, in the early years of the Cultural Revolution, those quotation-songs were often accompanied by a frenzied "loyalty dance," until Jiang Qing put an end to the practice in 1969.<sup>240</sup> As the most prevalent musical production of the period, yangbanxi served a functional purpose in ritual practices such as establishing Mao as god-like, disseminating Mao's thoughts, and providing role models for people, thus providing an institutionalized system of attitudes, beliefs, and practices for the whole society to implement and adopt.

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<sup>238</sup> For example: "Never forget the class struggle," "Revolution is not a dinner party," and "Serve the people."

<sup>239</sup> There were hundreds of songs created using Mao's quotations and poems as lyrics. Li Jiefu, one of the most proficient composers in the early period of the Cultural Revolution writing Mao, once composed 17 Mao's quotation songs in four hours. In 1993, "People's Music Press published *A Hundred Mao Zedong Poem Songs*, among which 35 songs were composed by Li Jiefu." Huo Changhe, *Red Musician—Jiefu* (Beijing: People's Publications, 2003), p. 287-88.

<sup>240</sup> Dai Jiafang, *Zouxian Huimie* [Heading toward the Destruction: The Rise and fall of Yu Huiyong: Master of the Maoist Model Theatre] (Hong Kong: Time International Publication, 2008), p. 282.

Yangbanxi served to promote the cult of Mao.<sup>241</sup> In yangbanxi arias, Mao was often compared with the sun or other bright objects such as a torch.<sup>242</sup> By employing natural images of sun and light, yangbanxi depicted Mao as the source of life; thus, they played an important role in instilling a quasi-religious veneration of the leader among the people. During the Cultural Revolution, numerous posters and musical compositions referred to Mao as “A red sun in the center of our hearts” and a “savior of the people.” In addition, Mao and the Communist Party were often portrayed as identical or else juxtaposed in arias.<sup>243</sup> Mao was seen as the embodiment of the party, or as Stephen Feuchtwang put it, the party “became personalized in the figure of Mao.”<sup>244</sup>

Yangbanxi’s musical language and its modern style were good matches with Mao’s imagery and ideas, and they were very effective at eliciting deep emotions from the audience. First, yangbanxi music signified an avant-garde style by applying western music elements and techniques in Beijing opera to reflect a progressive image of Mao and the Communist Party. It also reflected the conception of socialist society: new ideas,

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<sup>241</sup> However, yangbanxi was not the first to start such a large scale promotion of the cult of Mao. In 1964, a spectacular song and dance paean *The East is Red* was created to honor Mao and glorify his leadership, employing more than 3,500 performers, and directed by premier Zhou Enlai. Combining more than 30 revolutionary songs, more than twenty dances, and five large choruses, as well as utilizing different performance types of singing, dancing, and mixed Chinese and Western instrumental music, this spectacle premiered on October 2, 1964 and its film version was disseminated nationwide the following year. (Current Chinese leader Hu Jintao, as a performer representing Qinghua University, joined the performance.)

<sup>242</sup> As shown in Changbao’s title aria “Wish to See the Sun in a Dark Mountain” in Act III of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy. The Major Arias from Model Opera*, (Beijing: People’s Music Press, 2002), p. 3. Also in the last phrase of Guo Janguang’s aria “Cannot cover the shimmer of red sun” in Act V of *Spark Among the Reeds (Shajiabang)*, and in Panshui Ma’s title aria “Chairman Mao brings sunlight and rain to the world” in Act VII of *Ode to Dragon River*. These arias are on p. 71 and p. 129.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., p. 125. As in the text of Yang Zirong’s aria in Act V of the same opera, “Every word of the party is the guarantee of a victory; Chairman Mao’s thought will forever lighten up and shine.”

<sup>244</sup> Stephen Feuchtwang, “Chinese Religions,” in Linda Woodhead, ed., *Religions in the Modern World: Traditions and Transformations*, (London and Routledge: 2002), pp. 86-107,

new culture, new customs, and new habits. In addition, it coincided with other changes within yangbanxi, such as new costumes, new stage design, new choreography, and much more.

Second, yangbanxi music created a glorious image of Chairman Mao, the communist party, and revolutionary heroes by utilizing familiar songs and folk tunes to enhance their significance and to construct an emotional bond between the leader and heroes or leader and audience. For example, the melody of “The East is Red”<sup>245</sup> is brought into two operas.<sup>246</sup> The use of this folk song not only provided a symbolic image and sacred space, but also formed a connection between Mao and the people by placing Mao’s image in the rural tradition. In *Azalea Mountain* and *The Red Lantern*, the music borrows melody from the song “L’Internationale” at a time when the heroes were facing death, representing the symbolic connection of Chinese heroes’ selfless sacrifice to a collective cause of Chinese and world revolution. The references of these songs not only provided deep levels of insight into the symbolic image and enhanced the literal meaning but also created a dramatic effect and aroused the emotion of the audience.

Third, yangbanxi music promoted new social standards and a popular culture by absorbing folk tunes and altering Beijing opera’s melodic system to create musically

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<sup>245</sup> *The East Is Red*, was originally a Chinese folk love song from Shanbei. Shanbei, located in northwestern China, is a region with historical and geographical significance. It is held as a revolutionary holy land as it was the Chinese Communist Party base for during 1930s and 1940s. The first communist art school, *Lu Xun Academy of Art*, was established during these years. It sent many students and teachers to the northwestern provinces to collect folksongs and was one of the thousands of folk songs they collected. The new text goes: “The east is red, the sun is rising, China has brought forth Mao Zedong. He works for the welfare of the people. He is the people’s great savior.”

<sup>246</sup> Editorial Board of People’s Music Press, *The Major Arias from Model Opera*, (Beijing: People’s Music Press, 2002). The arias from *Spark among the Reeds* and in *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* are on p. 74, and p. 27.



expressive and emotionally appealing arias for the masses. For example, in *Ode to Dragon River*, the popular aria “Holding This Treasured Book,” sung by the lead female character Jiang Shuiying, glorifies the benefits of studying Chairman Mao’s works and gaining wisdom. Since the audience perceived her as a role model, emulation of the character was encouraged. As Hung remarks, messages within songs can be easily implanted in memory because “songs appeal to emotions; they have little need for reason or argument.”<sup>247</sup> As Judd has noted: “From 1970 to 1976, the population at large was called on to sing the heroes’ words as well as to learn from their actions and thereby internalize their qualities and become more like them.”<sup>248</sup> Thus, yangbanxi played an important role in the shaping of a new moral culture.

Yangbanxi also played an important role in disseminating Mao’s thoughts and political ideologies. Mao’s quotations, like snippets of scripture from any religious tradition, could be readily applied to just about any situation, and they were generously sprinkled throughout all yangbanxi libretti. For example, Mao’s teaching, “Be resolute, fear no sacrifice and surmount every difficulty to win victory,” was quoted in two operas.<sup>249</sup> Besides incorporating Mao’s words into the text of the opera, another widely applied technique was to make use of stage setting. In one scene of the ballet *The Red Detachment of Women*, a Mao quotation was even incorporated into the stage setting; in this scene, “The proletariat must free mankind before it can free itself” was written on a

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<sup>247</sup> Chang-Tai Hung, “The politics of Songs: Myths and Symbols in the Chinese Communist War Music, 1937-1949,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 30:4:904, 1996.

<sup>248</sup> Ellen R. Judd, *Dramas of Passion: Heroism in the Cultural Revolution’s Model Operas*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 274.

<sup>249</sup> Mao Zedong, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong* [in Chinese and English] (Peking: Dongfanghong chubanshe, 1967), p. 343.

blackboard, and the dancers used their body language to interpret the meaning of the quote. (See picture)

Stories of saints are used in other religious traditions to illustrate the virtuous lifestyle; likewise, yangbanxi developed a pantheon of heroes exemplifying socialist virtues. These folk heroes populating the yangbanxi stage displayed a new set of moral qualities for the masses to emulate. For example, they demonstrated their devotion to Mao by studying Mao's works and leading others to believe in Mao's words. They also revealed a willingness to sacrifice themselves for the Party or people, and proving their dedication by giving the gift of safety to others at the risk of their own life.<sup>250</sup> Likewise, yangbanxi heroes illustrated and interpreted Party policies and political tenets through their performances. For example, in *Azalea Mountain*, the main character Ke Xiang represents a virtuous Communist Party member who "remembers the Party's commands and swallows personal hatred."<sup>251</sup> These heroes' actions and experiences demonstrated how Mao's teachings empowered them and led them to defeat enemies or to triumph in adversity.<sup>252</sup> Furthermore, the common people in these stories were portrayed as living

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<sup>250</sup> For example, Jiang Shuiying in Act VIII of *Ode to Dragon River* demonstrates her devotion to Mao by leading others to study Chairman Mao's works. Li Yongqi in *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* reveals his willingness to sacrifice in his aria "From now on I will follow the Communist Party to kill the wolf and tiger, no matter if I have to go through water and fire, or even have my body smashed to pieces." (*The Major Arias From Model Opera*, (Beijing: People's Music Press, 2002), p. 22). Li Yuhe in *The Red Lantern* and Yang Zirong in *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* exemplify their dedication by giving the gift of safety to others at the risk of their own life.

<sup>251</sup> This is how another character in the opera describes Ke Xiang.

<sup>252</sup> In *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, Yang Zirong could risk his life, disguising himself as a bandit member and working in the enemy's midst, because the Party gives him "wisdom and courage." In *On the Docks*, Fang Haizheng could face an intricate situation and without losing sight of her goal because "Remembering the Party [gives her] clear vision and clear mind." In *Azalea Mountain*, Ke Xiang credits Chairman Mao and the Party for giving her intelligence and sharpness in her aria "Thinking of you gives me strength, confidence and composure." Editorial

virtuously and in harmony with one another; likewise, communist representatives were portrayed as friends of the people, who in turn gave their full support to the revolutionary cause.

Yangbanxi, as the central liturgy of the cult of Mao, also played important social functions during the Cultural Revolution. Attendance at yangbanxi was regarded as an important social event for Chinese leaders and party members as well as for foreign visitors. Mao made an appearance at new yangbanxi productions and left his mark on each, whether it be a suggestion for a change in the title (as in the case of *Among the Reeds*) or the altering of a key word in an aria (as in the case of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*). Likewise, Zhou Enlai was famously remembered as having watched the ballet *The White Haired Girl* seventeen times and giving many suggestions for improvements.<sup>253</sup> When American president Nixon visited China, one of the activities arranged for him and his delegation was to watch *The Red Detachment of Women* with Jiang Qing and Zhou Enlai.

Yangbanxi itself was a sort of sanctifying ritual for the performers and the audience to demonstrate their allegiance to Chairman Mao and the Communist Party. Performing yangbanxi was considered a privilege and an honor. Professional performers received additional financial support and enjoyed high social status; some were even promoted to high political positions.<sup>254</sup> Likewise, amateur performances were also

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Board of People's Music Press, *The Major Arias From Model Opera*, (Beijing: People's Music Press, 2002), p. 27, p. 90, p. 225.

<sup>253</sup> Meng Bo, "Remembering Premier Zhou and the White Haired Girl," (Shanghai: Xinmin wanbao (Xinmin Evening News, June 26, 2005).

<sup>254</sup> For example, the lead dancer of *The Red Detachment of Women* Liu Qingtang, and the lead performer of *The Red Lantern* Qian Haoliang were both appointed vice ministers of culture in 1975.

encouraged across the nation, in an effort, as Judd points out, “to create a new popular culture.”<sup>255</sup> Participation in these events encouraged ordinary people to sacrifice self-interest in the name of the public good, which was in line with yangbanxi’s emphasis on moral behavior. Thus, yangbanxi performance served as an occasion in which communal values were reaffirmed and strengthened, as individuals and groups expressed their loyalty to Mao and united to protect and enhance the reputation of their faithfulness.

Conceptualizing yangbanxi as a religious ritual helps to establish the historic continuity of the meaning of religious ritual in Chinese society. First, there was a long tradition in China of worshiping the emperor and tolerating authoritarian rule, because the emperor’s power was seen as a mandate from heaven. Since traditional religious worship was not allowed during the Cultural Revolution, it was only natural for people to worship Mao as a god. Second, Mao needed to develop a cult of personality to legitimize his seizure of power as a “mandate of the people.”<sup>256</sup> Having unleashed the havoc of the Cultural Revolution to destroy his enemies, Mao now demanded absolute loyalty from those who remained in the party. Therefore, loyalty to Mao was the pivot of the dramatic construction in yangbanxi and was portrayed as the highest morality for people to pursue. In sum, yangbanxi was of high importance during the Cultural Revolution in promoting Mao’s thoughts and political ideology, as well as providing new social standards and role models for people to follow.

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<sup>255</sup> Ellen Judd, *Dramas of Passion: Heroism in the Cultural Revolution’s Model Operas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 266.

<sup>256</sup> Jin Qiu, *The Culture of Power: the Lin Biao Incident in the Cultural Revolution*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 22.

## Conclusion

For millennia, the Chinese masses played little role in national politics. Yet it was Mao's revolutionary genius to see the power in enlisting the masses to help him seize control of the country. Furthermore, Mao understood from early on that the only way to bring his revolutionary message to the illiterate masses was through the arts. That it is why it was so important for him to develop a socialist art policy already in the early Yan'an days, even to the extent of establishing an art academy to train a generation of socialist artists to propagate the revolutionary message.

Perhaps it was easier to push forward with art reform in Yan'an, since all present were already invested in the cause. But after the founding of the People's Republic, Mao had to deal also with artists who, though stoically accepting of the new regime, were by no means devoted to it. This does not mean there were no bottom-up attempts at cultural reform during this same period, for as we shall see in the next chapter, the need for a modernization of Beijing opera was keenly felt by those involved in the art form during the first half of the twentieth century, although not necessarily along socialist lines. Thus, it was not so much resistance to change that Mao had to struggle with, but rather with other approaches to reform that were also well articulated. In part, we must concede that Mao's line prevailed because he held the reins of power. But we also need to acknowledge that the long-term success of socialist art reform in China was due to an efficacious collaboration between Mao and Jiang, with Mao outlining the political objectives to be achieved and Jiang providing the technical know-how to accomplish those goals.

The Cultural Revolution was nominally an attempt to reform Chinese culture along socialist lines, but there can be no doubt that Mao's primary objective was to regain control over the party and the people. For Jiang Qing, though, this really was an opportunity to remake the culture of the country. With her husband once again firmly in control of the government, it would be her vision of the socialist arts in general and revolutionary Beijing opera in particular that would drive the modernization of China's most iconic performing art.

Yangbanxi was the artistic centerpiece of the Cultural Revolution and a direct product of revolutionary artistic theory and practice. Although the Chinese Communist Party had been trying for more than two decades to encourage the development of revolutionary opera, it took a particular confluence of factors during the Cultural Revolution for this goal to finally be achieved. First, the endeavor required unwavering political support, and this was not achieved until Mao finally eliminated all factions opposed to his plan for building a socialist China. Second, opera reform could not be successful without the full cooperation of a large group of artists, and this could not happen until the older generation, invested in the traditional forms and practices, had given way to a younger generation devoted to the revolutionary cause. And third, it required a leader with a clear vision of what revolutionary Beijing opera would look like, and who could clearly articulate the steps needed to achieve that goal.

It was only under the aegis of Jiang Qing from the early 1960s that true reform of Beijing opera in line with Mao's vision of socialist art was achieved. Many leaders of the cultural establishment dismissed her interest in culture as the hobby of a bored housewife and tried to sabotage her agenda. But as we shall see in the follow chapter, her detractors

seriously underestimated her ability, and she played a crucial role in the development of a comprehensive revolutionary arts program throughout China, especially in the transformation of traditional Beijing opera into yangbanxi.

Beijing opera has always been riddled with contradictions. As a hybrid art form, forces desiring to maintain tradition clashed with forces for innovation, and its grass roots origin conflicted with the aspirations of its practitioners to achieve a high level of aesthetics. Societal changes in the twentieth century challenged the ability of Beijing opera practitioners to adapt, and the contradictions inherent within it could well have destroyed the genre as a living art form were it not for its reincarnation as yangbanxi. Indeed, it was the development of yangbanxi as an art form that managed to keep the tradition of Beijing opera alive while at the same time molding it into a new living art form with important social relevance and widespread audience appeal. Thus, yangbanxi brought Beijing opera full circle, from its origins as folk opera in the eighteenth century to courtly entertainment in the nineteenth century and elite art form in the early twentieth, and then back to a genre with relevance to the masses by the time of the Cultural Revolution.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: YU HUIYONG AND YANGBANXI**

According to Carl Dahlhaus (1983), one has to understand the meaning of an act or event before analyzing its cause and effect. This understanding includes reconstruction of a person's motivation by empathizing with and being sympathetic to the individual and his set of circumstances. Following Dahlhaus's method, this chapter emphasizes the person behind the formation of yangbanxi and lays out the circumstances of his life, both personal and political, as a key to understanding the development of his avant-garde style and aesthetics. What we will find is that Yu was a musician and scholar with political convictions that were a product of his time, place, and personal background, and his compositions were embedded and manifested in China's social, cultural, and political realities.

This chapter follows the chronological development of Yu Huiyong's musical journey, from his early years as art worker in an army performance troupe, as a student at the Shanghai Conservatory, as a composer and scholar, to his later years as an official figure in China. Portraying Yu as representative of Chinese intellectuals, the chapter touches upon a variety of situations: his political beliefs and attitudes, the apprehensions he felt before taking office, his official duties and the mistakes he made, his dual role as composer and political leader, his strengths and weaknesses, and finally, his use of power to serve his mission to save the heritage of Chinese music tradition. This chapter demonstrates that one must have a finely nuanced understanding of the on-the-ground



political dynamics in order to understand Yu's artistic accomplishments and achievements.

Yu Huiyong was the most important force behind the success of yangbanxi. His unique approach to blending performing arts from East and West, ancient and modern, high art and popular culture in yangbanxi reflects a highly developed musical philosophy and aesthetic belief system. While stamping each work with his individual style, Yu simultaneously created operas that also stayed in line with the Chinese government's art policies. Contemporaries of Yu who were interviewed for this chapter all expressed their admiration for the man and his ability to capture the essence and power of Beijing opera, especially during a period when the theme of opera was restricted and musical expression was limited. Other composers were actively creating stage works over the same period, but it is widely believed that nobody, then or now, was better at the craft than Yu Huiyong, whose compositions were anchored in China's social, economic, and political realities. His knowledge of both Western music theory and Chinese folk opera enabled him to blend Beijing opera with Western elements and reach his goal of establishing a new national art with Chinese identity that was based on a new music and performance system. His opera was aimed at entertaining the Chinese people while at the same time preserving China's folk music heritage. His achievement in both Chinese music theory and Beijing opera composition brought the old genre to a new height and completed the transformation of Beijing opera from the classical form to the modern form.

## Sources of Information about Yu's Life

Before proceeding to Yu's life, it is necessary to discuss the main sources used in this chapter to recreate Yu's biography. Until recently, research in China relating to the Cultural Revolution was taboo (and to some extent it still is). Since most primary sources in China regarding the Cultural Revolution were classified until very recently, there has been little incentive for scholars in China to write about this period. Therefore, most research related to the Cultural Revolution has been done by Westerners or overseas Chinese, who have likewise been stymied by limited access to primary sources.<sup>257</sup>

Many scholars, according to Roderick Macfaquhar, based their research on secondary or tertiary materials that are out of date and inaccurate. This has produced a common flaw among these scholars—a lack of the cultural and historical awareness necessary to create a coherent picture. The use of this inaccurate information not only led to questionable conclusions but also created even more confusion. For example, Lei Ouyang Bryant's dissertation often simply passes on value judgments expressed by the Chinese press at certain periods and without acknowledging that these views have changed.<sup>258</sup> Thus, Bryant takes at face value statements in the Chinese press during the Cultural Revolution labeling the previous period as “a black dictatorship in the arts.” Bryant also accepts at face value later assessments of the Cultural Revolution as the Gang

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<sup>257</sup> There is a growing awareness of the dangers of circulating inaccurate information among Western scholars. See, for example, Macfaquhar, Roderick and Schoenhals, Michael, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge: 2006).

<sup>258</sup> Lei Ouyang Bryant, *New Songs of the Battlefield: Songs and Memories of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, (University of Pittsburgh Ph.D. dissertation, 2004).

of Four's "fascist dictatorship" and the period from the late 1970s through the 1980s as "bourgeois liberalism."

Other studies of Beijing opera and yangbanxi either ignore the Cultural Revolution altogether or at least downplay the contributions of important political figures such as Jiang Qing and Yu Huiyong. One such case is Elizabeth Wichmann's book, *Listening to Theater: The Aural Dimension of Beijing Opera*, which is a study of Beijing opera based on her first-hand experience studying performances in China in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The book provides detailed discussions of linguistic, musical, vocal, and instrumental components of the sound system in Beijing opera. However, it fails to mention the extensive changes in Beijing opera, as if *yangbanxi* never occurred or were not a part of Beijing opera.<sup>259</sup> Likewise, Clare Sher Ling Eng, in her recent article, "Red Detachment of Women and the Enterprise of Making 'Model' Music during the Chinese Cultural Revolution," claims to "challenge established narratives that portray the Cultural Revolution as a time of artistic famine and nihilism" and to rehabilitate the "eight model works."<sup>260</sup> Neither Bryant nor Eng give any meaningful credit to Jiang Qing or Yu Huiyong, even as they discuss the musical anthology and revolutionary ballet, which clearly emerged under the leadership of Jiang and Yu. This omission is more understandable if the author is Chinese and has written for Chinese publication.<sup>260</sup> Such omissions, as Jiang Jiehong has stated, either suggest the writer's belief in the artistic mediocrity of that decade or deny the reality that China's revolutionary history and its

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<sup>259</sup> Elizabeth Wichmann, *Listening to Theater: The Aural Dimension of Beijing Opera* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press: 1991).

<sup>260</sup> Clare Sher Ling Eng, "Red Detachment of Women and the Enterprise of Making "Model" Music during the Chinese Cultural Revolution," *voiceXchange: A Graduate Music Student Journal of the University of Chicago*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2009). Retrieved from <https://letterpress.uchicago.edu/index.php/voicexchange/article/view/29/62>.

current liberalization are part of the same discourse of modernity.<sup>261</sup> Indeed, Beijing opera, as a living art form, constantly absorbed features from the other operatic forms and adapted itself to the needs of contemporary society. Thus, from a historic point of view, the development of yangbanxi is the natural trajectory of Beijing opera and should be seen as the continuation of the effort to modernize Beijing opera, which started in the early twentieth century, especially in the endeavors of Mei Lanfang and Cheng Yanqiu.

*Yangbanxi* has long been overlooked by academia.<sup>262</sup> While an increased interest in China has produced a large body of scholarship in the West, virtually no serious musicological research on *yangbanxi* or the development of Beijing opera after the 1950s exists. To judge from recent publications in the United States, such as Terence Chong's 2003 paper "Chinese Opera in Singapore: Negotiating Globalization, Consumerism and National Culture," Nancy Guy's 2005 *Peking Opera and Politics in Taiwan*, and Daphne Lei's 2006 *Operatic China*, one might wonder whether Beijing opera still exists on mainland China at all, or if instead it has emigrated to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, or New York's Chinatown.<sup>263</sup>

Not surprisingly, research concerning music during the Cultural Revolution is scant, and substantial research on yangbanxi is virtually non-existent. To date, only two Ph.D. dissertations have dealt primarily with yangbanxi. One of them is Lu Guang's *Modern Revolutionary Beijing Opera: Context, Contents, and Conflicts* (Kent State

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<sup>261</sup> In his new book, *The End of the Revolution: China and the Limits of Modernity* (2010), Wang Hui argues that China's revolutionary history and its current liberalization are part of the same discourse of modernity.

<sup>262</sup> In *Burden of Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art* (2007) Jiang Jiehong criticizes the lack of scholarly attention to art works of the Cultural Revolution.

<sup>263</sup> Daphne P. Lei, *Operatic China: Staging Chinese Identity across the Pacific* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2006), deals with performances of Beijing opera in America's Chinatown.

University), an ambitious study that attempts to cover almost everything related to Beijing opera from 500 B.C. to 1997. In his preface Lu states that he was “an insider by virtue”—a professional violinist at a state-level orchestra and that he mainly played yangbanxi music during the Cultural Revolution. Thus, he was an eyewitness to many events, and later became a professional composer, a university professor, and finally a doctoral student of ethnomusicology. Lu declares himself to be an “objective outsider” whose goal was to “complete a thorough study of the Modern Revolutionary Beijing opera and share with the world one of the most extraordinary experiences an ethnomusicologist could have.”<sup>264</sup>

Unfortunately, discussions or observations that could be deemed “objective” are extremely rare. Instead, Lu’s study teems with extreme exaggeration, unfounded negative comments, highly biased judgments, and vitriolic remarks. Yu Huiyong and Jiang Qing are described as evil, ignorant about music and opera, full of hatred toward Western music, disliking Beijing opera, immoral, and so forth. His illustration of Yu Huiyong, the chief composer and theorist of yangbanxi, demonstrates his scornful and demeaning writing style. In his thesis, Yu was “only an ordinary teacher at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music before Jiang Qing found him in the late 1960s”<sup>265</sup> and “his innovation was only to add Western elements, such as harmony and orchestration into the traditional Chinese genre.”<sup>266</sup> He “climbed to the highest position” because “he was good

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<sup>264</sup> Lu Guang. *Modern Revolutionary Beijing Opera: Context, Contents, and Conflicts* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1997), p. xvi.

<sup>265</sup> Lu, p. 224. This statement lacks basic knowledge. Yu was in fact already a prominent scholar of Chinese music theory, vice-chairman of the national music department at the country’s most prestigious conservatory, as well as an eminent music critic and composer well before he became involved in the creation of *yangbanxi*.

<sup>266</sup> Lu, p. 225.

at flattering those above him.”<sup>267</sup> “After Jiang Qing was arrested, Yu was removed from his position,” Lu added, giving a cursory summary of the end of Yu’s life by stating, “Without any hope, he committed suicide.”<sup>268</sup>

However, what seems more problematic is his conclusion that:

The birth of model opera (yangbanxi) was tragic to both Chinese theater and Chinese art... Such radical artistic reforms that do not conform to the artistic and cultural values of a given society are destined to fail in the long run. Despite its destructive power and its short-term prevalence, *yang ban xi* (yangbanxi) failed in the long run. It was doomed to fail... because it was a part of careful political conspiracy.<sup>269</sup>

Anyone familiar with contemporary Chinese history would recognize that the claims in his conclusion are almost identical to those that appeared in the Chinese newspapers of the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is unfortunate that the author conflated research with “personal reflections” and relied on secondary or tertiary sources.<sup>270</sup>

Liu Yunyan’s dissertation at the Central Conservatory of Music, *Analysis of Dan Aria Music in Modern Beijing Opera*, is a rare study of yangbanxi music carried out in Mainland China. However, it is concerned almost exclusively with technical issues and very little with the social and political dimensions. As such its value is very limited.<sup>271</sup>

Published studies dealing with Yu Huiyong and his role in the creation of yangbanxi are rare. Richard Kraus, a political scientist at the University of Oregon and a

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<sup>267</sup> Lu, pp. 225-27.

<sup>268</sup> Lu, pp. 225-27.

<sup>269</sup> Lu, pp. 580-589.

<sup>270</sup> Lu, p. 6. I interviewed Lu’s classmate from Kent University Luo Qing, who is now a professor at Shanghai Conservatory. Luo told me that he does not agree with Lu’s conclusion and believes it has serious problems.

<sup>271</sup> Liu Yunyan, *Analysis of Dan Aria Music in Modern Beijing Opera*, (Beijing: Central Conservatory of Music Press, 2006). Dan aria is one kind of Beijing opera composition written specifically for young female performer.

leading scholar of Chinese studies, has written several books and articles concerning the art of the Cultural Revolution. His article, “Arts Policies of the Cultural Revolution: The Rise and Fall of Culture Minister Yu Huiyong,” illuminates cultural policy through the plans and personality of Cultural Minister Yu Huiyong.<sup>272</sup> Kraus’s treatment of the topic is certainly adequate for a study of this nature, and he seems knowledgeable about Chinese politics and art politics. The limitation is that Kraus adopts many views directly from the Chinese sources without a critical filter. Nevertheless, Kraus’s writings are relevant to this study and include many intriguing points that reveal important connections between politics and culture.

In China, only one book on the life of Yu Huiyong has been published, namely Dai Jiafang’s *Toward Extermination—The Rise and Fall of the Cultural Revolution Cultural Minister Yu Huiyong*. First published in Beijing in 1994, it was subsequently banned on the mainland; a revised version of this book was subsequently published in Hong Kong in 2008. Dai is currently director of the Musicology Institute and professor of musicology at the Central Conservatory of Music. He served as my adviser during my Fulbright fellowship at the Central Conservatory of Music (2010-2011), and during that period he was working on a new version of his research regarding Yu Huiyong, which he attempted to publish in China. He submitted this manuscript in 2011 but was denied publication by the examination committee. I find Dai’s work to be reliable and to have unique insights. Similar to Yu Huiyong, Dai has had experience as both a scholar and a politician, and before taking on his current position, Dai worked at the Central

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<sup>272</sup> One interesting detail is reflected in the title of his article, which is identical to Dai Jiafang’s book. Kraus’s title sounds neutral but its content is less than neutral, while Dai’s title is politically correct for publication even though its content is actually more neutral.

Government Cultural Bureau in 1990s, eventually reaching the position of vice minister of education.<sup>273</sup>

Dai is from Shanghai, and after graduating from the Central Conservatory of Music in 1983, he became a faculty member at the Shanghai Conservatory, where he had the opportunity to get to know many professors who had worked with Yu Huiyong. Dai started collecting materials and writing his book about Yu Huiyong in 1988, and finishing in 1991. It took Dai three years to find a publisher who would dare publish it. With many revisions, it was finally published in 1994 and only one month after its release, the book was banned in China. The book was denounced as an attempt to rehabilitate Yu Huiyong, who is still officially considered to be an affiliate of the notorious Gang of Four because of his collaboration with Jiang Qing.<sup>274</sup>

While concealing its true sources and disguising itself as fiction, this book nevertheless is a reliable source of information about Yu Huiyong, based on personal interviews and primary sources that no one had previously seen, in particular Yu's files and his 170,000-word confession from the Cultural Revolution. Considering that research on the Cultural Revolution was forbidden in China at the time, it took great courage and integrity for Dai to write such a book featuring a political figure and sensitive subject regarding music and politics. Contrary to Lu's study, Dai described Yu as a person who was musically talented but politically incompetent, who had both virtues and faults, who

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<sup>273</sup> It took many years for the central government to permit his resignation from such a high post and eventually allow him to be transferred to his current position. Interview with Dai Jiafang in Beijing in June 2006.

<sup>274</sup> In the 2008 Hong Kong edition of this, Dai fingers Minister of Propaganda Ding Guangeng as responsible for having the book banned. Dai Jiafang, p. 507.



was not as perfect as Yu's admirers claim, but certainly not as malevolent as in Lu's portrayal.

Yu's biographical information provided in this study is largely based on numerous interviews with Yu's family members, including his widow Ren Ke, his nephew Xin Jixian, and his daughter Yu Jiayi. The major events, dates, and activities presented here are consistent with the standard brief biographies appearing in recent publications of Yu's books, as well as with the events of Yu's life as portrayed in Dai's book. In addition, I have also interviewed dozens of Yu's former students and colleagues, as well as a number of Yu's contemporaries who were familiar with his work. Thus, the story of Yu Huiyong's life and career as presented in this and the following chapters is based mainly on the first-hand accounts of those who knew the man and his work.

### **Early Life**

Yu was born into a peasant family in a small fishing village on the coast of Shandong province on June 24, 1925. Yu displayed musical talent in music very early in life. According to his mother, Yu could recite songs after he heard them only once or twice. He was an only child and very close to his mother, especially after the death of his father when he was only eight. Yu was a sickly child, and as he grew up in a remote village that lacked both doctors and medicine, music was his greatest comfort. His mother was considered one of the village's best singers, and her songs brightened Yu's

childhood, providing him with joy and peace.<sup>275</sup> During restful seasons on the agricultural calendar, his mother took the impressionable Yu to watch touring theater troupes at nearby villages whenever possible. Under his mother's nurturing hand, he developed a particular interest in Beijing opera. He later taught himself to play several folk instruments, including the *erhu* (a two-stringed fiddle), *sanxian* (a plucked string instrument), and *dizi* (a folk flute made of bamboo). He loved the local folk songs, dance, and theater.

When Yu's mother could no longer afford his schooling, Yu set out to earn his own keep at the age of fifteen. He packed up his few belongings and left his mother to work as an assistant accountant at a factory in a small town about 300 miles from his home. He worked only for room and board, but the food was never enough. Yu quit the job, returned to his hometown, and taught at a local school in order to escape conscription by the Nationalist Army.

Yu had come of age at a time when two wars were being fought on Chinese soil—the protracted civil war between Nationalists and Communists on the one hand and the War of Japanese Resistance on the other. Influenced by the popular anti-Japanese songs of the period, Yu wrote a letter to the Communist songwriter, Chen Zhi'ang, who encouraged him to join the revolution.<sup>276</sup> He left his comfortable teaching position and set off on foot without saying goodbye to his mother, whom he could not bear to burden with the constant worry of losing her only child. After three days of walking, he reached his

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<sup>275</sup> This is told by Yu's widow, Ren Ke. Interview with Ren in summer 2006 and many times in 2010.

<sup>276</sup> Dai Jiafang, *Zouxian Huimie* [Heading toward Destruction: The Rise and Fall of Yu Huiyong: Master of the Maoist Model Theater] (Hong Kong: Time International Publication, 2008), p. 32.

destination and joined the regional People's Liberation Army's (PLA) performance troupe. His many artistic talents were quickly recognized and put to use; he found himself in high demand for singing, playing instruments, acting in dramas, and performing in various folk operas. He even wrote song lyrics and drew propaganda pictures as needed. If that were not enough to occupy him, it was on this job that he first learned the skills of composition, directing, and play writing. Yu was in his element, and this experience prepared him for his future career as the principal composer, designer, and theorist of revolutionary Beijing opera by schooling him in adapting to demands in a rapidly changing environment.

Following the Communist victory, the newly established government provided free educational opportunities to underprivileged working-class students. As a beneficiary of this new educational policy, Yu was admitted to Shanghai Conservatory of Music (hereafter referred to as Shanghai Conservatory) without having to participate in the competitive national exams.<sup>277</sup> His years of service in the PLA, a period of industriousness for the artist, paid off with the opportunity to pursue higher education and formal research in musicology.

Shanghai Conservatory, founded as the National Conservatory of Music, was the oldest and most prestigious music school in China at that time, and many of its faculty members were trained in Europe. The majority of the students at the conservatory came from intellectual families of the urban middle class and had studied Western music from

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<sup>277</sup> Some leaders recommended that Yu study at Shanghai Conservatory because they considered him intelligent; others only agreed because they thought Yu needed to be humbled in such an environment. See Dai Jiafang, *Zouxian Huimie* [Heading toward Destruction: The Rise and Fall of Yu Huiyong: Master of the Maoist Model Theater] (Hong Kong: Time International Publication, 2008), pp. 57-58.

childhood. Yu Huiyong shared little in common with these students besides his love for music, but he soon proved his worth in this challenging environment. President He Luting was the first to discover Yu's extensive knowledge of and talent for traditional Chinese folk music, and he invited Yu to teach a folk music class while he was still a student at the conservatory. With the same industriousness he had exhibited in the PLA, Yu proved himself worthy of He's special treatment and confidence in his talents.

Unlike most government-sponsored students, Yu did not return to his army unit when his studies came to an end after ten months. Instead, he was retained at the conservatory from September 1950 as the head of its music ensemble. At one of the ensemble's performances, Yu was entranced by a beautiful singer from Shanghai, Ren Ke. They married in 1953 after a lengthy courtship. Ren, like Yu, had lost her father at an early age, but besides her mother, she was also responsible for supporting two siblings. Their responsibilities increased as a married couple when they permanently moved Yu's mother down from the countryside. They added two more mouths to feed to their already large family with the birth of their daughters in 1954 and 1956. Although they lived in a crowded home and depended primarily on Yu's salary to support the entire household, they would always remember this as the happiest time of their lives.<sup>278</sup>

### **Scholar and Composer**

Yu realized his weaknesses in the conservatory's highly competitive, westernized environment, and to make up for this, he designed and implemented a course of study for

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<sup>278</sup> The above biography was told by Yu's wife Ren Ke, Yu's colleagues and students during many interviews during 2006 and 2010.

himself in harmony, orchestration, counterpoint, and Western musical forms. Yu was promoted as researcher and instructor in the newly established department of national music in 1953 and became the head of the folk music theory division in 1956. Much as Bela Bartok had done in his early career, Yu made many visits to remote areas to investigate folk culture and collect folk songs, meticulously compiling, transcribing, and editing these collections. By 1958, Yu had published four volumes, namely *Shandong Da Gu* (Shandong Big Drum), *Jiaodong Minge Xuan* (Anthology of Jiaodong Folksongs), *Shanbei Yuling Xiaoqu* (Folksongs of Shanbei Yuling), and *Danxuan Paiziqu Fenxi* (Analysis of Danxuan Paizi Music). Yu's contributions to the study of Chinese traditional music can hardly be overestimated, as Dai Jiafang stated "from any angle, it cannot be denied that Yu Huiyong was the most influential musician in China from 1950 to 1970."<sup>279</sup> But these publications—ultimately, his only publications in his lifetime—exacted a great personal cost before and during the Cultural Revolution.

Yu's extensive research validated Chinese folk music as a respectable field of study and established himself as its preeminent scholar. His most significant contribution was that he integrated a wide range of individual folk styles and genres, such as folk songs, storytelling, and theater; he also formed a systematic theory of Chinese folk music, which he called, "Comprehensive Research on National and Folk Music."<sup>280</sup> His scholarship culminated in two widely acclaimed books that were never published in his

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<sup>279</sup> Dai Jiafang, "Yu Huiyong's Study on Chinese Traditional Music Theory," *Music Art*, Vol.1, 2008, p. 77-96. In this article, Dai declared that Yu's contribution was three-fold: first, research in Chinese traditional music theory; second, composition of Beijing opera and mass song; and third, influence in politics and policymaking.

<sup>280</sup> According to Lian Bo, Yu was a great leader and extraordinary scholar in this field. His research was widely recognized and their division became the model for other conservatories to follow. Interviews with Lian Bo in Shanghai in 2007 and 2011.

lifetime, *Research on Theatrical Art Music* and *Studies on the Relationship between Melody and Lyrics of Traditional Chinese Music*.<sup>281</sup> Many have deemed this the birth of Chinese ethnomusicology and Yu the father of the field.<sup>282</sup>

The decision to not publish was Yu's own. It is likely that Yu did not dare to publish any more of his works after being accused during the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957-1958) of "pursuing bourgeois fame and wealth."<sup>283</sup> Instead, he printed and distributed these free of charge to his students. Despite precautions to keep a low profile, his writings quickly spread nationwide, and his extraordinary influence both inside and outside of the Shanghai Conservatory was unmatched by any other music professor at the time. His theories had a profound impact on Chinese musicology, and Yu was widely respected by both colleagues and students.<sup>284</sup> His classes were in high demand, attended by students of various majors, including music theory, composition, musicology, and instrumental performance. Furthermore, students' lecture notes taken from Yu's class were copied and circulated at conservatories and universities throughout the country, notably at the Central Conservatory of Music and China Conservatory of Music.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> It was only recently that these two books were allowed to be published. *The Relationship between Melody and Lyrics of Traditional Chinese Music* was published in 2010 by Central Conservatory Press, and another new book *Research on Theatrical Art Music* is in press and will be published in 2011 by the same company.

<sup>282</sup> See Dai Jiafang, *Yangbanxi de Fengfeng Yuyu* [The Trials and hardships of the Yangbanxi: Jiang Qing, the Model Performance, and the Inside Story] (Beijing: Zhishi Chubanshe, 1995), p. 237. Qiao Jianzhong, who copied Yu's lecture notes on *Studies on the Relationship between Melody and Lyrics* in 1960s, stated that Yu's work "is the flagship among research in Chinese traditional music history and theory of the period" (Qiao Jianzhong, *Chinese Traditional Music* (China: Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press, 2009), p. 3.

<sup>283</sup> Dai Jiafang, *Yangbanxi de Fengfeng Yuyu* [The Trials and hardships of the Yangbanxi: Jiang Qing, the Model Performance, and the Inside Story] (Beijing: Zhishi Chubanshe, 1995), p. 236.

<sup>284</sup> Interview with an anonymous female musicology professor at the Shanghai Conservatory, who took Yu's class in the early 1960s.

<sup>285</sup> Qiao Jianzhong, the former president of Chinese Music Research Institute, told me that when he was a student at the China Conservatory of Music in early 1960s, he copied Yu's lecture notes

Beyond his academic research, Yu also commented on stage works, audience perception, and popular taste, which he considered to be the practical foundations of a new Chinese theatrical music. He frequently wrote music critiques for newspapers and magazines on issues ranging from differences in Chinese and Western musical practice to Beijing opera. His best known piece was the famous 20,000 word 1964 article, “On Issues of Modern Beijing Opera Music” (*Guanyu jingju xiandaixi yinyue de ruogan wenti*)<sup>286</sup> which included an overview of Chinese music history, exploring textual, technical, and interpretative questions, as well as addressing what he perceived to be the strengths and weaknesses of Beijing opera.<sup>287</sup> His writings covered the geographical expanse of Chinese folk tradition from the southern *pingtan* to the northern *jingyun dagu*, numerous samples of which Yu recorded and transcribed for posterity.<sup>288</sup>

The accomplishments of Yu’s early career also included a number of musical compositions. Although he did not compose a large quantity of music before writing Beijing opera, almost every piece he wrote was of high quality and well received. While still a student, he wrote the libretto, composed the music, directed the production, and starred as the male lead in a small comic opera, *Kua Nüxu* (Praise the Son-in-Law, 1950). It was performed several times for conservatory and public audiences and received a

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from a friend at the Central Conservatory, who had borrowed it from another student who had taken Yu’s class at Shanghai Conservatory. Interview with Wang Yaohua in Lexington, Kentucky in 2009 and Qiao Jianzhong in Shanghai in 2007.

<sup>286</sup> It widely known among scholars that Jiang Qing first learnt Yu Huiyong’s name from these articles published in magazines and newspapers.

<sup>287</sup> Other influential articles include titles such as “The Music Design of Guo Jianguang” and “Theater Music Should Serve the Purpose of Building the Heroic Image.” Yu started contributing articles to a major Shanghai newspaper, *Wenhui Bao*, even while a student at the conservatory. Interview with retired university professor Jin Maojun in 2007, who had worked with Yu for *Wenhui Bao*, as a student correspondent at the Shanghai Conservatory in 1949.

<sup>288</sup> Both forms involve storytelling while playing an instrument, the pipa in the case of *pingtan* and the drum in the case of *jingyun dagu*.

warm reception from workers and high praise from the conservatory president, He Luting. Several of his songs achieved national popularity in the late 1950s and early 1960s, such as “Song of The Female Commune Member,” “The Flower of Happiness Will Last Forever,” and “Cannot Help Singing the Mountain Song.”<sup>289</sup> Also among his accomplishments during this early period was a set of choral works performed by the choir of the Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra as well as several art songs, one of which was adapted as a cello solo piece.



Figure 1. Portrait of Yu Huiyong from the early 1960s.<sup>290</sup>

Long before his career as yangbanxi composer, Yu had already earned wide-ranging respect as a teacher, scholar and composer. Many have attributed his diligence

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<sup>289</sup> These songs were widely performed, published numerous times in magazines and newspapers, and recorded as monographs; some of them were arranged into instrumental music. The Chinese titles for these songs are: *nü sheyuan zhi ge*; *xingfu huakai wanniang chang*; *buchang shange xinbushuang*.

<sup>290</sup> Photo courtesy of Ren Ke.



and endeavors to his deep sense of patriotism and dedication to the communist cause.<sup>291</sup> As far as Yu was concerned, he never would have had the chance to enter Shanghai Conservatory without the support of the Party; his one-year of government-sponsored study launched his entire career. His sense of duty to the country was also expressed as a kinship with his fellow Chinese citizens. His working class background drove his commitment to the state's socialist cause and his impulse to create works of art for common people.

After leaving home, Yu saw his talents as being “nurtured by the Party,” and he sincerely attributed his entire success to his country.<sup>292</sup> According to one of his colleagues, Lian Bo, “Yu was very devoted to his work and loyal to the Party, the country and the people.”<sup>293</sup> Clearly, Yu considered it his responsibility to give back to the state and made it his mission to create art and to establish an environment for artistic expression that fed the cultural soul of China and its people, much as his mother's singing healed him and gave him a purpose as a child.

Yu's contributions, however, were often viewed with misgivings by some members of the Party committee, both in the military and at the conservatory. Yu was repeatedly persecuted for a number of seemingly small missteps from his early career in the military through his tenure at Shanghai Conservatory. Like many victims of political

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<sup>291</sup> Interviews in 2007 and 2011 with Chen Yinshi, professor of ethnomusicology at Shanghai Conservatory.

<sup>292</sup> Yu, Huiyong. “Studies on the Relationship between Melody and Lyrics” (Central Conservatory of Music), p. 2. Yu did not acknowledge his achievement. During the Cultural Revolution he gave all the credit including his “three prominent” theory to Jiang, naming Jiang as first librettist, director, composer, and stage designer. See Dai Jiafang, *The Ups and Downs of Yangbanxi: Jiang Qing, Yangbanxi, and the Inside Story* (Beijing: Zhishi Publication, 1995), p. 240.

<sup>293</sup> Interview with Lian Bo in Shanghai in February 2011 and June 2008.

movements in modern China, Yu could not have foreseen the reinterpretation his career would undergo and the outsized influence earlier decisions would come to have on his life. Decisions made out of filial piety and academic integrity forever made him susceptible to ideological attacks, and no amount of evidence to the contrary could ever completely silence his critics. Despite his modest upbringing, even Yu could not escape ideological incriminations at the height of political movements from anti-rightist campaigns to the Cultural Revolution. He was devoted to scholarship but had no interest in politics; his fear of political meetings and movements was well founded.

Yu had joined the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) performance troupe, *Jiaodong Wengongtuan* in 1946 during the civil war, and in March 1947, their unit was surrounded by the Guomintang (Nationalist) troops and had to be relocated. As his mother's only son, he feared for her well-being should he die at war, and he wanted to leave something behind to ensure her of his filial piety to his dying breath. He gathered his belongings and bundled among them the following note:

Guomintang Brothers, if you see this note, I am probably already dead. My only family is an old mother at home. If you have any consciousness of duty, please send these to my home—I will be forever grateful for your kindness. It is okay if you want to keep all the things, but please send the picture to my mother as a souvenir. The address is on the back of my picture.<sup>294</sup>

In a naive decision to seek approval for his filial gesture, Yu shared the letter with his unit leader, who took the heartfelt note and exclaimed, "This is not good!" The communication intended for his mother should he die serving his country became the first

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<sup>294</sup> Dai Jiafang, *Zouxiang Huimie* (Heading toward Destruction: The Rise and fall of Yu Huiyong: Master of the Maoist Model Theater) (Hong Kong: Time International Publication, 2008), p. 41.

piece of evidence of unpatriotic thoughts and, worse, an act of treason. He was harshly criticized in his army unit for “having illusions for the enemy and with a tendency to surrender.”<sup>295</sup> As punishment, Yu was temporarily suspended from his work in the performance ensemble through the spring of 1948. In addition, his initial Party membership application was rejected, and he was not admitted until December 1949 after he had studied at the Shanghai Conservatory for a full term.

Interpreted from Yu’s personal perspective and without any ideological overtones, the note was written by a young man ready to sacrifice his life for the Communist cause and as a final expression of filial piety. He had no intention to surrender, nor did he ever actually surrender; the letter was written should the worst case scenario that he die without seeing his mother again come to be a reality. In retrospect, Yu was foolish to let any eyes besides his own see the letter before his death, but his motivations were wrongly tangled up in ideological battles fought by more politically minded comrades than Yu. The letter cast a permanent mark on his personal file.

Even worse, Yu became a ready target for attacks and ridicule whenever there was a political movement.<sup>296</sup> During the Anti-Rightist Movement in 1958, all his published anthologies of folk songs were considered as self-promoting plagiarism shamelessly pilfering the rightful property of the peasants. Yu was criticized as “pursuing bourgeois fame and wealth” and was sentenced to hard labor and re-education in the

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>296</sup> In Dai’s book, Yu was described as “sportsman,” which is a pun, meaning Yu was the target at every movement. In Chinese, sport and movement are exactly the same word. See Dai 1995:238.

countryside.<sup>297</sup> However, he was sent back to Shanghai for medical treatment after only three months because of serious stomach bleeding.<sup>298</sup> After his return, he was not trusted to teach students enrolled in the conservatory but instead was assigned to teach special non-degree classes for professional performers.<sup>299</sup> Although a temporary setback for his career, this assignment gave Yu an opportunity to learn more about Beijing opera as well as to become more acquainted with those who practiced the art form. As a result, Yu acquired invaluable experience that served him well years later as yangbanxi composer.

There was a dichotomous split in Yu's character. He loved the Party but distanced himself from the political arena. He was criticized for being a *baizhuan dianxing*, an ivory-tower scholar who cares for nothing but research, and labeled a democrat hiding under the banner of the Communist Party. His attempts to shy away from politics and to avoid political meetings backfired and were cited as reasons for his re-education. This treatment made Yu even more skittish of politics and caused him to throw himself even more into his work.<sup>300</sup> The more he focused on his research, the more he came to be seen as a typical bourgeois scholar in the eyes of his critics. This may help explain why Yu dared not publish any more books after 1958, despite his continued writing output, and

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<sup>297</sup> Yu considered it a punishment from the Party. Dai Jiafang, *Zouxiang Huimie* [Heading toward the Destruction: The Rise and fall of Yu Huiyong: Master of the Maoist Model Theater] (Hong Kong: Time International Publication, 2008), p. 104.

<sup>298</sup> For more details, see Dai 2008:118-120.

<sup>299</sup> Dai 2008, p. 111.

<sup>300</sup> Yu had stomach problems when he was nervous, such as if he had to go to such meetings. Instead, he needed to go to the hospital because of the pain, citing ill health as his reasons. Interview with Ren Ke in Beijing in 2010.

why he instead gave out free copies of his manuscripts to his students as textbooks—the phrase “pursuing bourgeois fame and wealth” probably echoing in his head.<sup>301</sup>

Yu is widely recognized as a pioneer for his groundbreaking work in the composition of revolutionary Beijing opera, and scholars of Chinese music credit him with the foundation of Chinese music theory.<sup>302</sup> It is hardly acknowledged, however, that these two activities—creation and research—fueled each other. Yu’s compositions were firmly based on his research, and his research was spurred on by desire to create meaningful art.

However, a disproportionate amount of attention has been paid to Yu’s political activities. Yu was a musician and scholar with political convictions that were a product of his time, place, and personal background. He never set out to get involved in politics or to become a politician. His career was politicized by ideological movements in China to reform or, if need be, wipe out counter-revolutionary elements in Chinese society. He was forced into a political role that he would have preferred to decline during the Cultural Revolution. However, his family and associates repeatedly emphasized in interviews that his commitment to the development of a national Chinese theater was so fervent that he

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<sup>301</sup> Yet even today, these unpublished works of Yu are considered the most comprehensive project and an important milestone for the development of Chinese ethnomusicology. And after fifty years, these two works are finally officially being published in 2008 and 2011. Many attempts had been made to publish Yu’s books earlier. In 1997, China Research Institute published half of Yu’s *Studies on the Relationship between Melody and Lyrics* in a journal along with other articles. It was published anonymously in 2005 as “unofficial material” through Shanghai Conservatory.

<sup>302</sup> According to many of Yu’s colleagues, one of his great contributions in Chinese music theory involved naming the modes of Chinese folk music, which had not been previously standardized, with more than ten ways to name the different keys and modes in Chinese music. After Yu published his article “Guanyu woguo minjian yinyue diaoshi de mingmin” [Regarding the Names of Chinese Folk Music], the music society accepted Yu’s method, which is still used today. Interview with Lu Zaiyi in 2006. Also see Dai Jiafang, *Zouxiang Huimie* [Heading toward the Destruction: The Rise and fall of Yu Huiyong: Master of the Maoist Model Theater] (Hong Kong: Time International Publication, 2008), p. 115.

overcame his aversion to politics. Yu agreed to take on a political role during the Cultural Revolution in order to complete his modernization of Beijing opera and to shield himself and his colleagues from ideological attacks.

In truth, his prominent status in Chinese music research made him an easy target for both criticism and praise depending on the political climate of the moment. During times of high political tension, his “wrongdoings,” such as his letter home and his published books, resurfaced and fueled the attacks. Lian Bo, a colleague and one of his best friends at the conservatory, explained:

Yu was extremely talented and capable. He was single-mindedly focused on his job and wanted to improve the situation from music education to theater reform. Under Yu’s leadership, our division achieved a great result and became the national leader. However, I thought Yu was very humble and careful. I finally found out that he carried a heavy burden all those years until the Cultural Revolution, when the note from his file surfaced and was exposed on a big-character poster and made known to the whole conservatory. Yu was labeled a traitor, a typical bourgeois intellectual, and democrat among the Communist Party, along with other accusations.<sup>303</sup>

Lian Bo said that he had a strong sense that fear and insecurity pervaded Yu’s career, and he vividly described it as Yu’s personal *jinkuzhou*, in reference to the powerful restraining curse that was placed on the head of the Monkey King in the Chinese classic *Xiyouji* (Journey to the West).

It came then as a great relief to Yu when he received Jiang Qing’s invitation to join the composition team at the Shanghai Beijing Opera Company in 1965.<sup>304</sup> It was a

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<sup>303</sup> Interview with Lian Bo in Shanghai in February 2011.

<sup>304</sup> Yu was labeled as “politically unreliable person” at that time by party secretary Zhong Wangyang, who believed Yu “faked illness when he had to work in the countryside but was totally healthy when he was asked to work on opera creation.” Thus, he tried hard to stop Yu from involvement in Beijing opera creation. Zhong wrote a self-contradictory report to the Shanghai Municipal Propaganda Bureau requesting that Yu be called back to work at the

call to his passion and, for the first time, to set about achieving his mission without having to worry about unpredictable consequences. It provided him with a great opportunity to create modern Beijing operas that were, first and foremost for the masses—the workers, peasants, and soldiers. With the Chinese people in mind, his main goal was to write music that created an image of revolutionary heroism and that achieved a unity of revolutionary content with the highest perfection of artistic form.

### Yu's Early Involvement in Beijing Opera

Jiang Qing had become aware of Yu through his articles and reviews published in various newspapers and journals in the early 1960s. She reportedly first read a piece of his titled “Music Issues Concerning Modern Themed Beijing Opera,”<sup>305</sup> but according to Chen Yinshi, one of Yu's students, it was another piece that left a greater impression, “Theater Music Should Serve to establish the Heroic Image.”<sup>306</sup> The latter caught Jiang's eye for its insightful discussion and analysis of one of the early yangbanxi, *The Red Lantern*. Contemporary political themes ran through Yu's writings, but it would be

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conservatory. Zhong gave two main reasons for this. First, Yu was not suitable to work on Beijing opera reform under Jiang Qing because of Yu's alleged “bad” behaviors. Second, Yu was the vice dean of the Department of the National Music Theory, a position that carried a heavy teaching and research load. Zhong said he would send a “politically reliable person” to replace Yu if needed. When Zhong's request was denied, Zhong called Yu directly and forced him to attend a school meeting. During the meeting, Yu was criticized and isolated, and then he was told to stop the work at the Beijing opera company and return to school. Dai Jiafang, *Zouxiang Huimie* [Heading toward the Destruction: The Rise and fall of Yu Huiyong: Master of the Maoist Model Theater] (Hong Kong: Time International Publication, 2008), p. 175-183.

<sup>305</sup> Yu Huiyong, “Music Issues Concerning Modern Themed Beijing Opera,” *Shanghai Theatre*, No.5 and No. 6, 1964.

<sup>306</sup> Yu Huiyong, “Xiqu yinyue bixu wei shuzao yingxiong xingxiang fuwu: zong hongdengji tankaiqu” [Theatre Music Should Serve to establish the Heroic Image: using *The Red Lantern* as an example], *Wenhui Bao*, 28 March 1965.

shortsighted to label him a mouthpiece of the party. He spoke his own mind and wrote from personal experience and research; that is, his views on the working class and appropriate themes for modern Beijing opera generally—but not always—coincided with the government policy and the goals of Jiang’s cultural program. His articles analyzing the theatrical and theoretical bases of Beijing opera clearly indicated to Jiang that Yu was the single candidate who could implement Mao’s vision of a revolutionary theater for the masses.

Jiang first met Yu in Shanghai in June 1965 and enthusiastically reported to him: “I have read your articles. It should be said that we’ve known each other for a long time. Your articles are very well written, and our ideas are in total harmony.”<sup>307</sup> Since that meeting, Jiang would meet Yu every time she came to Shanghai, so that they could discuss music composition in the modernization of Beijing opera.<sup>308</sup>

It is commonly believed that Jiang arranged for Yu to join the composition team of her first Shanghai project, *On the Docks* (1965), after reading his essays. Other versions of the story, however, exist. According to the version told by Wang Yongjie, a conductor of the Shanghai Film Orchestra,<sup>309</sup> Jiang Qing did not simply call Yu to join the creative team of *On the Docks* after coming across his writings. Instead, Jiang gathered 20 composers at the Jinjiang Hotel in Shanghai in 1965 and gave each of them the task of composing an aria in Beijing opera style to a lyric from the revolutionary

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<sup>307</sup> Xu Chen, *The Big Stage of Life: The Internal News of Yangbanxi* (Jinan: Yellow River Press, 1990), p.292.

<sup>308</sup> Dai Jiafang, *The Ups and Downs of Yangbanxi: Jiang Qing, Yangbanxi, and Inside Story* (Beijing: Zhishi Publication, 1995), p. 239.

<sup>309</sup> Wang Yongjie was the conductor for both the stage and film versions of *On the Docks* during the Cultural Revolution and later became conductor of the Shanghai Film Philharmonic Orchestra. Interview with Wang Yongjie in Shanghai in February 2011.



opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*. Jiang's "test" resembled imperial exams that required artists to produce a painting from the line of a famous poem. Yu was among the 20 composers, and his aria most impressed Jiang and won him an invitation to join the composition team of the Shanghai Beijing Opera Company. His first project was *On the Docks*, which was still in development for production on the stage.<sup>310</sup>

Wang's account slightly differs from that told by Yu's wife, Ren Ke, who claimed that Yu had written several movements for *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* and given them to Jiang Qing. After looking them over, Jiang decided to use his overture for Act V.<sup>311</sup> In Ren's version, Jiang additionally requested that Yu revise her four established operas (*The Red Lantern*, *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, *The White Tiger Regiment* and *Among the Reeds*); she also asked him to add more arias to enrich the images of the main characters.<sup>312</sup>

Although Yu was well known in academia, he was still unknown in performance circles. Yu was first ignored at the Shanghai Beijing Opera Company and unfairly dismissed as a "Western devil," an accusation in line with Shanghai Conservatory's reputation for emphasizing Western music. His compositional skills, however, soon won him the respect that his scholarship and experience in Chinese music deserved. He was named principal composer and head of the artistic production group in vindication of his

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<sup>310</sup> Interview with Wang Yongjie in Shanghai in February 2011. Wang considered Jiang as a Beijing opera expert who studied and performed Beijing opera as teenager and later in her early career. "That certainly better fits Jiang Qing's personality and style," Wang said, "She had good taste and was very knowledgeable about Beijing opera."

<sup>311</sup> This overture was widely performed and was one of the most familiar to Chinese audiences during the Cultural Revolution. It was also adapted as a solo piece for violin, accordion and many other instruments. The whole opera of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* was made into a symphony.

<sup>312</sup> Interview with Ren Ke in Beijing in June 2007.

abilities. *On the Docks* was the first Beijing opera to tackle themes from contemporary society and the lives of Shanghai's working class after Liberation. The libretto was originally chosen by Jiang Qing after watching the production of a regional Huai opera called *Morning on the Dock* in 1964.

The composition of its music, like its libretto, went through a long and difficult process and was criticized by Jiang Qing until Yu Huiyong joined the team.<sup>313</sup> *On the Docks* was a favorite of Mao and Jiang; its music was well integrated with the libretto, and several of its arias enjoyed popularity independent of the opera for their gorgeous music. It premiered in 1965 and was the final stage work to join the pre-Cultural Revolution ranks of the eight yangbanxi.<sup>314</sup> Following the success of *On the Docks*, Jiang Qing quickly entrusted Yu with the revision of other works already underway, such as *Taking Tiger Mountain By Strategy* and *The Red Lantern*.

The quality of yangbanxi in the eyes of many of its fans had already reached its pinnacle in its first stage of development. The famous writer Sha Yexin wrote after seeing a 1965 performance of *The Red Lantern*:

I was touched by its content and attracted by its artistic perfection. I was a fan of traditional Beijing opera and I learned many Beijing opera arias when I was young. But after watching *Red Lantern*, I became a fan of the modern Beijing opera. I named my daughter who was born during the Cultural Revolution Sha Hongzhi, to express how much I loved these operas.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> Dai Jiafang, *The Ups and Downs of Yangbanxi: Jiang Qing, Yangbanxi, and the Inside Story* (Beijing: Zhishi Publication, 1995), p. 79.

<sup>314</sup> The opera underwent many more revisions by Yu Huiyong in 1969 to 1970, and the latest revision was made in 1974.

<sup>315</sup> Shi Yonggang and Zhang Fan. *Yangbanxi shiji* [History of Yangbanxi], (Beijing: zuojia chubanshe, 2009).pp. 85-86. The three characters that compose her name represent three operas. "Sha" is the family name but here it represents the opera *Shajiabang* (*Among the Reeds*); "Hong"

Its popularity even spread to Hong Kong, and a Cantonese newspaper reported the reaction of an audience member from Hong Kong who had come to see *The Red Lantern* performed in Guangzhou:

To be honest, this was not an operatic form that I like, and I came and expected to see something that I could make fun of, as we had heard of Communist propaganda from the mainland. But we were drawn into the play and before we realized it, our original plan was totally distorted. Instead, we learned a meaningful lesson and we fell in love with this modern opera.<sup>316</sup>

Yu's involvement, however, in the transformation of traditional Beijing opera had only just begun, as Jiang's vision for a new revolutionary art form did not end with audience approval. She pointed out many musical problems with each work, but the revision did not satisfy her until Yu put his hands on the project. Lu Zaiyi, one of the yangbanxi composers recounted: "Professor Yu was an absolute genius. And he only needed to change a few notes for the whole aria to be lifted. We all experienced such moments during the rehearsal."<sup>317</sup>

It seems that both Yu and Jiang believed that a revolutionary artwork had to capture and reflect the reality of modern life, requiring even more innovative techniques than changes to costume and movement in order to speak more directly to the modern Chinese masses. Yu came to the job with this mission in mind, and he came armed with an unmatched combination of professional competence and aesthetic taste, which would require raising the bar of audience expectations by providing new music experiences.

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represents *Hongdeng Ji (Red Lantern)*; and "zhi" represent *Zhiqu Weihushan (Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy)*.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., p.86.

<sup>317</sup> Interview with Lu Zaiyi in Shanghai in 2006.

Jiang Qing provided him with the ideal platform for achieving his dual goals of writing operas that were “for the masses of the people” and of the highest artistic perfection.

### **Rescued from the Cow Shed**

With the advent of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, Yu became one of its earliest targets. His academic achievements made him vulnerable in the new anti-intellectual climate. The Red Guards recalled him from the Shanghai Beijing Opera Company to be criticized at the Conservatory, and he was held in the “cow shed,” a small room where “bad elements” were kept, for the duration of his return. Besides his earlier transgressions, Yu was further implicated for being firmly established in the intellectual hierarchy as head of the national music department. He was attacked for propagating feudalism through his appropriation of traditional Chinese music, and his academic publications were denounced as typical “ivory tower” crimes and his anthologies as plagiarism. He was accused of favoring “rightists” in the political movements of 1955 and 1957 and again labeled “a democrat hiding under the banner of the Communist Party” due to his recurrent absence from party meetings and political studies. The darkest mark against him remained his treasonous letter addressed to his “Guomindang brothers.” Yu was condemned as an “anti-communist, anti-socialist and anti-Chairman Mao” element. His home was searched by the Red Guards and many of his belongings, including books, manuscripts, and even his home telephone, were confiscated.

Yu was deeply affected by this turn in his fortune. He sincerely believed his research and artwork all proceeded from his commitment to the nation’s socialist cause, and thus his days of ideological persecution should have been behind him. It never

occurred to him to protect himself under Jiang Qing's political might. Jiang, however, did not so easily forget his invaluable contributions to the progress of her mission, and she still required his expertise in revising and creating model works. She requested a meeting with her lead composer when the Shanghai Beijing Opera Company arrived in Beijing in October 1966 to stage productions of two operas. It took ten days after her request for the Red Guards to finally release him from the "cow shed." Although he traveled to Beijing after his release to meet with Jiang, the composer was prevented from attending *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, the current staging of which would not have been possible without him, due to his "unfit political tendencies."<sup>318</sup> Jiang rescued him from further humiliation by dispatching her personal secretary to fetch him from the hotel. Yu was seated in a no less prominent position than next to Jiang Qing for the performance, and during the final applause, Jiang brought him up on stage with her to receive the recognition rightfully due the opera's greatest artistic contributor and visionary.

However, Jiang Qing's power and influence were limited. Even after his public appearance with Jiang, Yu was still treated as a "bad element" and was forbidden from joining the rest of the troupe for an audience with Mao at Tian'anmen. On the train back to Shanghai, Yu had to endure a hard seat, in spite of his recurrent stomach pain, while the others were given berths in sleeper cars. And on his arrival at Shanghai Station, he was again arrested by the Red Guards, who subjected him to further humiliation at the Conservatory by forcing him to wear his shoes around his neck, indicating his inability to

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<sup>318</sup> *Taking Tiger Mountain By Strategy* was not considered a good opera at the 1964 conference. Even Jiang Qing said, "The arias are terrible." See Dai Jiafang, *The Ups and Downs of Yangbanxi: Jiang Qing, Yangbanxi, and the Inside Story* (Beijing: Zhishi Publication, 1995), p. 66.

escape the power of the revolutionary masses. Furthermore, he was labeled as an anti-Party revisionist and forced to admit these accusations.<sup>319</sup>

Jiang's intervention eventually rescued Yu and prevented the even greater harm that most certainly awaited him at the hands of the Red Guards. In the early days of the Cultural Revolution, these zealous students were given free rein to vent their revolutionary zeal by cursing, beating and humiliating their teachers, who were powerless against the onslaught of abuse. For example, Red Guards at the Central Conservatory in Beijing forced its president, Ma Sicong, to eat grass because his surname meant "horse." Individual lives and entire households were broken by the unchecked advances of the Red Guards, and an undocumented number of people chose suicide over further humiliation.<sup>320</sup> One such victim was Yu's friend and neighbor Shen Zhibai, who committed suicide in his home directly upstairs from Yu after years of humiliation by the Red Guards. Yu was greatly shocked by the tragedy that literally took place right above his head. Since workers from the community funeral home refused to touch the body of an "anti-revolutionary criminal," Yu took care of all the arrangements for Shen's proper burial. Thereafter, Yu sought out every opportunity to express his gratitude to the one

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<sup>319</sup> For more details, see Dai Jiafang, *Zouxian Huimie* (Heading toward Destruction: The Rise and fall of Yu Huiyong: Master of the Maoist Model Theater) (Hong Kong: Time International Publication, 2008), pp. 207-212.

<sup>320</sup> At Shanghai Conservatory alone, there were seventeen people who chose suicide during the early Cultural Revolution, including professor and chair of the department of conducting and composition, Yang Jiaren, and his wife; piano professor, Li Cuizheng; and He Xiaoqiu, daughter of president He Luting.

person in power who repeatedly came to his rescue: “Without Jiang Qing, there would be no Yu Huiyong.”<sup>321</sup>

Under Jiang’s wing, Yu’s career once again flourished, both professionally and politically, culminating with his appointment as the Chinese Minister of Culture in 1975. In between his positions at Shanghai Conservatory and the Ministry of Culture, he also served as head of the Shanghai Municipal Cultural Bureau and member of the Central Committee. His acceptance of greater political responsibility at first glance appears to be in direct contradiction to his artistic endeavors. Some who did not personally know Yu condemned his political trajectory as “jumping on the pirate ship.”<sup>322</sup> However, Dai argues that “casting Yu as a criminal without consideration for his beleaguered personal past and the background of the Cultural Revolution is unfair and insensitive.”<sup>323</sup> As Dai points out in his biography of Yu Huiyong, we must refrain from judging the actions of others without fully understanding their circumstances:

In the forceful flow of the history, each individual is weak and helpless. We can’t foresee our own future...As I wrote every turning point of Yu Huiyong’s life, I always asked myself, what would be my choice? And the answer was always: I would do the same!<sup>324</sup>

Given the circumstances of the Cultural Revolution, it was simply unthinkable to refuse a position offered by Jiang or any other Party leader. In spite of his phobia of politics, Yu allowed himself to be drawn into the power games of the Party elite; after all,

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<sup>321</sup> Dai Jiafang, *Zouxian Huimie* (Heading toward Destruction: The Rise and Fall of Yu Huiyong: Master of the Maoist Model Theater) (Hong Kong: Time International Publication, 2008), p. 236

<sup>322</sup> Interview with Liang Maochun in Beijing in 2006.

<sup>323</sup> Interview with Dai Jiafang in Beijing in 2010.

<sup>324</sup> See Dai Jiafang, *Zouxian Huimie* (Heading toward Destruction: The Rise and fall of Yu Huiyong: Master of the Maoist Model Theater) (Hong Kong: Time International Publication, 2008), p. 508.

such a move offered a modicum of security for him and his family.<sup>325</sup> And perhaps even more importantly, he was now officially being asked to do what he had wanted to do all along: further the cause of revolutionary art reform through his research and composition. Using his new position of power, Yu was able to invite his former colleagues and students to join him in his projects while at the same time recruiting the most talented artists from around the nation; meanwhile, he was able to create an environment for artistic expression that shielded artists from the paranoia and political vicissitudes of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>326</sup>

### **Back on the Docks**

From April 1967, Yu was back to work on projects with the Shanghai Beijing Opera Company, starting with the revisions of *On the Docks* and *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*. As the head of the Shanghai Cultural Bureau, Yu was given full artistic control over the revision of these two pieces, which he extensively reworked based on his vision of revolutionary art. As Yu gradually gained trust and power in 1968, he began advocating for and implementing a hybrid of East-West orchestral accompaniment of

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<sup>325</sup> Yu was always immersed himself in his own research and regarded highly by the president He Luting, who like Yu Huiyong, most time did not get along with the Party secretary at the conservatory. However, Yu seemed to avoid these Party leaders and did not along with them. Dai, 2008, p. 95.

<sup>326</sup> Yu's wife Ren Ke claimed that his greatest regret as minister of culture was the assignment of leading the televised criticism of Shanghai Conservatory president He Luting. Yu had hoped to use his new position to rehabilitate He, but instead he got caught up in events beyond his control. According to Ren, he was distraught for days. Interview with Ren Ke in Beijing in October 2010.



Beijing opera. His approach justified the rehabilitation of many of his colleagues, whom he invited to join yangbanxi troupes.<sup>327</sup>

By late 1968 when Yu was called to revise *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* for its film version, he was ready for the new challenge, as he knew that Jiang considered this opera to have room for musical improvement. Just like the other early yangbanxi, the original score of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* used solely a Chinese ensemble as accompaniment. Although Jiang was defiant against critics of its original version, she admitted to her closed circle of friends that the music was sorely in need of revision.<sup>328</sup> Thus, after the completion of *On the Docks* in 1965, she called on Yu to revise the music. Yu went even further than Jiang had envisioned, adding arias to strengthen its characters and composing musical transitions to introduce continuity between scenes. Taking advantage of the situation, Yu pushed the envelope of revolutionary opera reform by rewriting the entire score of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* using a mixed orchestra of Chinese and Western instruments.<sup>329</sup> Yu abandoned the old rules of instrumentation, increasing the size of the ensemble by adding more Chinese instruments and introducing Western instruments, resulting in a well-balanced orchestra that retained the aural prominence of the traditional *sandajian* (the stringed ensemble that is the typical

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<sup>327</sup> For example, Xia Feiyun and Yu Lina were both faculty members at the Shanghai Conservatory. Xia became the conductor for *Taking Tiger Mountain By Strategy* and Yu, as a violinist, played an important role in the orchestra of *On the Docks*. Wang Yongjie, conductor of *On the Docks*, confirmed that the majority of the orchestra players for *On the Docks* were from Shanghai Conservatory. Interview with Wang Yongjie in Shanghai in March 2011.

<sup>328</sup> An early version of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* was criticized after its 1964 debut. However, Jiang believed it had potential to become a good opera. She defended it in front of others, but privately she admitted in Shanghainese, “The music was terrible.” Dai Jiafang, *Yangbanxi de Fengfeng Yuyu* [The Trials and hardships of the Yangbanxi: Jiang Qing, the Model Performance, and the Inside Story] (Beijing: Zhishi Chubanshe, 1995), p. 26.

<sup>329</sup> When Wang Yongjie, who graduated from middle school attached to Shanghai Conservatory, was hired in 1967 as a conductor of *On the Docks*, the mixed orchestra did not yet exist. Interview with Wang in March 2011.

accompaniment for arias). Yu experimented extensively with various combinations of instruments to achieve the highest sound quality and balanced sonority, and he was the first to successfully harmonize an East-West Beijing opera orchestra.<sup>330</sup>

Integrating Western instruments into yangbanxi was not easy. Beijing opera was initially performed outdoors with percussion filling the atmosphere with a large, booming sound. To be performed indoors, it was necessary to reduce the overpowering effect of the percussion. Moreover, the percussionists needed to play in tandem with the full orchestra, because percussion no longer was the sole accompaniment for choreographed sequences. Yu placed plastic walls around the percussion section to reduce its volume, allowing the musicians to play their instruments the way they were accustomed to. The percussive sound was further tempered by adding silver to the instruments, yielding a softer and mellower sound than the traditional brass. Yu, in fact, looked into every aspect of the music that contributed to the final effect and took a hands-on approach to engineering the sound of the orchestra.

With his extensive knowledge of Beijing opera as well as both Eastern and Western musical traditions, Yu may have been the only composer at that time with both the requisite knowledge and the ability to lead this music reform. But in order to do this, he first had to accustom the musicians to the two traditions, because most of his

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<sup>330</sup> There were such attempts before the 1950s. For example, *Modeng Jianü* (Modern Nun, 1927, performed by Shang Xiaoyun) was probably the first and only Beijing opera to employ piano and violin for its accompaniment, but it was never widely performed. There were two main reasons that Yu succeeded where others had failed. One was that Yu Huiyong was more knowledgeable than his predecessors; he not only played most of these Chinese instruments but also understood western harmony and instrumentation. The second reason was that, prior to the Cultural Revolution, there was a lot of resistance to change within the Beijing opera society. Interview with Jing Yuehua in Shanghai in March 2011. Interview with Shang Changrong (Shang Xiaoyun's son) in Shanghai in July 2011.

musicians were only familiar with one or the other system. Yu taught the fundamentals of Beijing opera, including its performance technique, rhythmic concept, and subtlest gradations of timbre, to the players of Western instruments. He also had them listen to the Beijing opera drumbeat and understand the different Chinese modes and metric systems.<sup>331</sup> He gave all the string players a jinghu so that they could understand its characteristics and performance techniques. To the Chinese instrumentalists, he explained Western concepts of pitch and timbre, which meant accepting an entirely new musical temperament.<sup>332</sup>

However, it was by no means simple for Chinese players to adopt the Western tuning system, and it required a process of compromising and learning from each other. For example, in Act V of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, the primary aria with the verse “*yinglai chunse*” (welcome spring) where the syllable “*chun*” is sung on a characteristic note within the Chinese system. Being neither natural nor sharp, this note therefore did not belong within the Western tuning system. Yu’s solution in this case was to have Western players follow the Chinese quartertone system here. But in general, the intonation of the Chinese instruments was altered in rehearsal and the performers had to follow the Western tonal system.<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Western instruments followed the system of equal temperament while Chinese instruments had their own system, which sounded discordant to Western-trained ears. The Chinese players could not read Western notation, and they did not need to read a score when accompanying traditional Beijing opera. However, it was by no means simple for Chinese players to adopt the Western tuning system. It was a process of learning from each other and compromising.

<sup>332</sup> According to Gong Guotai, the technique, the sound, and the aesthetic concept of Chinese instruments are totally different from those of Western string instruments. The task for the performers was to reach a compromise and so bring the sound closer to each other. Interview with Gong Guotai in Beijing in July 2008 and February 2011.

<sup>333</sup> Interview with Wang Yongjie in Shanghai in March 2011.

Lian Bo and Jin Yuehua each recalled vividly their first impression when they heard a radio broadcast of Yu's reworked *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* in 1969.

Lian Bo, a professor at Shanghai Conservatory and Yu's longtime colleague at the same department, commented:

I knew right away that this was done by Yu Huiyong. There is no one in China who knew better than Yu Huiyong how to solve all the problems of mixing Eastern and Western orchestras. It was not a simple matter of mixture. The challenges come from all directions: different systems of pitch, timbre, concept, rhythm, performing techniques, and so on.

Jin, who had just graduated from a six-year Beijing-opera training program at the Shanghai Theater Academy, remarked that he had no idea who the composer might be:

But I was so excited by the effect of mixed orchestration and its richer sonority. My siblings were all trained in Western music and traditional Beijing opera just did not sound good to our ears. Studying Beijing opera was not my choice in the first place and I was ready to give it up. But now I saw hope for the future and believed this was the right direction for Beijing opera. The Westernized orchestration greatly enhanced Beijing opera's musical expression by avoiding the dreary instrumental mimicry of the same old arias, as was the case in most traditional Beijing operas.<sup>334</sup>

This format, as tested out in the Shanghai Beijing Opera Company's *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, earned approval and praise from government leaders such as Jiang Qing and Premier Zhou Enlai, and other operas soon adopted this system.<sup>335</sup>

Yu's mixed orchestration paved the way for greater musical innovation and the expansion of the musical language of Beijing opera, as became apparent during the

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<sup>334</sup> Interview with Jin Yuehua in Shanghai in March 2011 and Lian Bo in Shanghai in July 2005 and February 2011. They both remembered that the radio played the instrumental piece *Da Hu Shang Shan* and an aria sung by Yang Zirong and Shao Jianbo.

<sup>335</sup> The standard number for Western string instruments was four violins, three violas, two cellos, and one bass. It became standard practice after *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*.

production of *The Red Lantern*. This work was originally a Hu (Shanghai-style) opera, but in 1963 Jiang recommended it be adapted into a revolutionary Beijing opera. She asked the lead composer of the revised opera, Liu Jidian, to adapt the socialist anthem “L’Internationale” for the scene where the protagonist is about to be executed, but Liu countered that the desired effect could not be achieved with a traditional Beijing opera ensemble.<sup>336</sup> Jiang accepted that excuse for the time being, but after watching a Shanghai performance of the opera in 1966, she once again asked Liu to attempt an arrangement of “L’Internationale,” and he acquiesced. Jiang was unable to attend the rehearsal of this revised scene and sent her colleague, Lin Mohan, as her representative. True to Liu’s prediction, the result was disastrous, and Lin reported back to Jiang that the opera was better off without it. Liu’s inability to convert Jiang’s wish into the desired musical effect brought him criticism from his peers at the China Beijing Opera Company during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>337</sup> The problem was finally resolved in 1970 when Yu was asked to make some revisions to the opera before it was filmed. For the film version, Yu employed a mixed orchestra, using only Western instruments for the performance of “L’Internationale.”

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<sup>336</sup> Zhang Jianmin, one of the composers of *The Red Lantern*, explained to me why composers could not adapt the tune of “L’Internationale” for *The Red Lantern*: “the only possible instrument could play this tune was suona, a double reeds Chinese instrument that is initially included in Beijing opera accompanying instruments. Suona could make a loud and high-pitched sound, but its sound was not stable and very easy to lose its pitch when it is played alone. Furthermore, suona was mainly used for wedding and funeral scenes, which could be politically problematic if it were considered a celebration of the death of the hero in that case of *The Red Lantern*. Therefore, it was not a good idea to use suona and it would not have good effect anyway.” Interview with Zhang Jianmin in Beijing in July 2011.

<sup>337</sup> . He was accused of being against Jiang Qing and trying to destroy *The Red Lantern*. Interview with Zhang Jianmin in Beijing in July 2011.

What is revealing about this episode was that the composers of *The Red Lantern* were thinking narrowly in the box of traditional Beijing opera, which only allowed a small Chinese ensemble to accompany an aria and had limited ability to express specific emotions through instruments.<sup>338</sup> Yu's success with "L'Internationale" proved his openness to fusing traditional Chinese theater with Western artistic forms in service of a new revolutionary art. It is therefore not surprising that the two operas to which Yu made major contributions prior to the Cultural Revolution—*On the Docks* and *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*—had more sophisticated musical scores than other early model operas.

Yu's artistic decisions on yangbanxi were the result of a common historical and cultural tradition. What had lain at the core of the 1919 May Fourth Movement had been precisely the search for an adequate integration of Chinese tradition and modernity.<sup>339</sup> Many historians, such as Fu Jin, agreed that theater reform in the early twentieth century marked the beginning of the modernization of Beijing opera, but no one clearly articulated what this modernization should include or what its trajectory should be.<sup>340</sup> Beijing opera modernization, as a spearhead of theater reform, indeed started in early twentieth century and achieved varying degrees of success, particularly in terms of

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<sup>338</sup> Zhang Jianmin said that his alternative way was to use human voice to hum "L'Internationale" in 1980, as the National Beijing Opera Company could not afford to keep a large orchestra. Interview with Zhang Jianmin in Beijing in July 2011.

<sup>339</sup> The May Fourth Movement was a series of uprisings by students and scholars protesting against foreign encroachment and calling for a new Chinese culture based on Western models, including democracy and science. This movement led to the widespread adoption of the vernacular as opposed to the classical language in literature.

<sup>340</sup> Fu Jin. *Jingjuxue qianyan* [Introduction to Beijing Opera Studies] (Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2011), p. 7.

modern themes and performance techniques. However, modernization is a lengthy process, and it was still underway during the Cultural Revolution.

The establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 complicated the course of this modernization process due to changes in the sociopolitical system and the new socialist ideology. Artistic life became monopolized by state institutions that promoted an ambitious program of nation building as well as social and cultural restructuring. Beijing opera reform was naturally subsumed under this program of revolutionary art reform, whose goal it was to sustain the development of a new socialist society in China while maintaining its cultural identity. As Beijing mayor Peng Zhen pointed out in his 1964 talk during the Modern Beijing Opera Trial Performance Convention: "The revolutionary ideological content must be integrated with the special artistic characteristics of Beijing opera; it is here that the difficulty of reform lies."<sup>341</sup> Specifically what was needed to achieve this integration, however, was not clear to Peng.

It was Jiang Qing who precisely pinpointed the weakness of Beijing opera: "The art of the new Beijing opera should depend on music to build the image of the characters, not dance; the music and arias have to be well organized as a unified whole."<sup>342</sup> Apparently, Jiang's thinking had been influenced by Yu Huiyong's writing on this subject. Consistent with socialist realist doctrine, both Jiang and Yu embraced a functional conception of music, specifically that the integration of revolutionary

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<sup>341</sup> Peng Zhen, "Talk on the Modern Beijing Opera Trial Performance Convention" *Red Flag*, 1964, no. 14.

<sup>342</sup> Jiang continued with more details about composing arias for main characters, for example, using more structured tempo and beats, or using more *xipi* (modes). For more details, see Dai, 1995:67.

ideological content into Beijing opera could only be achieved through reform of its music.

### Theory and Application

In his 1963 seminal work, *Studies on the Relationship between Melody and Lyrics*, Yu made the case for composing music for opera arias that fit the natural tonal and intonation contours of the language.<sup>343</sup> Chinese is a tonal language, meaning that each syllable has associated with it a particular tonal pattern. There are hundreds of local dialects, each with its own distinctive set of syllabic tonal patterns; Mandarin, as well as the Beijing dialect on which it is based, employs four distinct tonal patterns, whereas some dialects employ up to ten. In Mandarin, for example, the syllable *ma* pronounced with a high even tone (55) means ‘mother’, with a mid rising tone (35) ‘linen’, with a low falling-rising tone (214) ‘horse’, and with a high falling tone (51) ‘scold’.<sup>344</sup> Figure 1 Figure 2 further illustrates these tonal patterns. Typically, in Chinese singing the syllabic tones are disregarded altogether, and it is left up to the listener to infer the proper tone from the context. In simple folk tunes, this is not a difficult task. However, the elaborate language of Beijing opera, which is a hybrid of several regional dialects with an

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<sup>343</sup> Although it was officially published in 2010 by Central Conservatory Press, Yu’s theory had been well known since *The Relationship between Melody and Lyrics of Traditional Chinese Music* was first printed and circulated within the Shanghai Conservatory. It was also published privately many times before 2010.

<sup>344</sup> The numbers in parentheses represent starting, mid, and ending pitch values on a 5-point scale, standard notation in Chinese linguistics. For example, the third tone in Mandarin, represented as (214), starts fairly low at level 2, falls to the lowest level 1, and then rises to the fairly high level 4. This tonal pattern could also be represented musically as the sequence D-C-F.



admixture of classical and antiquated forms, is difficult for the modern listener to follow without the aid of subtitles.

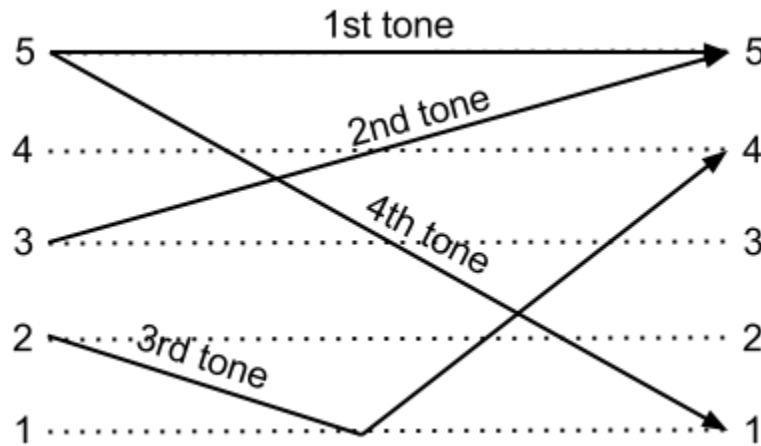


Figure 2. Tone contours of the four Mandarin tones.

To further complicate matters, these syllabic tonal patterns are laid on top of phrase-level rising and falling intonational patterns, universal across languages, that are used to convey levels of emotion and certainty, among other things. Again, in simple folk tunes, which evolved organically out of the spoken language, the melodic contour more or less follows the intonation contour of the spoken language. However, as Beijing opera virtuosi embellished arias with melismas to showcase their talents, the melody no longer fit the natural intonation contour of the lyrics; thus, while the singing may have been pleasing to the ear, the meaning of the language was largely lost on the listeners. It was also not uncommon for Beijing opera virtuosi to introduce melismas at locations that resulted in a corruption of the meaning of the text.<sup>345</sup> This problem grew worse in the

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<sup>345</sup> This phenomenon was also common in early Italian opera and attracted much critical attention from twentieth century new musicology scholars. Lawrence Kramer, for example, calls these moments “overvocalizations.” See Lawrence Kramer, *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical*

early twentieth century when performers like Mei Lanfang teamed up with poet-scholars who wrote libretti specifically for them; indeed, the texts were now so complex and poetic, it is likely even the performer did not always fully understand the meaning of what he was singing, making the misplacement of melismas even more frequent. It is then no wonder that the satirist Lu Xun lamented about the dire state of Beijing opera in the 1930s: “Sure, it’s elegant now; but most people don’t understand it, don’t want to watch it, and don’t feel they’re worthy to see it.”<sup>346</sup>

Although the music of Beijing opera was the main attraction to its audience, it was also in fact the weakest part of the genre. Early attempts at Beijing opera reform had focused primarily on developing more modern themes, poetic texts, and elaborate settings, costumes and props, with little attention being paid to improving the music.<sup>347</sup> No doubt this was largely due to the fact that traditional Beijing opera troupes did not employ professional composers, as well as to the practice of constructing new works

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*History* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2002), p. 63. Other scholars have termed this kind of melisma “meaningless” and “inappropriate” (Wendy Heller), “silly” (Susan McClary), and merely “ironic” (Iain Fenlon). See Wendy Heller, “Tacitus Incognito: Opera as History in L’incoronazione di Poppea,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* (Vol. 52, 1999), pp. 39-96: 67); Susan McClary, “Constructions of Gender in Monteverdi’s Dramatic Music” in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minnesota: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1991), 35-52: 49); Iain Fenlon and Peter N. Miller, *The Song of the Soul: Understanding Poppea* (London: Royal Musical Association, 1992), p.64).

<sup>346</sup> This comment was specifically aimed at criticizing Mei Lanfang’s performing style. Lu Xun, “About Mei Lanfang and Others,” *Zhonghua Daily*, October 26, 1934.

<sup>347</sup> However, the need to reform the music of Beijing opera was also widely recognized. For example, both Beijing opera masters Mei Lanfang and Cheng Yanqiu acknowledged the musical limitations of Beijing opera. Cheng went further, calling for the adoption of Western musical techniques such as harmony and counterpoint in his 1933 report after his study in Europe. See Chen Yuanqiu, *Report of Investigation on European Theater and Music By Cheng Yanqiu* (Beijing: Shijie bianyiguan, 1933).

largely on established forms by adding new lyrics to recycled melodies.<sup>348</sup> The traditional creative process was collaborative, and new works were born of and shaped through improvisation in work sessions and rehearsals; thus, the performers doubled as both creators and actors.

In Yu Huiyong's eyes, it was the music of Beijing opera that was most in need of reform. According to Yu, if Beijing opera were to become a revolutionary art form whose purpose was to educate the masses on the structure and benefits of the new socialist state, then the language had to be understandable to the common person. And this could only be achieved, he contended, if operas were intentionally designed by composers who were sensitive to the language and strove to fit the melody to the prosodic features of the lyrics.

Specifically, Yu made the following recommendations in order to avoid asynchronicity between vocal gesture and word meaning.<sup>349</sup> First, he advocated that the lyrics be written in Mandarin, the language of official business based on the Beijing dialect; this was in line with government policy, which mandated the use of Mandarin as the language of instruction in schools nationwide with the eventual goal of establishing

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<sup>348</sup> Most of these formulas came from Kun opera, which comprises four major elements: melodic-passages (qiang), metrical types (banshi), modes (diaoshi) and modal system (shengqiang). They are combined to form an integrated pattern for the performers.

<sup>349</sup> Yu Huiyong, *Studies on the Relationship between Melody and Lyrics* (Beijing: Central Conservatory of Music Publishing House), p. 7. In this book, Yu's writing is full of evaluations and speculations that go far beyond voicing an opinion or offering a methodology. Yu writes in a lively style, building on 239 solid examples with the scores and texts from various folk operas, and he differentiates himself from other scholars in the field by his sheer comprehensiveness, clarity, objectivity, and accessible approach to music analysis that is suited to both professionals and untrained amateur musicians, providing detailed footnotes that impart further information to his readers. What is most significant is that he puts his theories into practice, not only by offering critical observations about the strength and limitations in each example, but also by showing how to solve the ones with problems.

Mandarin as the common national language.<sup>350</sup> Second, he maintained the importance of composing melodies that matched the intonation contours of the spoken lyrics; thus, virtuosity had to give way to verisimilitude, again in line with Communist art policies on social realism. Third, and most intriguing, was Yu's proposal that the melody should be composed in such a way that it also shadowed the syllabic tonal patterns; an aria composed in this way then, according to Yu's theory, should sound natural to the ear as well as being easily understandable to the listener. Only when the relationship between melody and lyrics is compatible in this way, according to Yu, can the opera touch the listeners' hearts and transform their minds. Thus, Beijing opera could become an instrument not only for entertainment but also for education.

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<sup>350</sup> This goal of establishing Mandarin as the common national language has now largely come to fruition in the early decades of the twenty-first century. It involved a three-generation process, as exemplified by the author's family situation. Her parents, native Shanghainese who were young adults when the People's Republic was established, never developed more than limited proficiency in Mandarin. The author and her siblings, who learned Mandarin in school, are bilingual in Shanghainese and Mandarin, but speak the national language with a distinct Shanghai accent. However, her nieces and nephews that are still living in Shanghai are balanced bilinguals, speaking Mandarin with the standard pronunciation.

## 21. 家 住 安 源

京剧《杜鹃山》柯 湘唱

【反二黄中三眼】  
慢起

Figure 3. Excerpt from the aria “I’m from Anyuan” from the yangbanxi *Azalea Mountain*.

As a yangbanxi composer, Yu Huiyong put his theory into practice. An especially clear example of this is the first line of the aria “Jia zhu Anyuan” (“I’m from Anyuan”) from the opera *Azalea Mountain* (1973), as illustrated in Figure 3.<sup>351</sup> Yu’s melody generally follows the tonal and intonational pattern of this simple seven-syllable

<sup>351</sup> Zhu Weiying, ed., *Xiqu zuoqu jifa* [Techniques of Theater Music Composition] (Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe, 2004), p. 243.

sentence, *jia zhu an-yuan ping-shui tou*. Essentially, this sentence states: “I’m from Anyuan (county), Pingshui village.”

In this example, the composer has integrated the tonal pattern of the spoken language with the contour of the melody. The first syllable, *jia*, with its high even tone in speech, is represented in the music with a syllabic half-note A. The second syllable, *zhu*, is spoken with a high falling tone, and is sung in the descending series G#-F#-E. Recall that the syllabic tones are layered on top of the sentence’s intonation arc. The third syllable, *an*, although spoken as a high even tone, is higher in the intonation arc than *jia*, and so it is sung on the higher note B. The fourth syllable, *yuan*, as the second half of the place name Anyuan, is spoken lightly and hence loses its tone; it is sung on the lowest note of this phrase, E (m.5), which sets a low starting point for the rising tone of the next syllable. The following two syllables, *ping-shui*, as the name of the village the singer is from, are at the highpoint of the intonation arc as the most important information in the sentence, and each is sung melismatically. Furthermore, each melisma is suggestive of the spoken tonal pattern. Thus, the initial note of *ping* is B, leaping upward from the previous E and matching the mid rising tone of this syllable. It is also sung in melismatic fashion on higher notes (B-G#-E1-C1#-B, mm. 6-7), indicating the stress of this syllable in the spoken language. Likewise, the syllable *shui* is similarly stressed in a melismatic passage centering on B with high decorative notes (E-B-C1#-B-C1#-A-B, m. 7). Its low falling-rising tone is reflected in the contour of the three emphasized notes B, E, and B, in which the first B was borrowed from the preceding syllable *ping*. Finally, the syllable *tou*, at the end of the sentence and hence the bottom of the intonation arc, is sung on the low note G, its mid rising tone disregarded in speech as well as in the music. The

conciseness, the rhythmic and harmonic simplicity, and the relatively lower vocal range of this first phrase, create an image of the protagonist—a party cadre—as dependable and trustworthy from the very beginning.

The final developmental stage of yangbanxi witnessed Yu's most far-reaching innovations. In his final composition *Azalea Mountain*, Yu employed recurring motifs for each of the main characters. He had previously incorporated well-known songs, such as “L'Internationale” and “Our Workers Have Strength,” to thread themes of a united international socialist cause and the industrious spirit of Shanghai's longshoremen into his first opera, *On the Docks*.<sup>352</sup> In *Azalea Mountain*, however, he intensified and deepened character development through music by composing recurring motifs for the characters central to the work's plot as well as altering the recurrence and skillful using of the fragmentation.

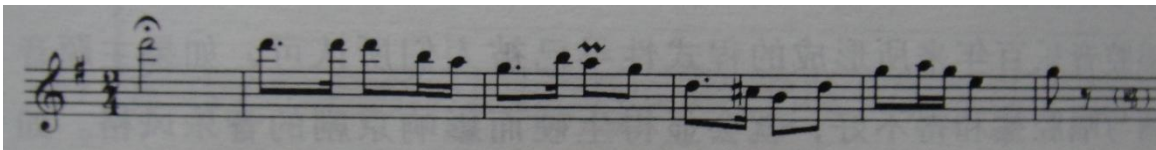


Figure 4. Ke Xiang theme from the opera *Azalea Mountain* (1973).

The technique is most effectively employed for the main character, Ke Xiang. Her powerful yet simple motif introduces the heroine Ke Xiang at the beginning of Act II (see Figure 4). In Act III, we first encounter a variant of this motif from in the introduction to the aria, which is rhythmically augmented and appearing in different key and meter (see Figure 5, mm. 1-3).

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<sup>352</sup> The overture of *On the Docks* utilized both songs, which were familiar to many Chinese people at the time.

## 21. 家 住 安 源

京剧《杜鹃山》柯 湘唱

【反二黄中三眼】  
慢起

家 住 安 源 萍 水 头, 三 代 挖 煤 作

Figure 5. First page of the aria “I’m from Anyuan” from the opera *Azalea Mountain*.<sup>353</sup>

<sup>353</sup> Zhu Weiying, ed., *Xiqu zuoqu jifa* [Techniques of Theater Music Composition] (Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe, 2004), p. 243.



The opening phrases of the aria follow the structure of the lyrics, which is a seven-syllable couplet with each line further divided into three segments of two, two and three syllables each. The first two segments each take one measure (m. 4 and m. 5) and the third segment takes three measures (mm. 6-8). The second phrase, though not fully shown in Figure 5, maintains the same poetic and musical structure. As shown in the example, the material of the opening phrases comes from the motif, and the melody is largely built on its segments, which permeates into both the vocal and instrumental parts. The melody for the first segment (G1-F1-E1, m. 4) retains the rhythmic and melodic features of the first half of the motif, namely, the second to fourth note in m.1. The notes for the second segment (B1-E1, m. 5) were the skeletons from the second half of the motif (B1 on m. 1, b4 and E2 on m.2 b1). In addition, the instrumental interlude on m. 5 is also from the first part of motif (m.1 b3). Likewise, the beginning of the second phrase (B-G-F-E, m.10) was again from the material of the opening motif (the first four notes on m. 1), with slightly altered rhythm.

Throughout the opera, this motif (In Figure 4) serves as the most important organizational building block. Through subtle fragmentations and variations of this motif in both the vocal and the instrumental music, Ke Xiang is developed into a complex character from her first appearance through the opera's final curtain. With this rhythmic and dynamic variation, gradations in her character are musically suggested as a striking person of wit, courage, and confidence is gradually revealed.<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> In Yu's first opera *On the Docks*, he tried to create a motif for the main character but did not consistently apply it through the whole opera. In Chapter Four, five, and Six, we will examine the aria and instrumental music in more detail.

Without sacrificing a distinct Beijing opera flavor, Yu demonstrated that it was possible to write Beijing opera in the standard modern language so that was more colloquial and easier for the audience of his time to understand. Furthermore, he demonstrated it was possible to allude to tradition while still using new compositional techniques, such as recurring motifs, as well as breaking free from Beijing opera's highly stylized melodic formula (which will be further discussed in next Chapter). Indeed, Yu was able to see clearly the very essence of Beijing opera, and by freeing it from convention was able to greatly increase the expressive power of the music he composed, as can be seen from the fact that many of these arias gained popularity in their own right.<sup>355</sup>

### **Red Safe-Box**

The Cultural Revolution was a time of great instability for the entire Chinese population. No matter one's intentions, any action perceived as revisionist could result in public humiliation, imprisonment, or even death. Neighbor spied on neighbor, old scores were settled by spreading rumors. Yu Huiyong was acutely aware of the political climate and wanted better for the large circle of artists with which he surrounded himself. Within the yangbanxi troupes, Yu aimed to cultivate a safe haven for artistic expression that relieved its members of the everyday paranoia and constant surveillance of the Cultural Revolution.

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<sup>355</sup> *Azalea Mountain* was the most popular yangbanxi, and many of its arias were adapted as solo and ensemble pieces for various instruments.

The Chinese Communist Party had only come to power with the support of the working class—the peasants, workers, and soldiers—who had carried out the revolution. Thus, government policies on education, hiring and housing gave preferential treatment to those with working-class backgrounds, a system generally referred to as the “red safe-box.” Although family origin has always been a marker of status in China, after Liberation the old custom was turned on its head; now being able to claim one’s parents and grandparents were purely working class was a mark of distinction--and the poorer the better.

Generally speaking, the members of the yangbanxi troupes did not fit into the government’s red safe-box. On the one hand, the performers and musicians of Beijing opera had traditionally been relegated to the lowest class of society, even below that of the peasants and factory workers. After Liberation, their status had officially been redesignated as “art worker”; however, a heavy social stigma against performers and musicians still prevailed. On the other hand, the Western-trained musicians brought in from the conservatories, as members of the intelligentsia, definitely could not claim working-class family origin. Yet many of those who worked under Yu described how the yangbanxi troupes had provided a relatively peaceful and serene environment for their creative processes and growth. For example, Yu’s musical assistant Gong Guotai reflected on the sense of security he felt within his yangbanxi troupe:

In our troupe, the relationships we had with each other were very simple and pleasant. It was a very united and open community. We helped each other, and we worked toward the common goal of creating the best work possible. No one went around spreading rumors about others. Yu often told us our profession and individual

performances were more important than family origin. Our slogan was: The greatest politics is to do a good job.<sup>356</sup>

Over and over again, those who had worked with Yu described how he had created, within the yanbanxi troupes, a sort of red safe-box for musicians and performers<sup>357</sup>.

Many Western commentators have remarked that artists during the Cultural Revolution were completely under the control of the government, in particular the whims of Jiang Qing, and had to produce whatever they were told to.<sup>358</sup> However, those active at that time have pointed out that, in fact, the opposite was true. Because of the “iron rice bowl” policy, whereby every worker was paid a meager yet livable salary regardless of performance or output—the safest thing to do was nothing. This was especially true for artists, whose work, because of its ambiguous nature, could easily be interpreted as counter-revolutionary regardless of the artist’s true intent. Therefore, the artists working under Yu, whose collective output was prodigious by any measure, would have been putting themselves at hireling great personal risk had it not been for the red safe-box Yu had created for them.

But maintaining this red safe-box for his artists meant that Yu often had to take political risks of his own. Jiang Qing was essentially the only patron of the arts during the

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<sup>356</sup> Gong Guotai was a composer and conductor of Shanghai Beijing Opera Company. He was one of Yu’s main assistants during the Cultural Revolution. Interview with Gong Guotai in Beijing in July 2008.

<sup>357</sup> I have interviewed many people who had worked with Yu Huiyong. Here are only a few names that are familiar for Chinese: Interview with Yang Chunxia, performer for lead character in *Azalea Mountain*, in Beijing in July 2006, Gong Guotai, assistant to Yu Huiyong, in February 2011; and Wang Yongjie, conductor for *On the Docks*, in February 2011.

<sup>358</sup> For example, Kraus asserts “Yu Huiyong was Jiang’s hireling.” Richard Kraus, “Arts Policies of the Cultural Revolution,” *New Perspectives on the Cultural Revolution*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 240.

Cultural Revolution, but because of the extreme political power she wielded during that time, any casual remark she made could stir up a flurry of reproach and recrimination. She had extended Yu considerable artistic license, no doubt because she saw him as the most effective vehicle for instantiating the revolutionary Beijing opera reform she envisioned. Nevertheless, on several occasions Yu had to stand up to her to protect those under him.

One such incident involved music for the yangbanxi ballet *Hongse Niangzijun* (*Red Detachment of Women*, 1964). After attending a rehearsal of the ballet, Jiang commented that the song “Wanquan Heshui” (On the Wanquan Riverside) sounded like the type of erotic ballad that used to be performed in the Shanghai nightclubs of the 1930s.<sup>359</sup> Du Mingxin, composer of the piece, was then criticized within the ballet company for trying to destroy yangbanxi by secretly hiding bourgeois music in the revolutionary ballet, and company officials asked various members of the orchestra to rewrite the song using the same lyrics. More than one hundred versions were submitted, ten of which were chosen for rehearsal. In the end, though, Yu kept Du’s original composition, praising it for its representation of the folksong characteristics of the island of Hainan, the setting for the ballet. This incident, according to Du, revealed Yu’s artistic integrity and personal courage, and Jiang Qing respected Yu’s decision in this case.<sup>360</sup>

Another incident involved the music for a documentary on the construction of the Nanjing Yangtze River Bridge. Li Delun, conductor of the Central Philharmonic Orchestra, watched the documentary with Jiang Qing, and he commented afterwards

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<sup>359</sup> Jiang’s comment was prophetic, as “On the Wanquan Riverside” is now a popular karaoke tune in China.

<sup>360</sup> Interview with Du Mingxin in Beijing in June 2011.

about Russian characteristics in the music. Such an observation is not surprising, given that Li had studied in the Soviet Union; however, it also struck a sensitive political nerve. The bridge, generally considered China's greatest engineering feat to date, had been completed without Russian technological assistance after the Sino-Soviet split. That the music might somehow suggest a Russian influence in the construction of the bridge was politically unacceptable to Jiang, and she asked Yu Huiyong to use his connections to find out who had composed the piece in question. Although Yu knew who the young composer was, he kept this information to himself, apparently working under the assumption that Jiang would not bring up the issue again, which was, in fact, the case.

Thus, it seems the more mature Yu Huiyong of the later Cultural Revolution was largely able to create a safe haven for his fellow artists by maintaining a level head while those around him succumbed to political panic. For example, he astutely co-opted into the yangbanxi troupes several of his enemies from the Conservatory who had denounced him during previous political campaigns. But although he was willing to take some personal risk to protect his artists, he could not indiscriminately defy Jiang. There were even times when he had to endure her criticism in front of his musicians. In the final analysis, Jiang and Yu seemed to understand their relationship was symbiotic; Jiang needed Yu to execute her vision of revolutionary Beijing opera reform, and Yu needed Jiang to keep him in her red safe-box.

### **Rescuing the Heritage of National Folk Music**

During the last two years of the Cultural Revolution, Yu Huiyong's talents were directed away from yangbanxi composition and back toward his original scholarly

research on Chinese folk music. This shift also elucidates the symbiotic relationship with Jiang Qing, whereby Jiang served as Yu's protector because she saw him as the most appropriate instrument for realizing her vision.

In early 1974, Jiang Qing initiated a new project to collect and record folk music from around the country. Because of the political climate at the time, this project was justified in terms of serving the needs of Chairman Mao. The frequently told story goes something like this: Mao had been an avid reader of ancient poetry all his life, but as his eyesight deteriorated with old age, he needed someone to read to him. Jiang justified this project in terms of providing Mao with recordings of his beloved poetry to listen to. The fact that she justified a project to preserve the national heritage in these terms reflects the degree to which the cult of Mao had permeated every aspect of Chinese politics near the end of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>361</sup>

However, it is clear that Jiang had three practical goals for this project. The first was to arrange new music for classical poems in order to make them more accessible to the masses. The second was to arrange certain traditional Beijing opera arias as instrumental works, with the purpose of developing a new repertoire for classical Chinese instruments. The third was to record selected Beijing and regional operas on film to preserve them for posterity. Yu Huiyong was responsible for recruiting the personnel for this task, for which he hired his colleague Lian Bo to lead the classical poem team and his former student Chen Yinshi as project coordinator.<sup>362</sup> The project officially started in

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<sup>361</sup> Xiang Yanshen, *Musicology Collection—Historical Traces of the Music Garden* (Jinan: Shandong Art Publication, 2002), p. 456.

<sup>362</sup> This project is mentioned in many books, such as in Li Songchen, *File of the CR 1966-1976* (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo Chubanshe), 1999, p. 1279. It is also mentioned in Dai, 388-399. Yu's colleagues Chen Yinshi and Lian Bo, both confirmed during interviews with the author their

November 1974, employing over eighty of the best artists and scholars from across the nation. Two months later, Yu Huiyong was named minister of culture, with oversight of this project as his major charge.<sup>363</sup>

This task consumed most of Yu's time during this period, as his approach was very much hands-on. He oversaw the selection of music for each poem, which included a translation from the classical language to the vernacular as well as an annotation explaining the origin and meaning of each piece. The music for each was selected according to the time period, style, and poetic formula of the work, and once again Yu could use his vast knowledge of Chinese musical traditions in service to his country and the revolutionary cause. He also worked with individual performers, coaching them on new techniques before recording their performances. In addition, Yu hand-selected two hundred arias from various operatic forms (mostly Beijing opera) to be arranged as an instrumental pieces as well as twenty-five traditional operas to be preserved on film.

This large-scale project to collect and record the folk traditions of Chinese music shows that neither Jiang nor Yu intended to entirely supplant them with modern revolutionary works. By these efforts it is clear that they saw the value of preserving China's cultural legacy. But perhaps also they could not have made this attempt to save the national music heritage until their program of revolutionary music reform had finally succeeded. Furthermore, this project can be seen as an act of reconciliation toward those musicians and composers who had been marginalized during the heyday of yangbanxi. It

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direct involvement in the project. Interview with Chen Yinshi in Shanghai in July 2005. Interview with Lian Bo in Shanghai in July 2005.

<sup>363</sup> This project became the primary focus for Yu, and he had to set aside his work on revising the opera *Panshi Bay*, which was a project of Shanghai Beijing Opera Company and had been originally composed by Lu Zaiyi, a graduate of Shanghai Conservatory. Interview with Lu Zaiyi in Shanghai in May 2006.



not only served to rehabilitate a generation of traditional performers who had been languishing since before the onset of the Cultural Revolution, but also provided a forum for these artists to pass on their skills to a new generation. In the end, this project also fostered considerable communication among scholars and artists in various fields. Thus, while traditional art forms were banished at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, they were resurrected to the status of national treasure as the Cultural Revolution drew to a close. This shift in policy suggests that the initial aim of the government at the onset of the Cultural Revolution was not to destroy the traditional art forms but rather to suppress them temporarily until yangbanxi was firmly established.

### **Conclusion**

Perhaps China's greatest musical loss at the end of Cultural Revolution was Yu Huiyong. Denounced as a "first-category Gang of Four element," Yu was arrested in the same month as Jiang Qing, and he killed himself the following year by drinking sulfuric acid.<sup>364</sup> Yangbanxi's chief creator, designer, organizer, theorist and principle composer became one of the last victims of the Cultural Revolution. All the people interviewed for this chapter, from the chairman of Chinese Musicians' Association to the presidents of conservatories, all expressed their respect for Yu and their regret for the loss of one of China's greatest twentieth-century composers.

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<sup>364</sup> In China, suicide is often viewed as an honorable death; however, in Yu's case it can also be interpreted as an act of rebellion against the government in protest of an injustice. In such a case, the person is unlikely ever to be rehabilitated.

In his theory of autonomy for audiences, Kraus (2004) argues that audiences and readers are able to establish their own individual relationships with works of art and literature.<sup>365</sup> This possibility for autonomy should be extended to artists, especially those, like Yu Huiyong, who serve in both artistic and political capacities.<sup>366</sup> Any extra-musical control, such as that exerted by political bodies, is considered by many scholars to be in direct opposition to creative activities and to automatically weaken the artistic value of any work produced under it. However, if the individual artist largely concurs with the official ideology, it may be possible for him or her to articulate the voice of authority in his or her works without compromising its artistic value. Art has a far more complicated relationship to the society in which it is produced and to the individual behind its creation than any reductive assessment that is based on one criterion can properly explain.

As a member of the first generation of musicians educated under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, Yu represented a changing identity of Chinese composers who were eager to participate in creations establishing new national image through opera while at the same time taking a strong stand for the preservation of China's folk music heritage. However, because of his close relationship with Jiang Qing, it became inevitable that every one of his decisions would be scrutinized and used by his enemies to vilify him.

The distinctive twentieth-century Chinese cultural and musical traits shaped Yu's aesthetic beliefs and thoughts. Viewed as a whole, Yu's aesthetics shows a

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<sup>365</sup> Richard Curt Kraus, *The Party and the Arts in China: The New Politics of Culture* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

<sup>366</sup> Among the other artists rewarded by promotions to important leadership positions for their contributions to yangbanxi were the ballet dancer Liu Qintang, Beijing opera actor Qian Haoling, and the pianist Yin Chenzhong.

correspondence with a deep-rooted Chinese cultural, philosophical, and aesthetic system. Yet his particular blend of tradition with modernity and his unique selections from Eastern and Western musical elements suggested a highly individual manner reflecting his own interpretation and an aesthetics that was without parallel in Chinese history.

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## **CHAPTER SIX: VOCAL MUSIC IN TRADITIONAL BEIJING OPERA AND YANGBANXI**

A common criticism of Beijing opera music, both in China and in the West, is that it all sounds alike. This is not just a casual dismissal by those unfamiliar with the art form; rather, it is a reflection of the musical practices in traditional Beijing opera. Music for Beijing operas was rarely composed anew, but instead it was drawn from a stock of melodies familiar to performers and audiences alike. In his yangbanxi compositions, Yu Huiyong breathed new life into the art form by composing new music that retained the essential characteristics of traditional Beijing opera while at the same time bolstering it with Western musical techniques that made his compositions more accessible to twentieth-century Chinese audiences.

Chinese opera, and especially Beijing opera, has been of increasing interest to Western scholars in the last few years. There are books and articles related to the topic, but most focus only on social or political aspects of opera. Questions concerning the context in which Beijing opera evolved, its relationship to Chinese music more generally, and the issue of dramatic validity have not been addressed with thoughtfulness and insight, if they have even been mentioned at all. Our understanding of Beijing opera as work of art remains fragmentary at best and skewed at worst. In spite of their earnest efforts to understand this art form, language and cultural limitations on the part of many Western scholars has left them a narrow and uneven understanding of performance and music conventions as well as restricted cultural and historical awareness. Furthermore,

given that Beijing opera is an orally-transmitted art form, there is little written record of the music or lyrics until the twentieth century, and this fact coupled with the inaccessibility of recordings and live performances, has stymied research.

Without question, composer Yu Huiyong was largely responsible for executing the reforms of Beijing opera that took place during the Cultural Revolution. For example, composer Xie Tan was ebullient with praise for Yu's accomplishments:

There was no one who has meant more and achieved more in Chinese music history than Yu Huiyong. No one understood the essence of Chinese folk music, theater music, and Western music as much as Yu Yuiyong. He is greater than Beethoven... Yu's music influenced and inspired so many people, yet he is so little known. Even as a composer, I did not know many works were by Yu Huiyong until very recently.<sup>367</sup>

Similarly, in the newly published *The Music History of the Republic*, author Ju Qihong also praised Yu Huiyong's genius and originality in composing yangbanxi music, which, he claimed, revealed a highest degree of professionalism and modernity.<sup>368</sup> However, both Xie and Ju leave unanswered the question of exactly what characteristics of Yu's music has led so many to hold it in such high regard.

A full understanding of Yu Huiyong's impact on twentieth-century Beijing opera cannot be obtained simply by examining his works in isolation. Rather, it is only with a full consideration of the broader context surrounding the development of yangbanxi that we can comprehend the full significance of Yu's work. These circumstances include long-standing musical conventions in Chinese music and Beijing opera, sociolinguistic

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<sup>367</sup> Xie was particularly fond of *On the Docks*, thought it was different from the rest of yangbanxi at the time of its premier. He also remembered several popular songs that he remembered as a child in 1970s and did not know they were written by Yu Huiyong. Interview with Xie Tan in San Francisco in May 2008.

<sup>368</sup> Ju Qihong, *Gongheguo yinyueshi* [The Music History of the Republic 1949-2008] (Beijing: Central Conservatory of Music Press, 2010), p. 125.

issues concerning choice of dialect, historical traditions regarding social and gender roles, and the political issues of that time period. Such a multidimensional approach has been the goal of this thesis.

In this chapter I will explain the main features and characteristic differences of vocal music among the traditional and modern revolutionary Beijing opera. I have chosen arias from a variety of operas and given detailed explanation of their musical features in combination with the historic background of their storylines, illuminating the structures and relationships between libretto and music, which were the main threads from which the dramas are woven. In each aria, I pay more attention to melodic features, mode and pitch range, rhythmic character, and organizational structure, as these represent the salient features of Beijing opera vocal music, and in so doing I will illustrate the major changes that have taken place on these areas.

### **Beijing Opera Vocal Music**

The most distinctive characteristic of traditional Beijing opera is its collective vocal improvisation. Until the twentieth century, there was no tradition of written libretti in Beijing opera. Classical Kun opera did employ written libretti as well as composed music, but this was an art form directed at the intellectual class. Beijing opera, on the other hand, like other regional operas, was performed both by and for the common people, most of whom were illiterate. Its stories were largely drawn from folklore and legend, and even when the characters were well-known historical figures, they were generally portrayed with a great deal of poetic license.

Lyrics typically consisted of rhymed couplets of either seven or ten syllables per line.<sup>369</sup> No doubt this tight structure, which is a feature of Chinese poetry in general, greatly aided in the recall of lines. Each line of the couplet was further subdivided into three or four semantic and rhythmic segments. Arias varied in length from just one to more than thirty couplets. These lyrics were set to music according to a system of formulas for matching couplets to melodies.

The vocal music of Beijing opera is based on a theatrical musical genre known as *banqiang*, which is characterized by its two-phrase structure.<sup>370</sup> Although *banqiang* includes a number of aria-types, Beijing opera largely makes use of two of these. The first aria-type, known as *xipi*, is used to express energetic emotions, and thus its usage was not unlike that of the major mode in Western music. The second aria-type, known as *erhuang*, is used to express deep thought and contemplation, and is thus similar in function to the Western minor mode. Furthermore, arias of both types are distinguished by their *ban* (literally, “beat”), a concept that incorporates both meter and tempo. For example, *yuanban* (“original beat”) indicates a 2/4 meter with a moderate tempo, while *liushui* (“flowing water”) marks a 1/4 meter with a quick tempo. Thus, each Beijing opera aria is designated by its aria-type (*qiang*) and *ban*, such as *xipi liushui* or *erhuang*

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<sup>369</sup> Chinese is a monosyllabic language in the sense that each morpheme, or basic unit of meaning, is a single syllable and is represented in writing by a single character. However, many Chinese words consist of two or more morphemes, either as compound words or as root word plus suffix or prefix. In written Chinese, there are no spaces between characters, either within or between words. Although there are several systems for representing Chinese in Roman letters, the system in use in the People’s Republic of China is called *pinyin*, and it calls for multisyllabic (and hence multi-character) words to be written as a single unit without hyphenation or spaces between syllables.

<sup>370</sup> *Ban* refers to the metrical type and *qiang* refers to the melodic phrase.

*yuanban*. Some *ban* are common to both aria-types, whereas others are restricted to one type or the other. Changes in emotion are largely expressed through changes in *ban*.

It is important to note that traditional Chinese musical systems are based on relative, not absolute, pitch, with instrumentalists typically tuning their instruments to match the singer's tessitura. Harmony is conceptualized differently in traditional Chinese music, and emphasis is placed more on horizontal than vertical relationships in the melodic structure. Thus, concepts from Western music, such as key and tonic, do not apply to Beijing opera music in quite the same way. In a given aria, a particular pitch will be central, but this will depend on the aria-type and the range of the vocalist.

The *erhuang* aria-type is based on a pentatonic scale *re mi sol la do re* (represented in cipher notation as 2, 3, 5, 6, 1). As the type usually associated with darker and more reflective moods, it is often used to express contemplation, and it is characterized by more conjunct motion. The musical phrase, always beginning on a downbeat, commonly parallels each line of the lyrics. However, the formally aligned couplet is typically set up into two asymmetrical phrases, with the first phrase consisting of twelve measures (eight measures of vocal music and four measures of instrumental interlude) and the second phrase five measures.<sup>371</sup> Until the twentieth century, all Beijing opera performers were male. When playing male role-types, vocalists made use of a Dorian-like mode (D-E-G-A-C-D), with the requirement that the first phrase of each couplet end on *do* and the second phrase on *re*, the tonic. When they performed female

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<sup>371</sup> This is the basic structure for *erhuang yuanban*. The structure varies according to different *ban*. For example, the opening phrase for *erhuang manban* is eleven measures instead of twelve (the instrumental part has three one-measure interludes), but the second phrase is also five measures. See the later example of "Woman, Don't Be So Stubborn." Liu Guojie, *Xipi erhuang yinyue gailun* [Survey of Xipi Erhuang Music] (Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue chubanshe, 1997), p. 174.



role-types, vocalists used a mode similar to Myxolydian (G-A-C-D-E-G), ending each first phrase with *la* and each second phrase with either *so* (tonic note) or *do*.<sup>372</sup>

The *xipi* aria-type is built from a heptatonic scale *do re mi fa sol la si* (represented in cipher notation as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, in which the relationship between the notes are similar to C-D-E-F-G-A-B).<sup>373</sup> Since it is used to express energetic emotion, frequent leaps are characteristic of its melodic structure. Each phrase begins on a weak beat, and the two phrases of *xipi* couplets are generally symmetrical. Male vocalists sing in a mode similar to Ionian, ending each first phrase on *do* and each second phrase on *re*. Female vocalists use a heptatonic Myxolydian mode (G-A-B-C-D-E-F-G), ending each first phrase on *do* or *la* and each second phrase on *so*.

The two aria-types do, however, have a number of common features. First, arias of both types begin with formulaic instrumental preludes that serve to indicate the aria-type and *ban*. For example, all *erhuang yuanban* arias begin with the same eight-measure prelude. Likewise, all *xipi yuanban* arias begin with an eight-measure prelude that is particular to this aria-type and *ban*. Second, the shape of the aria follows the basic structure of the rhymed couplet; in particular, the opening phrase of an aria is highly constrained, typically following the structure of the first line closely, including its segments (each containing two or three syllables), which are punctuated by short instrumental interludes. Third, melodic structure within a given aria-type and *ban* is also highly formulaic, and different aria-types in a certain *ban* serve different dramatic functions. Fourth, within a particular aria there can be no change of aria-type (for

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<sup>372</sup> Traditional Chinese scales are relative, not fixed as in the Western tradition.

<sup>373</sup> However, the fourth and seventh scale degree of this heptatonic is different from that of the West; specifically, F is a quarter-step higher and B is a quarter-step lower. For both *xipi* and *erhuang*, the scale can be transposed to begin on any pitch that best suits the singer's tessitura.

instance, a change from *erhuang* to *xipi* within an aria); however, with each new couplet within an aria, the *ban* can change. For example, an *erhuang* aria may have a *yuanban* first couplet, followed by *kuaiban* (“fast beat”) in the second couplet and ending with *sanban* (unmeasured) in the third couplet. Finally, all arias of a given aria-type and *ban* have essentially the same rhythmic structure and melodic contour, in addition to prescribed cadential pitches and shared vocabulary of melodic formulae. Such formulaic construction is clearly a necessity in a medium with oral transmission. As a result of this, Beijing opera arias of a given aria type and *ban* all sound very similar. Hence, Beijing opera aria is often described as *yi qu duo yong*, or “one tune fits all.”

### Example 1: “My Seventh Son”

The flavor of Beijing opera can be best experienced through the analysis of a simple example aria. In this case, let us examine the aria “My Seventh Son” (Ming qi lang) from the opera *Against the Stone* (*Peng bei*).<sup>374</sup> This opera relates the story of Song-dynasty general Yang Ye and the Battle of Mount Twin Wolves; encircled and outnumbered by attacking Liao forces, Yang sends his seventh son to Pan Renmei, commander of the main army, to ask for reinforcements. But Pan, who harbors a grudge against the Yang clan, instead kills Yang’s son and sends no aid. As the Liao approach, Yang refuses to be taken alive and instead kills himself by crushing his head against the

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<sup>374</sup> The synopsis for this opera is based on the entry in Huang Jun, ed., *Jingju Xiaocidian* [Pocket Dictionary of Beijing Opera] (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2009), p. 83. The score for this aria was transcribed by Li Rongshou (1895-1965) in early 1920s and was first published in a collection called *Pihuang Music Scores* (*pihuang qupu*) in 1923, and then much later online. Li was the first musician to transcribe Beijing opera in western notation. It should be noted that this transcription was made after the fact, since Beijing opera is an oral tradition that does not make use of written scores.

tombstone of legendary Tang-dynasty general Li Ling. This story is part of the oral history of China and is well known to Beijing opera audiences. Neither the libretto nor the score for this opera was originally written down, and it was only in the twentieth century that these were recorded.

First let us consider the poetic structure of the single couplet that makes up the lyrics for this aria. The couplet, transcribed in *pinyin* Romanization and translated in to English, is as follows.<sup>375</sup>

1      命七郎回大营搬兵求救，

Ming qi lang | hui da ying | ban bing | qiu jiu,

My se- venth | son went out | to bring | more men,

2      为什么去数日不见回头？

Wei shen me | qu shu ri | bu jian | hui tou

Why has he | still not yet | come back | a- gain?

Following classical Chinese poetic tradition, this couplet consists of two rhymed lines of ten syllables each, with three caesurae breaking each line into segments of three, three, two and two syllables respectively. In classical Chinese poetry, there are also conventions for organizing syllable tones according to particular patterns, somewhat like the rules for meter in Western poetry, but these conventions are largely disregarded in Beijing opera lyrics.

This poignant aria is sung by Yang Ye, of the role type *laosheng* (literally, “older male”), which was typical of the heroic male and roughly equivalent to baritone in the

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<sup>375</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the aria are by the author.

Western system. The score is notated in two voices, one vocal and one instrumental. The instrumental part is played by the *jinghu*, a fiddle with two strings, typically tuned to *sol* (5, close to the pitch of G) and *re* (2, close to the pitch of D), similar to the first two strings on the violin; the *jinghu* was the main instrument for accompanying arias in traditional Beijing opera.<sup>376</sup>

As can be seen from the score (Figure 6), this aria reflects Yang's worried state and is typical of the *erhuang* aria-type in a number of ways. First, the aria is sung in a Dorian-like mode known as *shangdiao*, which is the standard mode for male voices in this aria-type. Second, the texture is monophonic, with note-against-note accompaniment throughout. Third, the music includes mostly whole-step and minor-third motion, with only a few perfect fourth and perfect fifth leaps—always up and down around the tonic—which are the main feature of the Beijing opera *erhuang* aria-type. Finally, it should be noted that the two musical phrases are asymmetrical, in contrast with the lyrics. Whereas the lyrics are composed of two lines of ten syllables each, the two phrases of the vocal music are not of equal length. The first phrase is punctuated with long rests filled by one or more measures of instrumental interludes; the second phrase is sung straight through until a quarter-note pause just before the final two syllables. This structure for the opening two phrases is the standard formula of the *erhuang yuanban* aria type; the two phrases form a period, and the first phrase is always longer than the second phrase.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> For *xipi*, the lower string of *jinghu* is tuned in *la* and high string in *mi*, different from *erhuang*.

<sup>377</sup> Liu Guojie, *Xipi erhuang yinyue gailun* [Survey of Xipi Erhuang Music] (Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue chubanshe, 1997), p. 169.

## My Seventh Son

*Against the Stone*

**Traditional Beijing Opera**

Erhuang yuanban

8

Ming qi lang hui da ying

16

ban bing qiu jiu

24

wei shen me qu shu ri bu jian hui

31

tou

Figure 6. Score for the aria “My Seventh Son” from Beijing opera *Against the Stone*.<sup>378</sup>

<sup>378</sup> The synopsis for this opera is based on the entry in Huang Jun, ed., *Jingju Xiaocidian* [Pocket Dictionary of Beijing Opera] (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2009), p. 83. The score for this aria was transcribed by Li Rongshou (1895-1965) in the early 1920s and was first published in a collection called *Pihuang qupai* [Pihuang Music Scores] in 1923; part of this collection is now available online. Retrieved from <http://www.qilumingren.com/info/news/content/2616.htm> on May 18, 2013. Figure 6 renotated from the original.

The instrumental prelude is standard for *erhuang yuanban* and contains important melodic and rhythmic features that help establish the aria-type. The first three measures consist of an ascending-descending pentatonic scale that starts and ends on G, which is an important pitch in the *erhuang* aria-type. (The *jinghu* is tuned to G and D for *erhuang*). Measure 3 contains a syncopated rhythmic pattern that is characteristic and often used as a brief passage for the instrumental connectives of *erhuang*. Measures 4-6 display a rhythmic pattern consisting of ascending leaps and descending stepwise motion. Measures 8-9 consist of a repetition of the first three measures, serving as a bridge leading into the aria, with a syncopated rhythm and a pentatonic progression of G, A, C leading naturally into D, the opening pitch and the tonic of the aria. In sum, this instrumental prelude centers on G, assuming the subdominant function, which is the role of instrumental music in traditional Beijing opera.

This aria is a standard rendition of the *erhuang yuanban* aria type for male voices. The mode is the Dorian-like *shangdiao*, in which the tonic is *re*. The first phrase of this aria is especially noteworthy because it largely reflects the formulaic structure of Beijing opera *erhuang* aria, which requires that the first segment end on *re*, the second on *do*, the third on *mi*, and the last on *re*.<sup>379</sup> Also exemplified in this piece is the salient *erhuang* feature that the aria opens and ends on a down beat (as opposed to *xipi*, which begins on a weak beat). The first segment, *ming qi lang* (mm. 10-11) clearly establishes the tonic for the mode by starting and ending on the same tonic note D. The first word *ming*, is sung as

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<sup>379</sup> However, this rule largely applies only to the opening phrase, and if the aria consists of multiple couplets, the first lines of the subsequent couplets would not be necessary to follow this structural requirement.

a rising perfect fourth from D to G.<sup>380</sup> The first caesura is marked by a measure-long rest in the voice that is filled with instrumental interlude (mm. 11-12), where the material comes from the opening prelude. The second caesura is marked by a two-measure rest in the vocal part that is filled by an instrumental interlude (mm. 16-17) that is identical to the passage from the second beat of measure 7 to the end of measure 9. The third and fourth segments, *ban bing* and *qiu jiu* (mm 18-19) are of particular interest because two leaps (p4 and p5) occur in one measure (m. 18). The last syllable of the line, *jiu*, rests on a long note C, from the second beat of measure 19 to the down beat of measure 20, which signals the end of the first phrase. According to convention, the opening phrase usually ends on C, but in this case it is prolonged into a three-measure melismatic passage, ending on a down beat A (m. 22). This type of melisma, known as *tuoqiang*, is a hallmark of Beijing opera that provides singers with an opportunity to showcase their virtuosity. An instrumental interlude fills the following three-measure rest with the same stereotyped instrumental passage that was introduced in the prelude.

The second phrase begins on measure 26 and continues virtually uninterrupted until the end of the aria on measure 36. Indeed, the only rests in singing occur on the first beat of measures 28 and 30, serving to shift the penultimate syllable to an upbeat and the ultimate syllable to a downbeat; this structure is required in both Beijing opera aria-types, *xipi* and *erhuang*. The leaps of perfect fourths and perfect fifths scattered throughout this phrase all serve to create a sense of agitation as the father ponders the fate of his son. The aria closes in the typical Beijing opera fashion, with the singing of the final word *tou* in a

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<sup>380</sup> This, however, contradicts the falling tone of the word in natural speech. Disregard for spoken tone was common in traditional Beijing opera, as Yu pointed out in his book *Qiangsi guanxi yanjiu* [Studies on the Relationship between Melody and Lyrics] (Beijing: Central Conservatory of Music Press, 2008), p. 64-66.

melismatic fashion through five measures, ending on the tonic note and creating a sense of perfect cadence.

In sum, this example illustrates many of the characteristics of Beijing opera aria construction. First, the lyrics are created according to the traditional Chinese poetic convention of rhymed couplets. Second, the instrumental passages in this piece are typical of *erhuang*-type arias in that they consist of stereotyped melodies and rhythmic patterns; even the lengths of these passages are largely determined by convention, particularly the eight-measure introduction. Third, the melodic structure is highly formulaic. And finally, despite the simple formulaic structure of the lyrics, melody and rhythm, the use of melisma allows the performer to add complexity to the piece while showcasing his skills. Indeed, the melismatic passages presented in the example are only suggestive and will be executed differently by each performer. Since Beijing opera is an oral tradition, it is up to the vocalist to decide how to interpret the passage. These characteristics apply to female *erhuang* arias as well, with the only exception being that they are sung in a Mixolydian-like mode.

### **Example 2: “Woman, Don’t Be So Stubborn”**

Although the first example aria consisted of only a single couplet, most Beijing opera arias are much longer. In the next example, we examine the first two couplets of the *erhuang* aria “Nianzi, bubi tai liexing” (“Woman, Don’t Be So Stubborn”) from the traditional Beijing opera *Shougu Jiugu* (*Massacre of the Innocents*). In this opera, set in the Spring and Autumn period (771-746 B.C.), the emperor has ordered the slaughter of all newborn males in the land unless the last remaining heir of his mortal enemy Zhao



Dun is found, but Zhao's loyal servant Cheng Ying has hidden away his infant grandson. In this aria, Cheng attempts to persuade his wife to surrender their own newborn son instead to preserve their master's lineage as well as to prevent a holocaust. The lyrics are composed as seven rhymed couplets of seven syllables each. The first two couplets are given below, and the score is given in Figure 7.

- 1      娘子不必太烈性 ,  
  
Niang zi | bu bi | tai lie xing,  
  
Wo - man | don't be | so stub - born,
- 2      俾人言来你是听。  
  
Bei ren | yan lai | ni shi ting.  
  
Let me | talk and | you list - en.
- 3      赵屠二家有仇恨,  
  
Zhao tu | er jia | you chou hen,  
  
Our two | hous - es | are feud - ing,
- 4      三百余口命赴幽冥。  
  
San bai | yu kou | ming fu you ming.  
  
Caus - ing | more than | three hundred deaths.

Although the couplets of this aria consist of seven-syllable lines, the musical structure is still very similar to that of "My Seventh Son." Both arias start with exactly same eight-measure prelude, follow a similar pattern of segment-ending notes, and share a similar asymmetrical two-phrase structure. In fact, the aria "Woman, Don't Be So Stubborn" is a textbook example of asymmetrical structure since the first phrase is twelve

measures (eight-measure aria and four-measure interludes) and second is five measures. Nevertheless, there are many parallels between the two arias. In particular, there are many similarities between the opening phrases of these two arias. Thus, in this aria, just as in the previous example, we find that the first segment takes two measures and ends on *re* (m. 11), while the second segment takes three measures and ends on *do* (m. 15). The antepenultimate syllable is important in both cases. In ten-syllable lines, this is the final syllable of the third segment (m. 18), but in seven-syllable lines, this is the first syllable of the last segment (m. 19); nevertheless, they are both assigned the same required note, namely *mi*. Finally, the second phrase ends on cadential pitch *re* in both cases.<sup>381</sup>

### Woman, Don't Be So Stubborn

*Massacre of the Innocents*

Traditional Beijing Opera  
erhuang yuanban

Niang zi bu bi  
tai lie xing bi ren  
yan lai ni shi ting zhao tu er jia  
you chou hen

381 “My Seventh Son” has more measures because both phrases have extended melismatic passages (tuoqiang) on final syllables, which also gives freedom to end on *la* instead of *do* for the first phrase.

Figure 7. Excerpt from the aria “Woman, Don’t Be So Stubborn” from the traditional Beijing opera *Massacre of the Innocents*.<sup>382</sup>

This particular aria is composed of seven couplets, all of which have essentially the same rhythmic pattern and share the same melodic feature of required segment-ending notes. This can be seen by comparing the first and third phrases. For example, m. 11 and m. 28 both end on *re*; likewise, m. 15 and m. 31 both end on *do*. In addition, the second beat on m. 19 and m. 32 both end on *mi*, while mm. 20-21 and mm. 33-34 are identical. This aria demonstrates the formulaic nature of erhuang arias. First, a music phrase generally follows its rhythmic patterns and cadential pitches no matter whether it contains seven or ten syllables. Second, within each couplet, the first phrase is more strictly regulated than the second phrase. Third, it is optional to extend a melismatic passage known as *tuoqiang* at the end of the first line of the couplet. When it occurs, the cadential pitch could be altered. An examination of the structures of these two arias shows the notable differences occurring in these places: the first example is with *tuoqiang* (see mm. 19-21, mm. 31-36) and the second example is without (m. 21, 26, 34). Given the circumstances of the story, it seems that Beijing opera masters used this option wisely in these two arias. The *tuoqiang*, which usually occurs only in the opening lines of a couplet, occurred twice in this aria at the end of both lines, effectively expressing a father’s worry about the whereabouts of his son. The second example, on the other hand, is not only sung without *tuoqiang* at the end of each line, both the first and third phrases seem to end on the tonic pitch *re*, which sounds more forceful, instead of required *do*,

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382 Lian Bo, *Xiqu zuoqu jiaocheng* [Introduction to theater music composition], (Shanghai yinyue xueyuan chubanshe, 2008), p. 72.

Liu Guojie, *Xipi erhuang yinyue gailun* [Survey of Xipi Erhuang Music] (Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue chubanshe, 1997), p. 167-168. Renotated from the original cipher notation.

which would have sounded more tentative (see m. 21, 34). Furthermore, each phrase ends hastily, indicating the male-dominant mentality of the husband, who has already made up his mind and wants no dissent from his wife.

### Example 3: “Two Kingdoms”

The aria “Two Kingdoms” (Liang guo) from the Beijing opera *The Lost Pavilion* (Shijie ting) provides a good example of the *xipi* aria-type. It is sung by the historical figure Zhuge Liang, famous military strategist and statesman of the Three Kingdoms period (208-280 A.D.), nicknamed “Crouching Dragon” because of his cunning. In this opera, the Han Dynasty has collapsed, the country has fallen into civil war, and Zhuge Liang has forged an alliance between two southern armies to fight the northern warlord Cao Cao at the decisive Battle of Red Cliff.

This aria consists of three rhymed couplets, and each line is broken with caesurae into three segments of two, two and three syllables respectively, following a traditional pattern in Chinese poetry.<sup>383</sup> The lyrics, along with their translation, follow.

1      两国交锋龙虎斗，

Liang guo | jiao feng | long hu dou,

Two kingdoms | go to war | like dragon and tiger,

2      各位其主统貔貅。

Ge wei | qi zhu | tong pi xiu.

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<sup>383</sup> Lines 4 and 5 violate this pattern, reflecting the fact that Beijing opera is an oral tradition that largely, but not consistently, follows the traditional forms of Chinese poetry and music.

Each side | assembling | its army.

3      带领三军要宽厚，

Dai ling | san jun | yao kuan hou,

Treat | your troops | with decency,

4      赏罚公平莫要自由。

Shang fa | gong ping | mo yao zi you.

Discipline | fairly | not capriciously.

5      此一番领兵去镇守，

Ci yi fan | ling bing | qu zhen shou,

Lead | your troops | to the battlefield,

6      靠山近水把营收。

Kao shan | jin shui | ba ying shou.

Be resourceful, | bring home | a victory.

This aria utilizes a *xipi* aria-type to express excitement and agitation as the army prepares for battle. Like the previous *erhuang yuanban* example, this aria begins with an eight-measure instrumental prelude that is stereotypical of all *xipi yuanban* arias. The *xipi* aria-type is assigned to express energetic emotion, as seen the rhythmic features of this aria, which is more concise than in the previous *erhuang* example; likewise, there are no melismatic passages in this aria, either. As can be seen from the score, the phrases of each couplet are largely symmetrical; each consisting of either five or six measures, and the metrical pattern of each phrase is practically identical. The melody for each couplet is

also nearly identical. The alternating cadential pitches (*re* for the opening phrase and *do* for the ending phrase) at the end of each phrase are standard for this aria-type. It is also important to note that each phrase begins on a weak beat and each phrase is followed by an instrumental interlude that is essentially a repetition of the prelude. The score is given in Figure 8.

## Two Countries

*The Lost Pavilion*

**Traditional Beijing Opera**

xipi yuanban

7

13

21

30

37

45

Liang guo jiao feng

long hu dou ge wei qi zhu tong pi

xiu dai lin san jun yao kuan hou

shang fa gong ping mo yao zi you

ci yi fan ling bing qu zheng shou kao shan

jin shui ba ying shou

Figure 8. Score for the aria “Two Countries” from the traditional Beijing opera *The Lost Pavilion*.<sup>384</sup>

### Summary of Beijing Opera Aria Characteristics

The three examples above give a flavor of the two main aria-types in Beijing opera. The *erhuang* aria-type is used to represent deep thought and contemplation, while the *xipi* aria-type expresses energetic emotion such as agitation or anticipation. There are, however, two additional aria-types, known as *fan-erhuang* and *fan-xipi*. Although the prefix *fan-* means “anti-” or “reverse”, these are in fact extensions of the original *erhuang* and *xipi* aria-types. Both are used to express extreme emotions, especially deep sadness, desperation or despair. Largely similar in structure and features to the original aria-types, *fan-erhuang* and *fan-xipi* differ from the originals mainly in that the ending notes of each phrase are shifted downward by a fourth. This downward extension of the vocal range, then, is what gives these aria-types their somber character. Since they are only used in limited situations, they are not as highly developed as *erhuang* and *xipi*. However, both of these aria-types play a role in the development of *yangbanxi*, and so they merit at least brief mention here.

As we have seen, the Western concepts of meter and tempo are folded together into the single concept of *ban*, or “beat,” in traditional Chinese theatrical music, including Beijing opera. All three examples employ *yuanban*, namely a 2/4 meter with a moderate tempo. In Beijing opera, emotion is conveyed mainly through the use of different *ban*. *Yuanban* is the default meter and tempo for Beijing opera arias, and it represents a

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<sup>384</sup> Lian Bo. *Xiqu zuoqu jiaocheng* [Introduction to theater music composition]. (Shanghai yinyue xueyuan chubanshe, 2008), p. 72. Renotated from the original cipher notation.

relatively calm emotional state. However, dozens of *ban* exist, each representing a different combination of meter and tempo, and likewise each represents a different emotional state. In addition to the default *yuanban*, other common “beats” include *kuaiban*, a “fast beat” in 1/4 time, and *manban*, a “slow beat” in 2/4 time. Some *ban*, such as *manban*, are suitable for both aria-types; others, because of the emotion they express, are only suitable for one or the other aria-type. For example, *kuaiban*, because of its emotional intensity, can only be used with the *xipi* aria-type. On the other hand, *gunban*, a “rolling beat” with free tempo and unmeasured meter, is used to express bitter mood and weeping, and thus it is not suitable for the brighter *xipi* aria-type, and only occurs in *erhuang* arias. Within an aria, the *ban* can change from couplet to couplet, and sometimes even from phrase to phrase, as shifting moods are expressed by the vocalist.

All examples above are for male role-types, and this is not entirely by accident. Beijing opera, as a reflection of traditional Chinese society, is highly male-centered. The *laosheng* (“older man”) role-type is typically viewed as the heroic character of the opera and often represents a famous virtuous statesman or scholarly general from earlier Chinese history. (The young warrior role-type does not play a central figure in Beijing opera, or in traditional Chinese literature generally, as it does in the West). More broadly speaking, male roles such as emperors, generals, statesmen, kings and princes are among those most commonly found on the Beijing opera stage. On the other hand, there is a much more limited range of role-types for females. In general, women are portrayed as silly young beauties, nagging old women, or else as shrewish princesses scheming to destroy noble and virtuous men. However, in spite of the generally lowly status of women in traditional China, both in society and on stage, one female role-type stands as



quite extraordinary—the woman warrior. One example of this is the story of Hua Mulan, who must masquerade as a man to lead an army to avenge her father. A popular folk tale throughout the centuries, it was widely performed on the Beijing opera stage; yet, unlike the Disney version, the heroine returns home after leading the army to victory without receiving any reward or recognition for her valor. (After all, this is a story of vengeance, not women’s rights.) As has already been noted, at least until the middle of the twentieth century, all roles on the Beijing opera stage were performed by men, and this fact, at least in part, explains why female role-types remained underdeveloped until the advent of *yangbanxi*. Indeed, as we shall see in the following sections, there is a shift of focus from the centrality of the older male role-type in traditional Beijing opera to the prominence of young heroes and heroines fighting for the Communist cause in *yangbanxi*.

In conclusion, the above three examples illustrate many of the typical features of Beijing opera arias. First, lyrics are composed of one or more rhymed couplets, with parallel lines consisting of either seven or ten syllables arranged according to a strict structure. Second, arias are structured as two-phrase melodies that parallel the couplet structure and exhibit formulaic alternating cadential pitches. And third, a significant portion of each aria is made up of recycled instrumental passages serving as a sort of barely perceptible background music framing the highlighted aria. Each aria is preceded by a stereotyped instrumental prelude that indicates the aria-type as well as the meter and tempo (*ban*). Also, instrumental interludes frequently punctuate the aria, both within and between phrases. Arias are accompanied by stringed instruments such as the *erhu* and *jinhu*, which are two-stringed fiddles, and *yueqin*, a kind of lute. The accompaniment is typically monophonic, following the melody that is being sung (as shown in Figure 6).

We have also seen how the formulaic structure of aria melodies gives Beijing opera its distinctive flavor. While such recycling of melodies enables the performers to learn and pass on their art in an oral manner, this practice also gives the art form the sense of being highly repetitive. Thus a common criticism of Beijing opera is that every aria sounds the same. In the following sections of this chapter, we will see how Yu Huiyong took the essential features of Beijing opera and breathed new life into the art form by expanding the confines of its expressive range as well as by adding Western elements as needed. Thus was born *yangbanxi*, with its roots grounded firmly in Chinese tradition while appealing to the tastes of mid-twentieth-century audiences.

### **The Red Lantern**

After his release from the “cowshed” in early 1967, Yu Huiyong was asked by Jiang Qing to revise the music of the revolutionary Beijing opera *The Red Lantern* (*Hong Deng Ji*) and strengthen the heroic character Li Yuhe for a new production. Originally premiered at the 1964 Modern Beijing Opera Trial Performance Convention, *The Red Lantern* was already labeled as a model work by that time, and revision of this highly acclaimed and well-known work required experience with Beijing opera music and knowledge of composition. Yu, who had composed music for *On the Docks* and was familiar with the Western and Chinese music compositions as well as theatrical conventions, was ideally suited to the task. Since this opera was “collectively composed” in the Chinese tradition, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly who had composed what in the opera, but it has been ascertained that Yu Huiyong was solely responsible for at least the

aria “”Nothing Can Stop a Communist Party Member” (Tianxiashi nanbudao gongchan dangyuan).<sup>385</sup>

### “Nothing Can Stop a Communist Party Member”

*The Red Lantern* takes place during the Japanese occupation of the eastern seaboard of China at the onset of World War II. In this aria, the hero Li Yuhe has just had a secret meeting with a fellow member of the Communist resistance; he bids his comrade a safe return and exhorts him to remain true to the Communist cause. The lyrics to the aria “Nothing Can Stop a Communist Party Member” are as follows, and the score for this aria is given in Figure 9.

1 一路上多保重山高水险，

Yi lu shang | duo bao zhong | shan gao | shui xian,

On the road | be care-ful | over hill | and dale,

2 沿小巷过断桥僻静安全。

Yan xiao xiang | guo duan qiao | pi jing | an quan.

Al-ways take | the low road, | alone | and safe.

3 为革命同献出忠心赤胆，

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<sup>385</sup> Both Zhang Jianmin and Gong Guotai were both assistants to Yu at that time. Zhang worked for the *Red Lantern* troupe and remained at the Beijing National Opera Company; Gong worked for Yu for almost ten years during the Cultural Revolution and remained at the Shanghai Beijing Opera Company. Interview with Zhang Jianmin in Beijing in July 2011. Interview with Gong Guotai in Beijing in February 2011.

Wei ge ming | tong xian chu | zhong xin | chi dan,

To the cause | de-vo-ted, | loy-al | and brave,

4 烈火中应考验重任在肩。

Lie huo zhong | ying kao yan | zhong ren | zai jian.

Fire tes-ted, | we bear a | hea-vy | bur-den,

5 决不辜负党的期望，我力量无限，

Jue bu gu fu dang de qi wang | wo li liang wu xian,

We will not let the Par-ty down, | our strength is bound-less,

6 天下事难不倒共产党员！

Tian xia shi | nan bu dao | gong chan | dang yuan!

Not a thing | can stop a | Par-ty | mem-ber!

# Nothing Can Stop a Communist Party Member

*The Red Lantern*

Yu Huiyong  
erhuang kuaisanyan

Yi lu shang duo bao zhong shan gao shui

xian, yan xiao xiang guo duan qiao pi jing

an quan wei ge ming tong xian chu

zhong xin chi dan

lie huo zhong ying kao yan zhong ren

zai jian jue bu gu fu dang de qi wang wo li liang wu xian

tian xia shi nan bu dao gong chan dang yuan

Figure 9. Score for the aria “Nothing Can Stop a Communist Party Member” from the revolutionary Beijing opera *The Red Lantern*.<sup>386</sup>

The lyrics generally follow Beijing opera conventions. They consist of three rhymed couplets, and the ten-syllable lines are constructed in the standard three-three-two-two format. The only exception is line 5, which breaks the structure entirely with

<sup>386</sup> Renmin yinyue chubanshe bianjibu [Editorial Board of People’s Music Press], *Jingju yangbanxi zhuyao changduan jicui* [*The Major Arias from the Model Operas*], (Beijing: People’s Music Press, 2002), pp. 33-34. Renotated from the original cipher notation.

thirteen syllables. As we saw in the example of “Two Countries” from *The Lost Pavilion*, minor violations of this format were not uncommon in Beijing opera. However, line 5 jarringly disrupts the structure of the lyrics, grabbing the attention of the audience as the hero proclaims his important message.

There is no evidence to suggest that Yu Huiyong had any influence on the writing of these lyrics, but we can already see a radical break from tradition in the music he composed for this aria. First, this aria is through-composed. Traditionally, a two-phrase melody was matched to a couplet, with subsequent couplets sung to variations on this same melody. However, in this case the four phrases of the aria do not match up with the six lines of the lyrics. Second, it should be noted that although the aria-type is indicated as *erhuang*, which used a pentatonic Dorian-like scale for male performers, this aria is composed in a diatonic scale, utilizing tones from both the fourth (see A on m. 14, A# on mm. 43-44) and the seventh (D on mm. 2-8, m. 40) scale degrees.<sup>387</sup>

One intriguing and attention-grabbing part of this aria is the opening. First, there is no instrumental prelude leading into this aria. Rather, the character Li Yuhe transitions directly from dialogue to singing. Second, although the aria-type of *erhuang* is indicated on the score, the first phrase displays clear characteristics of the *fan-erhuang* aria-type, with its tonic centered on *la* instead of *re*. However, rather than shifting the scale downward by a fourth, as is the common practice, Yu shifted the scale upward by a fifth. In fact, it almost seems like a transposed *erhuang yuanban* opening of “Ming qi lang.” In particular, the segment-ending notes of the opening phrase, namely *la*, *so*, *ti*, *mi* (see C1,

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<sup>387</sup> Not only does Yu use notes from both the fourth and seventh scale degrees in the *erhuang* aria type, but he employs the fourth degree in both sharp and natural forms in this aria, which is very unusual in the context of Beijing opera.

B, the last note on mm. 2-3, D1 on m. 4 beat 2, and G1 on down beat m. 5) can be interpreted as the transposed *re, do, mi, la* of “Ming qi lang” (see D1, C1, E1, A in m. 11, m. 15, m. 18, m. 22). In addition, the skeleton of the *erhuang* opening in “Ming qi lang” (mm.10-15) of *re (do) mi | re | mi re do | la re | do* was transformed as *la so ti la | ti la so mi la so* in “Yi lu shang” (mm.1-2). In fact, since there is no instrumental prelude, the opening phrase could be heard by a seasoned listener as either *erhuang* or *fan-erhuang*.

A phrase-by-phrase analysis of this aria will help illustrate the ways in which Yu Huiyong departed from Beijing opera conventions. As we just saw, the first phrase opens without instrumental prelude, breaking with the convention of beginning an aria with a prelude to introduce the aria-type and *ban* (meter). The absence of such a prelude produces an intentional ambiguity of aria-type.<sup>388</sup> Furthermore, the segment-ending notes in the score and the overall sense of the tonic (it starts and ends on *la*, setting B as tonic), suggest that the aria-type is *fan-erhuang*. We also see short instrumental interludes punctuating the first three segments of the first line of the couplet, setting up the expectation of a longer instrumental interlude between the two lines of the couplet. However, instead the aria continues straight into the second line without a break, suggesting a single musical phrase, and not two, for the couplet.

The structural ambiguity of this aria is further exacerbated by the switch in aria-type from *fan-erhuang* to *erhuang* at the beginning of the second couplet, once again making a complete break from traditional practice.<sup>389</sup> This couplet is largely treated according to the conventions of the *erhuang* aria-type. The segment-ending notes

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<sup>388</sup> Given the fact that Li was an underground CCP member, this ambiguity perfectly fits his character.

<sup>389</sup> The switch from *fan-erhuang* to *erhuang* is not indicated in the score.

somewhat follow the standard pattern (see last note in m. 12, m. 14, m. 32, and m. 34), with short instrumental connectives punctuating the segments and a longer instrumental interlude (indicated by the rest on mm. 22-30) between the two lines, clearly marking a two-phrase musical structure that parallels the two-line couplet structure. The third phrase ends on a short downbeat tonic note (m. 36) according to the convention for this aria-type.

Yu once again breaks with tradition in his treatment of the third couplet. First, there is no instrumental interlude separating it from the previous couplet. Instead, Yu signals the beginning of a new musical phrase with a violation of convention, namely by beginning the phrase on a weak beat. But by doing so, Yu places *dang* (‘party’) on the downbeat of the next bar, giving this key word structural prominence. Just as he had done with the first couplet, Yu covers the entire third couplet with a single musical phrase.

This aria reflects a good balance of unity and variety in its overall design. Unity is brought out by its use of conventional modes and maintaining formulaic segment-ending notes and cadential pitches at the ends of phrases. Indeed, several melodic features employed in the aria are similar to those found in the “My Seventh Son” example. Yu also achieves unity in this aria through the use of asymmetrical phrases for the second couplet, and he composed opening and ending phrases based on the melodies for the first and third couplets. In a sense, the second half of the aria (starting at m. 31) is a mirror image of the first half. Yu also creates rhythmic similarity in the last two lines while at the same time introducing a novel structure by starting these two lines on a weak beat (instead of a downbeat).



Yet, despite its conventional features, there is a freshness to this aria brought about by the subtle use of unconventional techniques. In particular, the use of both *erhuang* and *fan-erhuang* types in the same piece makes this aria stand out from the rest of those in this opera.<sup>390</sup> Also, the aria is through-composed, unlike traditional Beijing opera arias, which typically recycle the melody of the first couplet, as shown in the earlier example of “Woman, Don’t Be So Stubborn” (where the first and third couplets illustrated essentially the same musical structure). Furthermore, Yu’s use of a heptatonic scale and sharpened notes within a conventionally pentatonic aria-type also creates a sense of freshness in this aria.

In this aria, Yu adheres closely enough to convention to maintain a Beijing opera flavor, but he also breaks the rules frequently enough to signal to his audience that this is revolutionary opera. For example, he uses *fan-erhuang* in the first couplet to emphasize the dire and dangerous situation of these comrades, which is exactly the sort of emotion conveyed by this aria-type. However, as Li Yuhe considers the strength and courage he derives from his loyalty to the Communist cause, the aria modulates to the contemplative *erhuang* aria-type. While Yu’s use of different aria-types for different affects is consistent with convention, he nevertheless violates the rule of only one aria-type per aria.

In Beijing opera, shifts in mood are mainly reflected through changes in rhythm and tempo. Certainly Yu makes use of this technique, indicating the first couplet as moderate tempo, but then rapidly increasing the tempo through the second couplet, only to slow it down again in the last. But Yu also makes use of frequent changes in dynamics,

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<sup>390</sup> It seems to me as a kind of direct modulation. Clearly the tonality has changed from C (m.2-9) to F (m.10-end).

as can be seen in the rich use of expression marks in the score. Although fluctuations in dynamics might be part of the individual performer's interpretation of a traditional aria, it would never have been considered obligatory before.

The initial chaos of the Cultural Revolution now behind him, Yu Huiyong was beginning to see his reputation rise. In spite of the breaks with convention we have just pointed out, we must still concede that "On the Road" largely maintains the characteristics of the traditional Beijing opera aria, especially when compared with Yu's later works. At this point, all we can say is that Yu was testing the waters. Yet his experiment met with approval, both from the government and from the general public, encouraging Yu to experiment further. In the final analysis, the most important aspect of "On the Road" is that it pointed the way for the further development of revolutionary Beijing opera

### **Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy**

The original version of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (*Zhiqu Weihu Shan*) was performed at the 1964 Modern Beijing Opera Trial Performance Convention, but it quickly got caught up in the power struggle between Jiang Qing and Beijing mayor Peng Zhen, who each had differing views on the future direction of revolutionary Beijing opera. Peng Zhen used his political influence to restrict performing venues, and he placed critical reviews of *Tiger Mountain* in the Beijing press, while at the same place publishing favorable reviews of the opera he sponsored, *The Raid of the White Tiger Regiment*. A battle of the two tigers ensued, pitting Jiang Qing against Beijing mayor Peng Zhen. Peng may have controlled the media and access to venues in Beijing, but

Jiang got the upper hand by arranging a public performance of *Tiger Mountain* with Mao in attendance.<sup>391</sup> This ended the public criticism of Jiang's favored opera, since no one would dare voice negative opinions of it after Mao had spoken out in its favor. In the end, the battle of the two tigers was about dominance in the revolutionary Beijing opera world and not about the relative merits of any particular opera. Indeed, in private Jiang confided that, while the story of *Tiger Mountain* was good, the music was not."<sup>392</sup> Also problematic, in Jiang's eye, was the fact that there were no female arias in the aria, in spite of the fact that one of the key characters in the story, Chang Bao, was a young woman. Jiang was pleased with the work Yu Huiyong had done on *The Red Lantern* and *Haigang* (which was still in production), so she asked him, at the end of 1965, to make some revisions and additions to *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*.<sup>393</sup>

The opera is set in northeastern China during the winter of 1946. With the end of World War II, the Japanese have withdrawn, and now the Nationalists and Communists are battling for control of the nation. The main story revolves around the young male character Yang Zirong, who must travel in disguise through enemy territory to complete a dangerous mission. However, a secondary story involves the young woman Chang Bao and her desire to exact revenge on the warlords that killed her family. It is the development of this character that we will consider in this chapter; yet, we will meet

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<sup>391</sup> Mao attended a performance on July 17, 1964 and indicated that the opera had promise. Shi Yonggang and Zhang Fan, *Yangbanxi shiji* [History of Yangbanxi], (Beijing: zuojia chubanshe, 2009), p. 362.

<sup>392</sup> When Peng Zhen criticized the music of *Tiger Mountain* for being as bland as boiled water, Jiang Qing needed to publicly defend the opera, but she confided to her close circle of Shanghai friends that the music was weak.

<sup>393</sup> However, the Cultural Revolution started in the middle of the 1966 before Yu had the chance to add new arias for the female character. Instead, Yu focused on revising arias for the main character, Yang Zirong, as Mao had suggested.

Yang Zirong again to discuss his famous horse ride through the snow in the next chapter on instrumental music.

### **“Send Me to the Battlefield”**

Although *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* was a collaborative effort, various sources confirm that Yu Huiyong composed the aria “Send Me to the Battlefield” (Jianjue yaoqiu shang zhanchang) in late 1969.<sup>394</sup> This aria is particularly noteworthy because of the way Yu Huiyong deftly navigated between the confines of convention and the requirements of revolutionary opera. On the surface, this aria follows traditional form. First, it uses a classical sequence of *ban* changes to express the shifting emotions of the singer. And second, the music mostly follows the text, with rests at the ends of segments. Even the pattern of segment-ending notes largely keeps with convention, as does the use of down beats to start and end each line. Yet, we also see Yu breaking with tradition, or at least bending the rules, to meet the novel needs of a character that is portrayed as a brave young woman. Rather than throwing convention out the window, however, Yu’s approach is to combine male and female aria characteristics, giving the sense of a determined young woman who is on par with any man.

In this aria, Chang Bao sees a regiment of the People’s Liberation Army drilling on the training field and resolves to join the army herself:

1      听那边练兵场杀声响亮，

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<sup>394</sup> Gong Guotai confirmed that this aria was composed, together with other pieces such as the overture to Act V, by Yu Huiyong in 1969 when he was asked to revise the opera for the film version. Interview with Gong Guotai in Beijing in February 2011.

Ting nabian lian bing chang sha sheng xiang liang,  
Listen to the war cry resounding from the training grounds,

2 看他们 斗志昂 为剿匪练兵忙 ,

Kan ta men dou zhi ang wei jiao fei lian bing mang,  
See their fighting spirit soar as they do their drills,

3 急得我如同烈火燃胸膛 !

Ji de wo ru tong lie huo ran xiong tang!  
I'm so eager to join, a raging fire is burning in my chest!

4 杀豺狼讨血债日盼夜想

Sha chai lang tao xue zhai ri pan ye xiang,  
Kill the beast, get revenge, think about it night and day,

5 披星戴月满怀深仇磨刀擦枪。

Pi xing dai yue man huai shen chou mo dao cha qiang  
Work through the night to sharpen your knife and clean your gun.

6 风雪里 峻岭上狼窝虎穴我敢闯 ,

Feng xue li jun ling shang lang wo hu xue wo gan chuang  
In the blizzard on the mountain peak I'll charge the tiger's lair,

7 为什么偏要留我守村庄 !

Wei shen me pian you liu wo shou cun zhuang!?  
Why should I have to stay behind!?

- 8      马上去找参谋长，  
  
Ma shang qu zhao can mou zhang  
I'll quickly find the chief of staff,
- 9      再把心里的话儿讲。  
  
Zai ba xin li de hua er jiang.  
And tell him what's in my heart.
- 10     坚决要求上战场，  
  
Jian jue yao qiu shang zhan chang,  
Send me to the battlefield,
- 11     誓把顽匪消灭光。  
  
Shi ba wan fei xiao mie guang.  
I vow to exterminate the enemy.

Following convention, the aria begins with an instrumental prelude (see Figure 10); however, Yu does not use any traditional Beijing opera material or patterns in its composition. Rather, he uses a military melody and the sound of a bugle to indicate the theme of the aria, Chang Bao's desire to join the army to avenge her family.

This aria has four sections, each marked with changes in *ban*, and each associated with a specified speed and meter.<sup>395</sup> The opening section consists of a free-meter

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<sup>395</sup> Four parts are marked by change of *ban*. They are: *daoban* with free meter, *huilong* in 1/4, *yuanban* in 2/4, and *duoban* in 1/8.

introductory phrase, marked as *daoban* (literally, “leading beat”).<sup>396</sup> Yu Huiyong employs this format but does not follow it entirely. Traditionally, *daoban* is used for non-metrical melismatic passages with long-held notes, but in this aria the passage has short, quick notes with clear note values (see Figure 10). It is also important to note that the cadential pitches (*mi* and *la*) of the opening section are typical of arias for the male role-type, even though it is sung by a woman. However, the next section is in contrasting mode and mood, indicated by a change in *ban* to *huilong* (literally, “returning dragon”) in a relatively quick tempo in 1/4 meter, with a female ending on the cadential pitch *sol*. The contrast in the opening sections reflects Chang Bao’s psychological dilemma; her father had disguised her as a mute boy for eight years to avoid being captured as they hid from the warlord that had killed the rest of the family; and so she feels conflict between her outward persona and the true personality she has kept hidden.

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<sup>396</sup> *Daoban* is a single introductory phrase that opens the aria, taking half (the first line) of the first couplet. It is usually followed by *huilong*, for the second half of the same couplet. Its structure is based on the first phrase of *yuanban*.

## 常宝唱腔——“坚决要求上战场”

1

【二黄小导板】慢起渐快

听那冲锋号 杀声 响亮

慢起渐快

快起渐快

1

慢起渐快

Figure 10. Excerpt from the aria “Send to the Battlefield” by Yu Huiyong, from the yangbanxi *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*.<sup>397</sup>

<sup>397</sup> *Geming xiandai jingju zhiqu weihu shan*. [Revolutionary modern Beijing opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*], (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1971), p. 325.



## Battlefield, Stubborn comparison

The image displays a musical score comparing two arias. The top staff, from 'Send to the Battlefield', features lyrics: Sha, chai lang tao xie zai. The bottom staff, from 'Woman Don't be Stubborn', features lyrics: Niang zi, bu bi, ri pan ye xiang, tai lie xing. The score includes dynamic markings like *mf*, *f*, and *ritard.*, and various musical notations such as grace notes and vibrato.

Figure 11. Top line from the aria “Send to the Battlefield” of *Tiger Mountain*; bottom line from the aria “Woman Don’t be Stubborn” of the traditional Beijing opera *The Massacre of the Innocents*.<sup>398</sup>

The next section, encompassing the second and third couplets (lines 4-7), is indicated as *yuanban* in a moderate tempo (116) in 2/4 meter. The structure of the first opening phrase uses the male *erhuang yuanban* prototype, identical to the opening phrase of the previous aria “Woman, Don’t Be So Stubborn” in which they follow the same segment-ending notes *re*, *do*, *mi*, *do* (see Figure 11, top line: B, A, C, A at m. 3, 8, 12, 14, and bottom line: D, C, E, C at m. 2, 6, 12, and 14).<sup>399</sup> Also notable in Figure 11 is the frequent use of notated grace notes, vibrato, and extreme changes in dynamics, in contrast to the traditional Beijing opera. These musical inflections shape Changbao’s feminine

<sup>398</sup> Renotated from the originals (Figure 7 and Figure 10).

<sup>399</sup> The top line is from “Send Me to the Battlefield” (*Tiger Mountain*), with ten syllables per line, and the bottom line is from “Woman, Don’t Be So Stubborn” (*Massacre of the Innocents*), with seven syllables per line, from traditional Beijing opera. Both have *re* as tonic, with a first phrase that ends on *do* and a second phrase that ends on *re*.

side and counterbalance the male characteristics in the aria structure. It is important to point out that the design of the aria was not totally based on the structure of the lyrics. This is the case, for example, in the third couplet (lines 6 and 7), in which the two musical phrases do not match up with the lines of the couplet. Instead, Yu treats the first six syllables of line 6 as one phrase, and then the remainder of line 6 plus all of line 7 as another phrase. Furthermore, a nine-measure instrumental interlude separates these two phrases, breaking with the tradition of only including long instrumental interludes at the end of a line. The ending section is marked as *duoban* in a quick-tempo of 1/8 meter. Although containing two couplets (lines 8-11), the music is sung in a rapid-fire syllabic sequence, totally ignoring the caesurae and giving no rests until it reaches the final caesura in the last line. From this point until the end, the aria again breaks into a free-meter *sanban* (a typical device to end a traditional Beijing opera aria), which allows the singer to linger on the final words of the aria, *xiaomeiguang* ('exterminate'). The aria ends on the standard female cadential pitch, *sol*.

In constructing a new type of aria for a new role-type, namely the brave socialist heroine, Yu combines conventional characteristics of both male and female aria types, but departs from the rules that might restrict expression. Without the constraints imposed by the traditional Beijing opera aria system of the male/female dichotomy, Yu's aria provided a fresh and contemporary sound that portrays the heroine as neither a male impostor nor as a frivolous female, but rather as a strong and capable woman determined to devote herself to the country and the socialist cause. "Send Me to the Battlefield" was one of the first *yangbanxi* arias expressly written for the new socialist heroine role model. Yet, Chang Bao is still only a minor character in *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*. At

around the same time Yu was working on revisions to this opera, he was also busy completely rewriting *On the Docks*, and in this opera we see the socialist heroine take center stage.

### **On the Docks**

Both *The Red Lantern* and *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* were already completed revolutionary operas when Yu Huiyong was called in to help with revisions. He contributed at least one aria to *The Red Lantern* and several to *Tiger Mountain*, and in addition he composed considerable instrumental music for both works. Thus, while we can see the hand of Yu Huiyong in many parts of these operas in their final forms, he was not involved with either of them through the whole process from conception to finish. On the other hand, Yu did have complete creative control over the development of the new revolutionary opera *On the Docks* (*Haigang*), and it is in this work that we see the composer truly putting his theory into practice.

*On the Docks* was based on an earlier Huai opera, *Morning on the Docks* (*Haigang de zaochen*) about the lives of the workers on the Shanghai riverfront, and it had been handpicked by Jiang Qing for development into a new model revolutionary opera. The original opera recounted the story of the young dockworker Han Xiaoqiang who feels his job is beneath him because he, unlike the others, has a high school diploma. Due to carelessness, he causes an accident on the dock, which he uses as a pretext for quitting his job. But a retired dockworker, Ma Hongliang, and the dock's party secretary, Fang Haizhen, educate him about the virtues of the socialist system and explain how it is now respectable to be a laborer in the New China, convincing him to stay. Jiang felt the

opera had promise as a revolutionary Beijing opera, but she saw the story as lacking drama and cohesion.

In the new libretto hammered out during 1965 and 1966, substantial structural changes were made to the story. First, the central character of the story shifted from the youth Han Xiaoqiang to the female party secretary Fan Haizhen, reflecting Jiang's program of developing the new role type of the heroic socialist female. Second, dramatic tension was increased by elevating a minor character, Qian Shouwei, to the status of arch-villain, an enemy of the people secretly plotting to sabotage the socialist system.<sup>400</sup> And third, the relationships and the motivations of the characters were strengthened. Now, old Ma Hongliang is young Han Xiaoqiang's uncle, and we learn that the youth is working on the dock, despite his education, because of filial duty—this is where his family has worked for generations.

The new version of *On the Docks* is set in the summer of 1963, and retired dockworker Ma Hongliang has returned to Shanghai to visit family and friends. He is greatly impressed by the rapid pace of development along the Shanghai waterfront, which he relates in the aria “The Great Leap Forward Has Changed the Face of the Docks” (Dayuejin ba matou de mianmao gai), and his former coworkers also tell him about how much their lives have improved under the socialist system. They are busy loading a ship with rice to be sent as aid to an unnamed African country when the accident occurs. However, the astute party secretary Fang Haizhen detects treachery in the ensuing commotion and soon learns that Qian Shouwei has laced a broken bag of rice with

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<sup>400</sup> This re-characterization of the antagonist was based on Mao's suggestion that the conflict in the opera be portrayed as class struggle rather than interpersonal conflict. Shi Yonggang and Zhang Fan, *Yangbanxi shiji* [History of Yangbanxi], (Beijing: zuojia chubanshe, 2009), p. 364.

fiberglass and resealed it, hiding it among the thousands of bags already loaded onto the ship. They will have to work round the clock to find the tainted bag, but, despite the daunting task, Fang reignites her coworkers' zeal for the socialist cause with the aria "After Reading the Plenum Report," reminding them that the end purpose of their efforts is to show their loyalty to the people and the party. In the end, the contaminated bag is found, the culprit is caught, and the mission is a success.

To Chinese audiences of the mid-1960s, the struggle onstage between heroine Fang Hanzhen and villain Qian Shouwei was clearly an allegory for the power struggle between Mao Zedong and Liu Xiaogi at the 1962 Central Committee meeting. It was at the plenary session of this meeting that the victorious Mao declared, "Class struggle should be talked about yearly, monthly, and daily." It was also this quote that gave Fang Haizhen the resolve to seek out the class enemy that had perpetrated the sabotage. We have seen before how Chinese politics was frequently played out on the opera stage; *On the Docks* is just one more example of this.

Production of *On the Docks* began in 1964, but Jiang was unhappy with the music and brought in Yu in early 1965 to completely redo the opera. Yu finished most of the arias in less than three months, but Jiang was unhappy with early drafts and demanded significant revisions. The final stage version was first performed in May 1966, but it continued to evolve until its form was solidified for the 1972 film version.

### **"The Great Leap Forward Has Changed the Face of the Docks"**

This aria was included in the original 1966 stage version of the opera and remained in the 1972 film version. The lyrics consist of five couplets that are rhymed but

in free meter, and the language is very colloquial. Particularly noteworthy in the construction of the lyrics is that each couplet makes up a single sentence.

1 自从退休离上海，

Zicong tuixiu li shanghai,

Since I retired from Shanghai,

2 时刻把码头挂心怀。

Shike ba matou gua xinhuai.

I often reminisced about the docks.

3 眼睛一眨已六载，

Yan jing yi zha yi liu zai

Six years have passed in the blink of an eye,

4 马洪亮探亲我又重来。

Ma hong lian tan qin wo you chong lai.

And I've come back again to visit family and friends.

5 看码头好气派，

Kan ma tou hao qi pai

The docks are impressive,

6 机械列队江边排。

Ji xie lie dui jiang bian pai

Machines line the riverside.

7      大吊车，真厉害，

Da diao che, zhen li hai,

The crane is mighty,

8      成吨的钢铁，它轻轻地一抓就起来！

Cheng dun de gang tie, ta qing qing de yi zhua jiu qi lai!

It lightly grabs tons of steel and lifts them up!

9      大跃进把码头的面貌改，

Da yue jin ba matou de mianmao gai,

The Great Leap Forward has changed the face of the docks,

10     看得我热泪盈眶心花开。

Kan de wo re lei ying kuang xin hua kai.

When I see it, my eyes are filled with tears.

This aria was composed in the *xipi yuanban* style traditionally used to express joyful and enthusiastic emotions. In this case, it is used to express Ma Hongliang's happiness at meeting his old friends again as well as his excitement at seeing the changes to his old workplace. The overall contour of the aria largely follows the convention of a traditional *xipi yuanban* aria. In particular, each phrase starts on a weak beat and ends on a strong beat. Also, the aria as a whole is sung within a narrow range (G to A1).

When we compare this aria with the traditional aria "Two Countries," we can see where the composer has hewed closely to traditional form, and where he has made significant departures. The musical and rhythmic structure of the first couplet of this aria

is strikingly similar to that of “Two Countries.” Like the latter, “The Great Leap Forward” has the same pattern of segment-ending notes and brief interludes between segments; even the cadential pitches (tonic pitch F) at the end of each phrase are the same. The only important difference between these two arias is the *tuoqiang* (extended melismatic passages) in mm. 7-9 and mm. 17-18 (see Figure 12 top voice).<sup>401</sup> But unlike “Two Countries,” in which the melody was largely a varied repetition, “The Great Leap Forward Has Changed the Face of the Docks” is through-composed, and its dramatic continuity is built into its structure. The message of the text is delivered by dynamic changes that clearly punctuate the couplets as well as by the contrast of melodic phrases. Furthermore, Yu wrote out the embellishments that singers would have customarily improvised in traditional Beijing opera.

#### Docks, Two countries comparison

The image shows a musical score titled "Docks, Two countries comparison". It consists of two staves of music, each with lyrics underneath. The top staff is for the aria "Nothing Can Stop a Communist Party Member" and the bottom staff is for the aria "Two Countries". Both are in 2/4 time and B-flat major. The top staff has lyrics: "zi cong tui xiu li shang hai, Liang guo jiao feng long hu dou shi ke ba ma tou gua xin huai. ge wei qi zhu tong pi xiu". The bottom staff has lyrics: "ge wei qi zhu tong pi xiu".

Figure 12. Score for the first line of the aria “Nothing Can Stop a Communist Party Member” from the revolutionary Beijing opera *The Red Lantern* on the top line, compared with the first line of the aria “Two Countries,” from the traditional Beijing opera *The Lost Pavilion* on the bottom line.<sup>402</sup>

<sup>401</sup> Top voice is from *Docks*, bottom voice is from *Two Country*.

<sup>402</sup> Renotated from the originals (Figure 13 and Figure 8).



As a through-composed piece, this aria exhibits far more variability in structure and detail than would be the case for a traditional Beijing opera aria. Although the first couplet is traditional in structure, its two musical phrases are not at all symmetrical. In just comparing the musical structure of the first two couplets, we already see few parallels. The first couplet is more melismatic, with *tuoqiang* extending through mm. 6-9 and mm. 15-16, by which Ma Hongliang expresses how much he has missed his old friends and environs. The second couplet, on the other hand, is more syllabic, conveying the happiness he feels about returning to the docks once again. The third and fourth couplets break completely with the lyrical conventions of Beijing opera, and the music composed for them breaks with tradition. In order to evoke the hustle-bustle image of a busy dock, Yu created a new *ban*, or “beat,” not used before in Beijing opera, which he called *paiban* (literally, “lined-up beat,” to be described shortly). Finally, the accelerated rhythm of the last couplet sums up the singer’s impression of a rapidly developing New China.

More specifically, the character of the newly invented *paiban* in lines 5-8 was not in its change of meter or tempo but rather its rhythmic structure, which breaks free of the traditional segmented pattern and instead follows the lyrics mechanically. This new *paiban* forms a unique pattern of two parallel musical phrases, each encompassing an entire couplet. The two phrases begin symmetrically, with pairs of three-syllable segments, followed by extended final segments (seven syllables in the first phrase, fourteen in the second). These phrases are melodically and rhythmically parallel as well; in each phrase, the first segment ends on *mi* (m. 36, 44, Fig. 4.8), the second on *la* (m. 38, 46), and the third on *do* (m. 41, 55). Each segment is also followed by a short unifying

interlude that creates a sense of dialogue between the vocalist and the instrumental accompaniment.

The most intriguing aspect of this new *paiban* in this aria is the comic effect it creates. By using frequent ascending and descending leaps, the music imitates the motion of the busy crane. Especially at the end of the phrase, with an upward jump of a seventh from D to C1 in m. 54 and a downward jump of a fifth from C1 to F in m. 55, the melody vividly recaptures and intensifies the movement of the great crane. During the instrumental interlude that follows, Ma Hongliang falls into hearty laughter, but in live performances the audience often breaks out into spontaneous laughter during mm. 54-55, so vivid is this musical imagery.

In his books *Studies on the Relationship between Melody and Lyrics* and *Research on Theatre Music*, Yu pointed out that the frequent mismatch between spoken tone and melodic contour made Beijing opera difficult for people to understand, and he instead advocated for the construction of melodies that matched the tonal contours of the spoken language as much as possible. Yu clearly put his theory into practice in the composition of this aria. First, we can find many examples where the melodic contour of the aria matches the tonal and intonational contours of the spoken lyrics. For example, in m. 6, the rising tone of *li* is matched with an upward jump of a fourth, the falling tone of *shang* with a downward step from A to G, and the low tone of *hai* with a return to the tonic note F. In addition, Yu made generous use of grace notes to help simulate spoken tones. For instance, the grace notes on *pai* in m. 38 and *re* in m. 60 are used to suggest the falling tones of each of these spoken words. These techniques make the aria sound very natural and easy to understand.

# The Great Leap Forward Has Changed the Docks

On the Docks

Yu Huiyong

xipi yuanban

zi cong tui xiu li shang hai, shi ke

ba ma tou gua xian huai. yanjing

yizhayi liu zai, mahongqiang tan qin woyou chong lai

kanma tou hao qi pai, jixie liedui jiang bian pai.

dadiao che, zhenli hai, chenglundu gangtie,

taqing qingde yi zhua jiu qi lai! dayuejinba ma toudemian mao gai, kandewo

relei ying kuang xin hua kai.

Figure 13. Score for the aria “The Great Leap Forward Has Changed the Face of the Docks” from *On the Docks*.<sup>403</sup>

Although the aria follows *xipi yuanban* conventions in many of its features, a striking divergence from tradition is in Yu’s manipulation of cadential pitches. According to convention, the first phrase of a period should end on *re*, and the second on *do*, but Yu

<sup>403</sup> Renmin yinyue chubanshe bianjibu. [Editorial Board of People’s Music Press]. *Jingju yangbanxi duanxiao changduan jicui* [Shorter Arias from the Model Operas]. (Beijing: People’s Music Press, 2002), pp. 50-52.

only follows this pattern in the last couplet. In contrast, both lines of the first couplet end on *do*, and all the other couplets in between exhibit an alternating pattern of *la* ending the first line and *do* ending the second line. It appears that Yu is reinforcing the harmonic function of the tonic, which is a minor triad chord built on D. In fact, most of the segment-ending pitches are from this tonic chord DFA.

“The Great Leap Forward Has Changed the Face of the Docks” is a primary example of a Beijing opera aria in the new revolutionary style that was easily accessible to the masses. It sports a singable melody, especially the period extending from mm. 35-55, which exhibits the simplicity and vivaciousness of a children’s song. The aria attained a high level of popularity during the Cultural Revolution, and it can still be found on karaoke lists in China today. In sum, we can see in this aria how Yu Huiyong was able to put his theory into practice in order to create an aria that maintained the essence of Beijing opera tradition while appealing to the proletarian aesthetics of mid-twentieth-century China.

### **“Loyal to the People, Loyal to the Party”**

*On the Docks* established a number of milestones in the development of revolutionary Beijing opera. As we have already seen, its libretto broke with the lyrical conventions of traditional Beijing opera; unlike *The Red Lantern*, which largely hewed to traditional poetic forms and language, *On the Docks* employed colloquial language. Furthermore, Yu Huiyong’s use of through-composition and the development of new *ban* enabled him to fit the melody and rhythm to the natural contours of the spoken language. Another important milestone set by *On the Docks* was the establishment—for the first

time in Beijing opera—of a true heroic role for a female player. Since there was no precedent in traditional Beijing opera for such a complex feature, Yu broke with convention and used material from both male and female role types to create a new heroic woman role type that was both strong and caring. Yu's use of contrast and variation in Fang's arias throughout this opera establishes a musical image of the party secretary as the new socialist woman as well as outlining the characteristics of the new socialist society.

Communist party secretary Fang Haizhen simply did not fit any of the traditional female roles in Beijing opera. She was neither an air-headed beauty nor a sharp-tongued nag, and she was not a Mulan-type warrior-woman, either. Instead, she was portrayed as intelligent, sensible, and articulate, capable of assuming a leadership role because of these qualities and not through the artifice of male-disguise. In the original Huai opera *Morning on the Docks*, the central character is the youth Han Xiaoqing, who did not like his job as dock worker first but later came to embrace the socialist cause; this in itself was a break from Chinese operatic tradition, which typically centered on a mature general or statesman. However, *On the Docks* was Jiang Qing's project, and clearly she saw this opera as a vehicle for pushing forward her agenda of women's rights.

"Loyal to the People, Loyal to the Party" was among the early arias that Yu first composed in early 1965 after he was assigned to the Shanghai Beijing Opera Company. It is probably the most complex Beijing opera aria ever been written up to that point, and exhibits Yu's use of varied *ban* for dramatic purposes.<sup>404</sup> As was Yu's habit, he did not

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<sup>404</sup> This is the aria that Yu revised following Jiang's comment to study Cheng Yanqiu's music style. Dai commented: "Jiang was deeply touched by the aria and especially praised the music design." Dai Jiafang, 2008, p. 165.

simply adopt the lyrical setting of the aria, but instead he designed his own musical plan, and he repeated segments of the lyrics as he saw fit. The rhythmic features employed in this aria are particularly note-worthy. In order to convey the drama of ever-shifting emotions, he changed *ban* eleven times in this aria, certainly more *ban* changes than any other aria in this opera, and quite an unusually large number of changes for Beijing opera in general. *Ban*, of course, is a complex musical concept, encompassing meter, tempo and rhythmic pattern, but in this aria the changes in meter are especially prominent. In addition, the shifting moods and passionate emotions of this aria are associated with frequent changing meters. Beginning with 4/4, the tempo is fairly steady, but the meter soon starts shifting back and forth between 2/4 and 1/4. The second half of the aria mainly stays on the 1/4 meter, but it swings eight times between three different *ban* types, creating successive waves of increased intensity. Toward the end, the tempo accelerates to 1/8, the fastest tempo of the aria, dramatizing the expectation and desire of the party secretary to save the young worker Han Xiaoqiang from despair.

## Loyal to the people, tuoqiang

*On the Docks*

**Yu Huiyong**  
fan-erhuang manban

5

11

Figure 14. Partial score for a melismatic passage in the aria “Loyal to the People” from *On the Docks*.<sup>405</sup>

The aria begins with a phrase in a slow 4/4 meter (*manban*) as Fang Haizhen recalls the dockworkers fighting against the imperialist dock owners prior to Liberation. Although the score indicates the aria is a *fan-erhuang* aria type, the melody sounds as if it were set in the *erhuang* structure for the male role, as the ending pitches of the first three segments are the stereotypical *re, do, mi*, like the earlier male-role *erhuang* examples of “Woman, Don’t Be So Stubborn” and “My Seventh Son.” It seems that the composer’s main interest here is to use monophonic texture (with little accompaniment) in this familiar structure to project a clear and perspicuous theme for the listener. However, the 15-measure opening phrase involves an eight-measure-long melismatic passage (*tuoqiang*), ending the opening phrase with a protracted expressive passage that contains a wide vocal range of almost two octaves, which is highly uncharacteristic for the opening phrase in the *fan-erhuang manban* aria type (figure 4.9). This can be viewed not only as an instance of the voice becoming free from the lyrics, but also as an example of the instrumental music taking prominence over the vocalist, as the vocal line mingles with the instrumental part, forming a contrapuntal relationship.

The next phrase (second line) changed to *yuanban* in 2/4 meter but on a weak beat, lamenting the many revolutionary martyrs who had died for the liberation of China, counting among them those who had worked on the docks, ending with the line: “The words and blood of the martyrs were flowing.” Yu singles out the word “flowing” by

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<sup>405</sup> Renmin yinyue chubanshe bianjibu. [Editorial Board of People’s Music Press]. *Jingju yangbanxi zhuyao changduan jicui* [*The Major Arias from the Model Operas*]. (Beijing: People’s Music Press, 2002), p. 103.

setting it to a descending E-minor triad arpeggiated under a static two-measure long note that brings the singer to her lowest range, as if suggesting that the line has cadenced. However, the melody continues with the repeated word “flow” on the down beat and swiftly changes to a new phrase in 1/4 meter with a down beat only, emphasizing the message of the martyrs: “Take a revenge and wipe out the grudge, take back the dock and become the master.” Ma Hongliang then steps in with a brief two-phrase remark about the changes that had been brought to the docks by the efforts of the Communist Party and the People’s Liberation Army. Fang Haizhen then tries to encourage Han Xiaoqiang to rethink his current situation. She sings about the importance of the work on the docks and teaches the youth to cherish his job. “Don’t run when you are lost,” she tells him. “You are the offspring of dockworkers, and we hope you stay on the docks.” The aria then suddenly breaks into unmeasured free meter on the last line of the aria, when Fang Haizhen exhorts Han Xiaoqiang to be “loyal to the people and loyal to the party,” reaching the climax of the aria on its highest note (C2). Through all of these devices, Yu turns a set of dry political slogans into a seven-minute long, deeply felt portrayal of the party secretary’s complex emotions and deep passion toward the younger generation.

Yu typically began his arias by following the Beijing opera conventions for the opening couplet, only then to depart from the traditional form, and his approach to “Loyal to the People, Loyal to the Party” is no different. Although labeled as *fan-erhuang*, the aria actually begins with the standard structure bearing a resemblance of male *erhuang* aria type, with the expected target notes for each segment but ending the phrase on a



female cadential pitch.<sup>406</sup> But from this traditional starting point, the aria moves freely through various structures and styles, making it far more complex than anything found in traditional Beijing opera. Although the standard approach for indicating shifts in mood in Beijing opera arias was to change *ban* (meter and tempo), Yu pushed its limit by calling for eleven changes of *ban* within this aria.

We see a number of innovations in this aria as well. For example, the use of repeated lines not indicated in the original text, though a common practice in Western opera, was novel to Beijing opera. Yu's use of counterpoint was novel as well. In traditional Beijing opera, the role of the orchestra was to accompany and support the vocalist. However, in "Loyal to the People," we see examples of counterpoint in which the instruments seem to be engaging in dialogue with the vocalist. However, it seems that Yu is still cautiously experimenting with this technique, as he still gives prominence to the melody to project the meaning of the lyrics. The instrumental layer never overpowers the vocal layer, and there is still a clear division of roles, with the voice prominent and the instruments as accompaniment. A final innovation we see in this aria is, in fact, an extension of traditional Beijing opera practices. The use of melismatic passage (*tuoqiang*) at the ends of segments or phrases is a characteristic feature of Beijing opera. The details in these two *tuoqiang* in the early model works are so strikingly similar that they suggest they are direct quoted from the same source of the traditional Beijing opera (see Figure 15 and Figure 16).

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<sup>406</sup> The male *erhuang* aria with *tuoqiang* often ends on *la* (as seen in "My Seventh Son" m. 22) but this phrase ends on *mi*, thus could be seen as a female ending.

## Reeds, Docks comparison

Yu Huiyong  
xipi yuanban



Figure 15. Top line is from an aria of *Among the Reeds* (1964); bottom line is from “The Great Leap Forward” from *On the Docks*.<sup>407</sup>

## Docks, Tiger Mountain, comparison

Yu Huiyong  
Erhuang yuanban

Figure 16. Bottom line is from an aria from *On the Docks* (1965); top line is from an aria from *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*.<sup>408</sup>

<sup>407</sup> Renmin yinyue chubanshe bianjibu. [Editorial Board of People’s Music Press]. *Jingju yangbanxi zhuyao changduan jicui* [The Major Arias from the Model Operas]. (Beijing: People’s Music Press, 2002), p. 60. *Geming xiandai jingju haigang*. [Revolutionary modern Beijing opera On the Docks]. (Hubei: Hubei renmin changduan, 1972), p. 12. Renotated from the original cipher notation.

Yet in this aria for Fang Haizhen, Yu takes this practice and extends it far beyond its traditional boundaries. Not only are the *tuqiang* in this aria much longer than what is normally encountered in traditional practice, but it was newly composed, with detailed inflections in both vocal and the instrumental parts, which break free from the traditional monophonic accompaniment that mimics vocal lines (see Figure 14). These *tuqiang* effectively display the emotional depth of the character and are very moving.<sup>409</sup> Apparently, Yu no longer viewed *tuqiang* as an opportunity for the vocalist to show off his or her talents, but rather as a means for developing deeper and more complex emotional expression.

Although it appears on the surface that Yu's approach to revolutionizing Beijing opera aria composition mainly involved introducing Western techniques, there is another way of viewing his eclectic approach. We need to keep in mind that Yu Huiyong was largely self-taught in music. Although he had exposure to both Chinese and Western music during his formative years, he was beholden to neither form. Rather, like Jiang Qing, it seems he had a sharp ear and good intuitions about what would work, and he was also open to experimentation. Not tied to any particular set of conventions, Yu exhibited a freedom of expression unusual in any milieu, and particularly noteworthy given the social and political restrictions of the Cultural Revolution.

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<sup>408</sup> *Geming xiandai jingju haigang*. [Revolutionary modern Beijing opera On the Docks]. (Hubei: Hubei renmin changduan, 1972), p. 12. Renmin yinyue chubanshe bianjibu. [Editorial Board of People's Music Press]. *Jingju yangbanxi zhuyao changduan jicui* [*The Major Arias from the Model Operas*]. (Beijing: People's Music Press, 2002), p. 21. Renotated from the original cipher notation.

<sup>409</sup> Dai in his book described Jiang Qing as moved to tears when she was watching the rehearsal.

### “After Reading the Plenum Report”

As *On the Docks* was being readied for film production in 1970, Yu composed yet another aria, “After Reading the Plenum Report,” for protagonist Fang Haizhen, on top of her fourteen other arias. There is no evidence that Jiang Qing, in pushing her feminist agenda, had asked Yu to do this. In fact, it is more likely that Yu added this aria to fill a hole in the story line as the opera was cut to film length. At any rate, the underlying message was clear: women in China were now taking center stage, both in opera and in real life.

The “plenum” of the title was that of the 1962 Central Committee, during which Mao disposed of his political enemy Liu Shaoqi by calling for continuous class struggle. The lyrics to “After Reading the Plenum Report” are composed of three rhymed but free-metered couplets.

1      细读了全会的公报激情无限，

Xiduliao quanhui de gongbao, jiqing wuxian,

After reading the plenum report I was filled with unbounded passion,

2      望窗外雨后彩虹飞架蓝天。

Wang chuangwai yu hou caihong feijia lantian.

Outside my window a rainbow hung in the blue sky after the rain.

3      江山如画宏图展，

Jiangshan ruhua hongtu zhan,

The great plan for our beautiful country was laid out before me,

4 怎容妖魔舞翩跹！

Zenrong yaomo wu pianxian!

How can we let the demon dance about!

5 任凭他诡计多瞬息万变，

renping ta gui ji duo shunxi wanbian?

Despite his many tricks and disguises,

6 我这里早已经壁垒森严！

Wo zheli zao yijing bilei senyan.

I am prepared and ready to fight.

Yu indicates on the score (Figure 17) that this piece is *xipi kuanban* (literally, “broad beat”), which was a new *ban* he created. Apparently it was based on the default *yuanban*, with a 2/4 meter in a more moderate tempo, which made it possible to have syncopation within a quarter note and dotted sixteenth notes in the accompaniment part. Contrary to *xipi* convention, most phrases begin on a downbeat and exhibit some characteristics of the *erhuang* aria-type containing male and female modes, suggesting a new role for women in socialist China that is on par with men, and this concept is supported by the underlying bimodal framework used throughout the prelude and the aria.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Previously, in an aria “Nothing Can Stop a Communist Party Member” from *The Red Lantern*, Yu changed aria types from *fan-erhuang* to *erhuang* without indication; but this time it is more obvious, since *erhuang* and *xipi* have more differences in their structure than just different segment-ending notes. In his later compositions, Yu indicated such changes in the score.

# After Reading the Plenum Report, Part 1

*On the Docks*

Yu Huiyong

8

Xi du liao quan hui de gong bao

14

ji qing

20

wu xian,

25

wang chuang

31

wai yu hou cai

37

hong fei jia lan

44

tian. jiang shan

50

ru hua hong tu zhan

57

zen rong yao mo

61

wu pian xian!

69



Figure 17. Score for the aria “After Reading the Plenum Report” from the opera *On the Docks*.<sup>411</sup>

We have already seen earlier how Yu Huiyong dispensed with the traditional practice of fitting melodies to lyrics such that each musical phrase paralleled one line of the lyrics. Again in this aria, Yu divided his phrases according to dramatic needs and not lyrical structure. In this case, the lyrics consist of six lines, but the aria consists of eight phrases. The first four phrases do not parallel the poetic lines; instead, the lines are divided into asymmetrical segments. The opening two phrases are symmetrical (mm. 9-17, mm. 18-26), but the underlying lyrics are not, breaking the first line into segments of eight syllables and four syllables. The third and fourth phrases are asymmetrical (mm.

<sup>411</sup> Renmin yinyue chubanshe bianjibu. [Editorial Board of People’s Music Press]. *Jingju yangbanxi zhuyao changduan jicui* [The Major Arias from the Model Operas]. (Beijing: People’s Music Press, 2002), pp. 86-87. Renotated from the original cipher notation.



27-34, mm. 35-48), dividing the second line into segments of three syllables and eight syllables. All of the phrases are punctuated by unified interludes derived from the prelude, with a distinctive double-syncopated rhythm and a transposed ascending and descending pentatonic scale that always ends on the same pitch as the phrase it follows (see m. 15 & 17, m. 24 & 26, m. 32 & 34, and m. 46 & 48).

As we have seen, the difference between the male and the female aria type is in the modes they use, and their structure is otherwise relatively similar. But when we compare the opening phrase of “After Reading the Plenum Report” with that of “The Great Leap Forward Has Changed the Face of the Docks,” we find that the difference between the two arias is in their structure, not the mode, as both arias give prominence to the important segment-ending pitches of *re*, *mi*, *do* and use only five pitches from a narrow-ranged pentatonic scale (from *do* to *sol*). The opening phrase of the aria “Docks” follows closely the structure of the traditional *xipi* aria type and caesurae of the lyrics, where the segment-ending pitches and the structure are parallel to the traditional opera aria “Two Countries.” The structure and the melodic outline of the opening phrase of “Report,” on the other hand, is based on the motif (mm. 5-7, second half of the prelude), which displays a hybrid feature of *xipi* and *erhuang*, as the first phrase clearly circles around the tonic note *re* (for the male *erhuang* aria-type) and starts on the downbeat (instead of a weak beat as required for *xipi*). In fact, the first two phrases are created through a compositional device that may be called motivic expansion (mm. 10-12, 13-15, 18-20), since the material is mostly from the second half of the prelude (mm. 5-7).<sup>412</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Although both arias are indicated as *xipi* and use only five pitches from a narrow-ranged pentatonic scale (from *do* to *sol*), the opening line of “Report” encompasses two phrases, taking a

Therefore, these two arias are created in fundamentally different ways but nevertheless have the same tonic notes.

The next two phrases, encompassing the second line of the couplet, use the first segment of three syllables to form one phrase and the remaining eight syllables for another. The material for these phrases comes from the same motif in the first half of the prelude (mm. 1-4), shifting the tonic note on *sol* (starting (m. 27) and ending (m. 46) on D1) instead on *re*. Since both *xipi* and *erhuang* female arias use a mode similar to Myxolydian (sharing the same cadential pitches of *la* for the first phrase, and *sol* or *do* for the second phrase), its identity as a *xipi* or *erhuang* aria-type is largely determined by its rhythmic feature of starting on a strong or weak beat, as well as the melodic contour.<sup>413</sup> Judging by these rules, the four phrases display mixed features of *erhuang* and *xipi*. The first two phrases are very much in a stepwise motion and emphasize *re*, so can be seen and heard as close to *erhuang* style, while the third and fourth phrases exhibit more *xipi* characteristics, especially the melody of the fourth phrase, which has more leaps (mm. 45-47, m. 40).

The following two phrases (five and six) parallel the second couplet, which consists of seven syllables each. They are again based on the motif and show a contrast of characteristics. The fifth phrase uses material from the second half of the prelude and thus shows more *erhuang* characteristics, whereas the sixth phrase is built on the material from the first half of the prelude and shows more *xipi* characteristics. The last two

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full eighteen measures (mm. 9-26), more than twice the length of the first line of “Docks,” which only takes eight measures (mm. 1-9).

<sup>413</sup> Simply speaking, the female *xipi* aria-type starts with a prelude ending on *do la* (6125 3612 |16), its phrases always start on a weak beat, and its arias have more leaps. The female *erhuang* aria-type starts with an *erhuang* interlude ends on *la do* (56 5 6 1) and the phrase always begins on a downbeat. Also, the melody has more stepwise motion.

phrases come with a new ban, *erliu* (literally, “two six”), which is characterized by a quickened tempo and a change of meter to 1/4. Both phrases show more of the *xipi* characteristics by starting on a weak beat and ending the aria on a downbeat of the tonic note *sol*, the female ending. The postlude echoes the melody of the last segment, which was derived from the first half of the prelude.

The use of a transposable motif exemplifies how the composer has taken elements of traditional Beijing opera aria and transformed them into a new and unique aria that is organized in a totally different way. As in traditional Beijing opera, the prelude serves as an abstract of the whole aria. On the surface, the shape of this prelude seems very similar to the shape of the traditional *erhuang yuanban* opening prelude in which both contain syncopation and a rising and falling pentatonic scale in a repeated pattern.<sup>414</sup> Even their function and usage is similar, each providing the basic melodic contour, rhythmic pattern, and pitch material for the aria and interludes. But these similarities should not be allowed to disguise the differences. The major difference between them is that the traditional *erhuang* interlude was used to create background, not to catch attention. But Yu’s prelude, although seemingly similar, was uniquely created and symbolic. A motif consisting of double syncopation and a melodic pattern of a rising and falling pentatonic scale is embedded in the prelude, serving as a building block, which can not only be melodically transposed and rhythmically repeated, but also generate a propulsive energy by the double accented syncopation and dotted rapid ascending and descending scales, which are very audible and attention-grabbing. If we break the interlude into two parts, it becomes clear that the material for the first and second phrases comes from the second

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<sup>414</sup> See explanation about *erhuang* prelude at p. 5-6.

half of the prelude and the material for the third and fourth phrases comes from the first part of the prelude.<sup>415</sup>

As in all the arias Yu created for the lead role Fang Haizheng, he brought a freshness to “After Reading the Plenum Report” by incorporating new compositional techniques and using motifs as a building block, techniques that had never before been used in Beijing opera. Although it was Yu’s first full opera, *On the Docks* has been widely praised by Chinese leaders, the public, and China’s most sophisticated contemporary composers and performers. For example, composer Chen Yi declared that Beijing opera reached its pinnacle of perfection with this work.<sup>416</sup>

In sum, Yu succeeded, in his first major opera, in creating a work that had appeal both to the masses and to the musical elite. All three arias examined here became so well known that many people during the Cultural Revolution learned the melodies by ear and sang them like folk songs. As was often the case with Yu’s compositions, all three arias were later incorporated into other popular works. “After Reading the Plenary Session Report” was adapted as a violin solo with piano, while “The Great Leap Forward Has Changed the Docks” and “Loyal to the People, Loyal to the Party” were incorporated into a string and piano quintet, respectively. Thus, not only did these works become widely known and sung among the masses, they also formed part of the standard repertoire as concert music

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<sup>415</sup> Although mm. 1-4 can be seen as a transposed motif of mm. 5-8, we can see that together they define the range of the material.

<sup>416</sup> Interview with Chen Yi in Beijing in August 2010.

## Conclusion

Yu Huiyong's approach to Beijing opera reform was logical and systematic. From all these examples, we can see a clear process of gradually bringing new elements to replace the old. Yu's style evolved from being highly derivative to one with more compositional elements and dramatic connotation. Because Yu was familiar with Chinese operatic tradition, he was more aware of what aspects were at the core of the art form and what aspects could be modernized without affecting the essence of Beijing opera. Since traditional Beijing opera was an orally transmitted art form, it required a certain structural rigidity due to the memory limitations of the performers. For example, the tight coupling of lyrics and music, the recycling of standardized tunes, and the formulaic aria types provided a framework for the collaborative efforts of the vocalists and instrumentalists as they reproduced old works and created new ones. Therefore, it can be said that before Yu Huiyong, Beijing opera aria was not a work of one composer, but rather was created by a group of artists.

Yu redefined Beijing opera and re-created it as an art form that was mainly shaped by the composer. His musical approach was driven by the expression of the heightened emotions of modern characters and the placement of music within the context of socialist new society. He gradually came to disregard traditional restrictions and by relying more on his intuitions about the relationship between vocal and instrumental music. No longer constrained by the traditional Beijing opera aria conventions, Yu's arias provided a fresh and contemporary sound that portray the common people of modern day China (workers, peasants, and soldiers) as heroes and heroines, who are strong, capable, and devoted to the socialist cause. By abandoning overly restrictive metrical conventions,

he was able to create arias that were clearly *erhuang* in style even though they did not begin on a down beat, as in the example of “Nothing Can Stop a Communist Party Member”; likewise, he knew how to create arias with a definite *xipi* flavor even though he did not start each phrase with a weak beat, as in “After Reading the Plenary Session Report.” Furthermore, he dispensed with the systems of separate modes and tessituras for male and female characters, in line with socialist policies advocating the equal status of men and women. But he did not simply masculinize his female characters; rather, he painted complex personalities through the subtle shifting between male and female aria types, allowing his characters to be at times more reserved or feminine, and at other time more confident and masculine. The efficacy of this approach can be seen in Chang Bao’s aria “Send Me to the Battlefield” in *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* as well as in Fang Haizhen’s aria “Loyal to the People, Loyal to the Party.”

Yu totally broke with the convention of stereotyped Beijing opera aria form and type, replacing this with the original through-composed aria that has a much wider range of expression. Yu freely modulated from one aria-type to another within a single aria, as for example when he began the aria “Nothing Can Stop a Communist Party Member” in *fan-erhuang* aria type, only to modulate to *erhuang* after the first phrase. As Yu gained more confidence in composition, he became bolder in his experimentation, and in “After Reading the Plenary Session Report” we see an even more unexpected shift from *erhuang* to *xipi*. Still, Yu’s approach was subtle, at least with early operas like *The Red Lantern* and *On the Docks*, in which modulations of aria-type were not overtly marked on the score but rather can only be discerned from a careful analysis of the music. However, by the time he put his hand to *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, he clearly indicated it

on the score when he modulated from one aria-type to another, as in Yang Zirong's aria from Act V, "Welcome Spring." Likewise in his culminating work *Azalea Mountain*, which will be discussed in a later chapter, Yu confidently marked the shift from *erhuang* to *xipi* in Ke Xiang's aria "It's a Bitter Pill to Swallow." Yu also abandoned the practice of organizing musical phrases in parallel to the lines of the lyrics. Instead, he grouped his phrases according to changes in emotion. Thus, a musical phrase could end in the middle of a line, contain an entire couplet, or even extend across couplets. In other words, Yu shifted the focus of the aria structure from the lyrics to the music.

Even when Yu followed convention, he pushed it to its limits and expanded its range. Traditional Beijing opera conventionally indicated shifts in emotion through changes in *ban*; Yu followed this convention but greatly increased the frequency of *ban* changes while at the same time considerably expanding the range of *ban* types. For example, Fang Haizhen's aria "Loyal to the People, Loyal to the Party" from *On the Docks* contains eleven *ban* changes. In that same opera, we also saw the introduction of a new *ban*, such as *kuanban*, in Fang Haizhen's aria "After Reading the Plenary Session Report," and *paiban*, in Ma Hongliang's aria "The Great Leap Forward Has Changed the Face of the Docks." Yu's invention of new types of *ban* greatly increased the range of emotional expression while at the same time generated unity and variety.

A hallmark of traditional Beijing opera was the use of improved melismatic passages known as *tuoqiang*. Yu made use of *tuoqiang* at key positions in his arias, but he no longer left it up to the performer to interpret; rather, the *tuoqiang* of Yu's arias

were all composed, and the performer was expected to follow the score.<sup>417</sup> Yu followed the conventions of segment-ending notes and cadential pitches in the construction of his arias when possible; he utilized the traditional modes and aria types, even though he bent the rules on when and how to use them.

Yu Huiyong's success in composing Beijing opera vocal music is undeniable, as many of his arias were not only popular among the masses but also among professional musicians, and many of his compositions have been adapted as chamber music pieces. The secret of his success is a good balance of tradition and innovation, which is the dilemma all composers face. As Xi Genghu, a *huju* (Shanghai-style opera) composer explained, "If the music all sounded like that in traditional *huju*, people would not come, if it sounded too different they also would not come."<sup>418</sup> However, it is hardly surprising that Yu achieved more in terms of Beijing opera reform than those who were more highly invested in the art form. As Jonah Lehrer, author of *Imagine: How Creativity Works*, explains:

[I]t's often the outsiders who do better: people on the fringes of that field — people who know enough to understand the question but don't know enough that they're going to run into the same stumbling blocks as the people on the inside who have already tried to solve it.<sup>419</sup>

This quote precisely describes Yu Huiyong. He was not formally trained in the art of Beijing opera. Indeed, his formal training in music was quite limited, yet he had a

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<sup>417</sup> Yu Huiyong individually instructed each of the original performers on how to deliver these arias.

<sup>418</sup> Jonathan Stock, *Huju: Traditional Opera in Modern Shanghai* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 173.

<sup>419</sup> National Public Radio interview with Jonah Lehrer, 21 March 2013. Transcript available at: <http://www.npr.org/2013/03/21/148607182/fostering-creativity-and-imagination-in-the-workplace>.



natural talent that he largely honed through self-instruction. Thus, he was not invested in Beijing opera convention. Instead, he was an amateur in the true sense of the word—a lover of the art who was more concerned with composing opera that could reach out to the masses rather than maintaining the purity of traditional forms.

Yu turned to his own extensive research of Chinese folk theater and music to guide his creative process; his profound understanding of folk traditions aided his composition of new works that alluded to tradition while stepping outside its formulas. His first innovation was to break free from the highly stylized melodic system and enrich its expressive power. Yu composed more appealing arias, many of which gained popularity in their own right, according to compositional rules derived from his research. Converting his theory into practice, Yu wrote arias that were more melodic, more colloquial, and easier to understand, without sacrificing a distinct Beijing opera flavor.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN: YANGBANXI INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC—A CONFLUENCE OF EASTERN AND WESTERN TRADITIONS

The Western listener hearing the instrumental music of Yu Huiyong for the first time might find little that is particularly notable. While there are certainly Chinese elements to his work, the musical idiom Yu employs is completely understandable to the Western ear. Indeed, pieces such as the Overture to Act I of *On the Docks* or the “Ski Scene” from *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* are even somewhat reminiscent of works by Yu’s contemporaries in the West, such as Bernstein and Copland, who also viewed themselves as composers for the common man. From a Eurocentric perspective, what is most notable about pieces such as these is not their familiarity of form but rather that fact that such works would have been sponsored by the communist regime during the Cultural Revolution, a period when China seemed to be rejecting all things Western.

Yet, from a Chinese perspective there is nothing foreign-sounding about the music of Yu Huiyong. In fact, his music sounds both quintessentially Chinese and thoroughly modern, the obvious next step in the evolution of Beijing opera music. Thus, neither did Yu cut a new form of music from whole cloth, nor did he abandon his cultural tradition in favor of Western models. Rather, Yu Huiyong’s genius lay in his keen sense of the musical zeitgeist of twentieth-century China.

For more than a century, China had been lurching toward reform of its institutions to bring them more in line with those of the West, and this included music reform.

Western musical influences have been present in China since the late sixteenth century

with the coming of European missionaries. Furthermore, the Manchurian court of the Qing dynasty (1644-1912) sought to build China as a cosmopolitan center of the arts and sciences, and as such patronized not only traditional Han Chinese art forms, but also those of the minorities within its realms, and it welcomed the practice of foreign art forms as well. As part of the Self-Strengthening Movement (*yangwu yundong*) of the late nineteenth century, the Qing instituted educational reforms that included instruction in Western music. Thus, by the mid-twentieth century, several generations of Chinese had grown up with the Western music idiom and no longer saw it as foreign. As Paul Clark has pointed out, “Cultural practice between 1966 and 1976 had deep roots in the Chinese experience not simply after 1949 but since China’s nineteenth-century encounter with Western power and culture.”<sup>420</sup>

Just as Sir Isaac Newton attributed his success to standing on the shoulders of giants, the same can be said for Yu Huiyong. The great Beijing opera performers of the early twentieth century, especially Cheng Yanqiu, had advocated for a reform of Beijing opera by adopting Western techniques to strengthen traditional forms. Likewise, composers of that time, such as Liu Tianhua and Xian Xinhai, sought in their compositions a synthesis of Chinese and Western elements that would have appealed to the burgeoning urban educated class. Yu clearly saw the direction these reform attempts were aimed at, and he brought them fully to their destination, creating a new style of Beijing opera with appeal not only to the educated elite but also to the uneducated masses. He could not have achieved his modernization of Beijing opera without the foundation laid by his predecessors. Nor could he have been successful without the full

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<sup>420</sup> Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History*, (New York: Cambridge University, 2008), p. 5.

support of the Chinese Communist Party, and especially not without the patronage and vision of the Chairman's wife, Jiang Qing, who was also influenced by the Western music, Hollywood films, and musical dramas. Thus, in order to understand the instrumental music Yu Huiyong composed for yangbanxi, we must first understand both the Eastern and Western musical traditions that influenced music composition in twentieth-century China.

### Early Western Musical Influences in China

Musical and religious practices are often deeply intertwined. This is certainly the case in the West, where the roots of European classical music can be traced back to the sacred music of the early Catholic church. A similar observation can be made in imperial China, where, for two millennia, the state was legitimized through the sacred rituals—including music—of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. Religion also served as the medium through which Western music was first introduced to China.

The seventeenth century was a time when European civilization flourished; its arts and sciences were developing rapidly, and its people were traveling around the globe in exploration and conquest. There was also a strong desire, on the part of the Catholic church, to propagate the faith to the peoples of other lands. The first notable missionary to China was the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), who spent nearly three decades in service to the Ming court. Ricci, who was highly intelligent and well educated, instructed the Ming on the latest advances in European science, mathematics, and arts, no doubt including music. Ricci also recognized Chinese culture and philosophy as highly developed, and he advocated the presentation of Christianity as compatible with the

teachings of Confucius, a policy followed by generations of Jesuits in the Chinese mission thereafter. With the fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644, there was some disruption of the Jesuit Chinese mission, but it resumed once political stability had been reestablished by the Qing.<sup>421</sup>

The Kang-Qian period (1661-1796) in many ways marked the high point of the Qing dynasty. Extending across the reigns of three emperors—Kangxi (1661-1722), Yongzheng (1722-1735), and Qianlong (1735-1796)—this was a time of relative peace, economic growth, and a flourishing of the arts and sciences. Indeed, the Qing court was sincerely interested in the outside world and encouraged international exchange. As foreign conquerors, the Qing had no vested interest in the traditional culture of the Han majority. Rather, the Qing viewed themselves as the rulers of a multinational empire and the cosmopolitan center of Asia, if not the world. Although they adopted the Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist customs of the Han, the Qing also maintained their traditional Manchurian religious practices. As a result, they were generally tolerant of other religions, and this included an open attitude toward the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim populations living in China.<sup>422</sup> The Jesuit missionaries were welcomed in the Qing court because of their scientific expertise, especially in the areas of map making and calendar construction, but they were also free to build churches and seek converts, as long as they followed Ricci's principle that Chinese Catholics could continue to engage in the Confucian rites.<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York, Norton, 1990), p. 71.

<sup>422</sup> Records of Jewish, Nestorian Christian and Muslim populations in China extend back at least a millennium. See Spence, p. 8.

<sup>423</sup> Spence, p. 71.

The Jesuits were also welcomed because of their knowledge of Western music. The Qing court invited musicians from all the neighboring countries, including Mongolia, Korea, and Nepal.<sup>424</sup> The Jesuits, as educated men of Europe, were certainly trained in music, even if they did not consider themselves musicians by profession. Nevertheless, they were pressed by the court to serve as musicians, music teachers, and even composers. Apparently, Kangxi had a keen interest in the harpsichord; in addition to maintaining a large collection of the instrument, the emperor and his sons received instruction from the Jesuits on how to play the keyboard.<sup>425</sup>

Two musician-missionaries stand out in particular, the Portuguese Jesuit Tomas Pereira (1645-1708) and the Italian Lazarist Teodorico Pedrini (1671-1746). During his 36-year stay in China, Pereira served the Qing court as diplomat, mathematician and music scholar. Pereira had a keen ear, and he was able to notate and repeat Chinese melodies on one hearing, an ability that greatly impressed emperor Kangxi. An accomplished organist, Pereira constructed several organs for churches in Beijing as well as one built expressly for the emperor that could play Chinese melodies mechanically. Following Ricci's principle of accommodation, the Jesuits celebrated mass in Chinese instead of Latin, and Pereira composed a number of hymns in Chinese, some of which are still extant. As a musical scholar and theorist, Pereira contributed significantly to China's understanding of Western music by joining, at Kangxi's behest, a newly formed academy

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<sup>424</sup> Yu Siu-Wah, *The Meaning and Cultural Function of Non-Chinese Music in the Eighteenth Century Manchu Court* (Dissertation, Harvard University, 1996), p. 42.

<sup>425</sup> Peter Allsop and Joyce Lindorff, "Teodorico Pedrini: The Music and Letters of an 18th-century Missionary in China," *Vincentian Heritage Journal*: Vol. 27: Iss. 2, p. 52.

tasked with compiling a five-volume encyclopedia of music. The fifth volume, on Western music theory, was started by Pereira but finished by his successor, Pedrini.<sup>426</sup>

Teodorico Pedrini arrived in China in 1711, assuming the position of court musician to Emperor Kangxi, a post that had been filled by Pereira until his death in 1708. Kangxi especially held Pedrini in high esteem, because he could not only play the harpsichord, he could build them. Yet, Pedrini had come to China to propagate the faith, not to give keyboard lessons to the emperor's children, a fate which he lamented in a number of letters home.<sup>427</sup> Nevertheless, his contribution to the Chinese understanding of Western music was considerable. First, he completed the volume on Western music theory started by Pereira; it was published, as part of the five-volume *Lülü Zhengyi (True Doctrine of Music)*, in Beijing in 1713. Perhaps an even more significant contribution was Pedrini's set of twelve sonatas for violin and bass, which he composed during his years in China. It is only reasonable to assume that these compositions were performed at that time, either by Pedrini himself or by his princely pupils. Furthermore, the fact that these sonatas were composed in the style of Corelli, highly popular in Europe at that time, indicates that the master's work was not unknown in China as well, at least in the Qing court. In the two centuries of political upheaval that China endured following the Kang-Qian period, Pedrini's sonata manuscripts were lost only to be found again in the archives of the Beijing National Library at the close of the twentieth century.<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> Joyce Lindorff, "Tomás Pereira" in *New Grove Dictionary of Music* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004); Allsop and Lindorff, p. 54.

<sup>427</sup> Allsop and Lindorff, p. 47.

<sup>428</sup> Joyce Lindorff, "Teodorico Pedrini" in *New Grove Dictionary of Music*; Allsop and Lindorff, p. 54.

Pedrini's tenure in China (from his arrival in 1711 until his death in 1746) is significant because it spanned the reigns of all three emperors of the Kang-Qian period. During this time, Pedrini found himself at the center of political intrigues in both the Vatican and the Qing court. The Vatican intrigue involved an issue known as the Chinese rites controversy. The Jesuits were the first Catholic missionaries in China, and they had continued to follow Ricci's principle of adapting the Christian faith to local practices. Later, missionaries from other orders, in particular the Dominicans, began arriving in China, and they were far less accommodating on the question of Confucian rituals. As a Lazarist, Pedrini favored the Dominican position, and certain Jesuits conspired to discredit him with the emperor, landing him in jail. However, Kangxi died the next year, and when his successor Yongzheng learned that those same Jesuits had supported his rival to the throne, Yongzheng freed Pedrini and expelled the Jesuits. Meanwhile, the Vatican had taken a hard stance on the Chinese rites question, and the Qing court would not tolerate a religion that forbade the Confucian rites, which it considered civil, and not religious, ceremonies. Apparently, Pedrini carefully trod the tightrope strung between Rome and Beijing, and for some time his was the only Catholic church in Beijing that was officially sanctioned.<sup>429</sup>

In addition to instrumental music, the Qing court was also an important patron of opera. We have already seen in Chapter Three how the Qing court invited companies from a variety of the regional operas to perform in the palace. We also saw how Beijing opera made its debut in the Qing court during the reign of Emperor Qianlong and rose to prominence as the national operatic form due in large part to the continued patronage of

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<sup>429</sup> Allsop and Lindorff, pp. 57-59.



his successors. Thus, it is not surprising to read reports of Western operas also being performed in the palace during Qianlong's reign, especially given the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Qing court during the Kang-Qian period. In one case, we even have records indicating the name and composer of the opera, specifically *La Cecchina, ossia La buona figliuola* (1760) by Italian composer Niccolò Piccinni.<sup>430</sup>

Despite more than a century of avid Western music patronage in the Qing court during the Kang-Qian period, this activity had virtually no influence on Chinese music outside the court. The only exception to this would have been the hymns composed by Pereira, Pedrini, and others that were sung in the Catholic churches of Beijing and other major cities in China. Nevertheless, the Chinese Catholic population was then, as now, miniscule, and it played no notable role in the advancement of Chinese music during this time period. More than a century would have to pass before Western music began to make headway into the mainstream of Chinese culture.

After a series of humiliating military defeats against the British, the Qing government acquiesced to the terms of the Treaty of Tianjin in 1858. Among other things, the treaty opened a number of Chinese cities to foreign concessions, permitted the free movement of foreigners throughout China, and legalized Christian missionary activity.<sup>431</sup> Although the Catholics had maintained a limited presence in China mainly by providing services to the Qing government, the Treaty of Tianjin opened the doors to missionary activity aimed directly at the Chinese people without having to curry favor with the imperial court. Churches in North America and Europe, both Catholic and

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<sup>430</sup> Tao Yabing, *Zhongxi yinyue jiaoliu shigao* [The History of Chinese and Western Music Interaction] (Beijing: Zhongguo dabaike quanshi chubanshe, 1994), p. 140.

<sup>431</sup> These hostilities, collectively known as the First and Second Opium wars, continued despite the treaty until 1860. Spence, p. 180.

Protestant, sent missions to China. In addition to proselytizing, missionaries set up schools and hospitals, and by 1875 there were some 800 missionary schools enrolling some 20,000 Chinese students, largely from poor families.<sup>432</sup> Along with religious instruction, these students were educated in English, mathematics, geography and music.<sup>433</sup> Music education in the missionary schools most likely consisted of singing hymns and Western folk songs, perhaps with Chinese lyrics, but these songs were written in Western notation and played on Western instruments such as the piano.<sup>434</sup> Graduates of these mission schools, because of their training in science, medicine, and English, played a disproportionately large role in the rapidly Westernizing Chinese society of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries; they were also well prepared for the study abroad opportunities that became available starting in the 1870s.

### **Western Musical Influences in the Twentieth Century**

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Qing undertook a program to modernize China known as the Self-Strengthening Movement, and this included the funding of study abroad opportunities for a large number of students. The first cohorts were sent to the United States, and later ones to various European countries. After its humiliating defeat in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894, China ironically began developing a newfound respect for its island neighbor, and this admiration increased many-fold after

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<sup>432</sup> Gu Changsheng, *Chuanjiaoshi yu jindai zhongguo* [Missionaries and Modern China], (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1991), p. 225-226.

<sup>433</sup> Spence, p. 208.

<sup>434</sup> Liu Zaisheng, *Zhongguo zhiandai yinyueshi jianshu* [Chinese Modern Music History] (Beijing: renmin yinyue subanshe, 2009), p. 13.

the Japanese defeat of Russia—a Western power—in 1904. Japan, which had demonstrated an ability to modernize rapidly while maintaining the essence of its culture, was now seen as model for Chinese modernization, and it became the destination of choice for thousands of students going abroad.<sup>435</sup>

One of these students returning from Japan was music educator Shen Xingong (1870-1947), who was much impressed by the Japanese educational system. Following the Japanese model, Shen selected a number of Western melodies and wrote Chinese lyrics for them. Around the turn of the twentieth century, the Qing court instituted a number of reforms aimed at developing a national school system on the Japanese model; among these was the 1904 mandate that all public schools include music education.<sup>436</sup> Shen's adaptations made up the bulk of the so-called “school singing-songs” (*xuetang yuege*) that were taught in urban elementary schools during the early decades of the twentieth century, thus redefining the concept of music for China's newly emerging urban middle class.<sup>437</sup> Indeed, Shen's synthesis of Western melodies with Chinese lyrics greatly influenced trends in Chinese popular music throughout the twentieth century. And viewed in this light, Yu Huiyong's synthesis of Western and traditional musical forms in the creation of yangbanxi is not quite as radical as it at first appears.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, China's east-coast cities rapidly Westernized as more and more foreigners entered the country, and more and more Chinese students returned from abroad. At the vanguard of this modernization was China's largest city, Shanghai, which had grown from humble market town to

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<sup>435</sup> Spence, p. 239.

<sup>436</sup> Liu Zaisheng, p. 33.

<sup>437</sup> Huang Zi, *Shen Xingong changge jixu* [Shen Xingong Song Collection ] (Anhui: Anhui wenyi chubanshe, 1997), p. 72.

international metropolis in just a century. It was in this city that the latest in music and theatrical trends in China were set. Not only was Shanghai the home of the nation's first music conservatory and the first professional orchestra in East Asia, the city boasted film studios and more theaters than the capital. Even the major Beijing opera performers such as Mei Lanfang now lived in Shanghai. Indeed, Shanghai well deserved its nickname at the time as "The Paris of the East."

The National Conservatory of Music was founded in 1927. It was established by music educators Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940) and Xiao Youmei (1884-1940), both of whom had studied at the University of Leipzig in Germany, and many of the early faculty members were Europeans, Russians, and returned Chinese scholars.<sup>438</sup> Most notable among these was Huang Zi, who was instrumental in introducing Western compositional theory to a generation of aspiring Chinese composers. Perhaps the conservatory's most famous student was He Luting (1903-1999), whose short piece *The Cowherd's Flute* (*Mutong duandi*) won a prestigious prize and has become a staple in Chinese concert halls.<sup>439</sup> He Luting was active in the Communist movement, composing patriotic songs for the revolution and music for numerous films as well as organizing the first communist philharmonic orchestra in Yan'an. After Liberation, he was appointed director of his alma mater, which had been renamed the Shanghai Conservatory of Music; it was in this capacity that he served as mentor for Yu Huiyong.

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<sup>438</sup> Han-lun Yang, "The Shanghai Conservatory, Musical Life, and the Russian Diaspora, 1927-1949," *Twentieth Century China*, Vol. 37, Iss. 1, p. 76.

<sup>439</sup> The contest was sponsored in 1934 by Russian composer Alexander Tcherepnin (1899-1977), who was active in promoting the development of Chinese music. Liu Zaisheng, *Zhongguo jindai yinyueshi jianshu* [A Brief History of Modern Chinese Music], (Beijing: renmin yinyue chubanshe, 2009), p. 237.

Against the rising tide of anti-Semitism in Europe, Shanghai had become a safe haven, and a large international Jewish community settled there. Among them was the Russian composer Aaron Avshalomov (1894-1965). Having grown up on the Russian-Chinese border (where his Jewish parents had been exiled) in a predominantly Chinese community, Avshalomov seemed more at home in China, and he spent a number of productive years in Shanghai, developing a unique style that blended Chinese and Western musical elements.<sup>440</sup> After the Japanese occupation of Shanghai, conditions deteriorated for the Jews, and most emigrated elsewhere. Avshalomov remained during the occupation but left Shanghai in 1947; he spent the rest of his days in the United States but was never able to develop a reputation for himself there. In China, however, he was well respected and lovingly known as “Apu,” and his works were often performed by the Shanghai Municipal Council Symphony Orchestra.<sup>441</sup> One of his most influential works was the music drama *Mengjiang Nü* (Lady Menjiang), based on a Chinese folk tale about the separation of a loving couple and their tragic ending as a result of building the Great Wall and the cruelty of the first Emperor of the Qin Dynasty (221-210 B.C.E.). The work was highly regarded by musicians and musicologists alike for its innovativeness.<sup>442</sup> Many other members of the Shanghai Jewish community were also active as musicians during this time, performing in various ensembles in the city.

The Shanghai Municipal Council Symphony Orchestra (known today simply as the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra) evolved out of a number of amateur ensembles that had been performing in the city since the 1870s. However, it was Italian conductor Mario

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<sup>440</sup> John Winzenburg, “Aaron Avshalomov and New Chinese Music in Shanghai, 1931-1947,” *Twentieth Century China*, Vol. 37, Iss. 1, p. 52.

<sup>441</sup> Liu Zaisheng, p. 316.

<sup>442</sup> Liu Zaisheng, p. 316.

Paci (1878-1946) who reorganized it in 1919 as the first fully professional symphony orchestra in East Asia.<sup>443</sup> Paci endeavored to promote an appreciation for Western classical music among the Chinese people; in addition to a full slate of concert hall performances, Paci led the orchestra in weekly concerts-in-the-park during the summer months, regular radio broadcasts of concerts, and special performances in the city's schools.<sup>444</sup> He provided positions in his orchestra for a number of European musicians fleeing the Nazis, the most notable example being Ferdinand Adler, who after the war returned to Europe to serve as concertmaster for the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra.<sup>445</sup> Most significantly, Paci extended many opportunities for Chinese musicians, both players of Western instruments as members of his orchestra and players of Chinese instruments as guest performers for special concerts featuring both Western and Chinese musical selections, including one event in which Beijing opera star Mei Lanfang served as the master of ceremonies.<sup>446</sup> Paci also strove to maintain good relations with the National Conservatory, inviting its students to attend Saturday rehearsals for free.<sup>447</sup> For more than two decades, Western classical music flourished in Shanghai under the baton of maestro Paci, until he and many members of his orchestra fled the city after the Japanese invasion.<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> Floria Paci Zaharoff. *The Daughter of the Maestro: Life in Surabaya, Shanghai, And Florence*. (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2009) pp. 105-112.

<sup>444</sup> Liu Zaisheng, p. 164.

<sup>445</sup> Han Guohuang, *Yinyue Wenji [Music Essays]* (Taipei: Yueyun chubanshe, 1992), vol. IV, pp. 159.

<sup>446</sup> Liu Zaisheng, p. 165.

<sup>447</sup> Han, p. 179.

<sup>448</sup> Paci returned to Shanghai after the Japanese surrender but died the following year. Liu, pp. 162-165.

It was also during this period of flourishing musical activity that we begin to see Chinese musicians trying their hand at Western composition techniques, creating pieces for both Western and Chinese instruments. Significant among these was Liu Tianhua (1895-1932), who employed Western musical structures to create new works for the *erhu* (a two-stringed fiddle) and the *pipa* (a four-stringed lute); he also used Western musical instrument construction techniques to improve the sound quality of the *erhu* and *pipa*.<sup>449</sup> Liu's work demonstrated that traditional Chinese instruments were not necessarily inferior to Western instruments in expressive power.

This more tolerant attitude no doubt contributed to the discovery, by Chinese musicologists, of the blind itinerant fiddler Abing (1893-1950, full name Hua Yanjun). During the Japanese occupation, Abing had built a reputation for himself wandering the streets of Wuxi playing the *erhu* and singing anti-Japanese commentary. Shortly before he died, musicologists Cao Anhe and Yang Yinliu recorded, and later transcribed, a number of Abing's compositions, the most famous of which is the solo *erhu* piece *Erquan Yingyue* (*Moon Reflected on Second Spring*, 1950).<sup>450</sup> Though not a composer in the modern sense, Abing stood at the cusp of a musical paradigm shift in China as a traditional itinerant fiddler whose works have become staples of the Chinese concert hall.

Without doubt, however, China's most influential composer of the early twentieth century was Xian Xinhai (1905-1945), who studied piano and violin at the Shanghai Conservatory but was expelled because of his political activities. He then went to Europe and studied composition at the Paris Conservatory under Paul Dukas (1865-1935). Xian

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<sup>449</sup> Liu Zaisheng, p. 108.

<sup>450</sup> Stock, Jonathan P. J., *Musical Creativity in Twentieth-Century China: Abing, His Music, and Its Changing Meanings* (Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 1996).

returned to Shanghai in 1935 (after Dukas passed away) and worked for film studios, where he composed music for patriotic movies. In 1938, Xian went to Yan'an, the Communist headquarters and became dean of the newly founded Lu Xun Art Academy. While there, Xian wrote the celebrated *Yellow River Cantata* (*Huang He Dahechang*, 1939), scored for a mixed orchestra of Western and Chinese instruments. This work incorporated both Western techniques and Chinese musical idioms. Uniting diverse folk forms, such as the Chinese folk singing style known as *duikouchang* and a style of fishermen's work song known as *haozi*, this piece also made use of Western techniques of choral writing and harmonic effects from the French Impressionistic School.<sup>451</sup> Xian was one of the first Chinese composers to write symphonies, orchestral suites, and operas. Upon his death in 1945 in Moscow, Mao Zedong praised him as the "people's musician." In the years to follow, Xian's music works became national musical icons, and during the Cultural Revolution his *Yellow River Cantata* was adapted as a piano concerto; it was among the most performed pieces on the Chinese concert stage during that period and is still regularly performed inside and outside China as well.<sup>452</sup>

The process of integrating traditional Chinese culture with that of the West had been underway for more than a century by the time Yu Huiyong tried his hand at incorporating Western musical elements into the underlying structure of Beijing opera. What differentiates Yu's work from the piecemeal efforts of predecessors such as Liu Tianhua and Xian Xinhai was his systematic approach to composition. Despite the political vicissitudes of the early decades of the People's Republic, Yu Huiyong was

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<sup>451</sup> Liu Zaisheng, p. 298.

<sup>452</sup> Richard C. Kraus, *Piano and Politics in China: Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggle over Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) pp. 89-92.



operating within a zeitgeist endeavoring to achieve an East-West synthesis. It is in this sense that we can view yangbanxi as the logical next step in the development of Beijing opera.

### **Traditional Beijing Opera Orchestra**

The instruments of the Beijing opera orchestra can be classified into four categories, strings, winds, brass, and percussion, much as a Western orchestra. The string section includes two fiddles and two lutes. The fiddles are similar in construction, each having two strings tuned to an interval of a fifth. However, the *jinghu* is higher in pitch and more piercing in timbre, while the *jing-erhu* is lower in pitch and mellower in timbre. Similar bows are used for both instruments. The lutes are quite different in form. The *yueqin* has two pairs of strings tuned at an interval of a fifth, with the two strings of each pair tuned to the same pitch. The *sanxian*, on the other hand, has three strings tuned at an interval of a fifth. The fiddles and *sanxian* were traditionally constructed of wood or bamboo with silk strings and snakeskin stretched across the resonator. The *yueqin* is constructed of all of wood with silk strings; both it and the *sanxian* are plucked with picks. The main instrument in the woodwind section is the *dizi*, a bamboo flute, while the main instruments of the brass section include the reed instruments *sheng* and the *suona*. The *sheng* consists of a number of bamboo tubes of different sizes, while the *suona* is composed of a wooden body with a metal bell. These wind instruments have a long history in Chinese classical ensembles and were borrowed by Beijing opera from Kun opera, unlike the strings, which were considered folk, not court, instruments. Finally,

percussion instruments in the Beijing opera orchestra included drums, cymbals, gongs and clappers.

The traditional Beijing opera orchestra consisted of six members, and each member had to play more than one instrument, depending on the needs of the moment. However, some members also served specific roles in the orchestra. For example, the drum master (*gushi*) served as the conductor of the ensemble and beat a drum or wooden block through most of the opera. Meanwhile, the *jinghu* player, known as the string master (*qinshi*), led the ensemble accompaniment of most arias. The string master was also responsible for working with the vocalist in arranging each aria during rehearsal as well as improvising during performances, following the lead of the vocalist during virtuosic displays, and compensating for errors on the part of the vocalist. This skill required the string master to have an intimate understanding of both the grammar and the vocabulary of Beijing opera music. Beijing opera also made use of pre-existing instrumental passages to mark important transitions in the story, such as the entrance of the emperor or the commencement of a banquet, and these melodies were typically performed by the ensemble of the brass instruments, led by a pair of *suona*. Special respect was accorded to a musician who could play all the instruments of the orchestra, and such a person was given the title “master of the six positions” (*liuchang tongtou*), so named because of the number of players in the orchestra, not the number of instruments.

In the early twentieth century, the size of the orchestra was increased to eight members. The *jing-erhu*, essentially a refined version of the common *erhu*, is a relative newcomer to the Beijing opera orchestra. Mei Lanfang advocated its use in his ensemble because he believed its deep mellow timbre complemented his falsetto voice. Around this

same time, another Beijing opera *wusheng* performer Yu Zhengting requested the inclusion of cymbals into the percussion section. Both of these additions became widespread among Beijing opera companies, and thus the standard size of the orchestra was set at eight by the end of 1920s. Further changes to the orchestra occurred after Liberation, including more Chinese instruments such as the *pipa* (a lute) and the *guanzi* (a brass instrument) as well a tendency toward each player specializing in a particular instrument, leading to further increases in the number of players in the ensemble. Thus, there was already a trend toward increasing the size and complexity of the Beijing opera orchestra before Yu Huiyong began adding Western instruments to the yangbanxi orchestra.

The orchestra in Beijing opera has two separate functions. One is to provide musical support for scenes involving singing, speaking, or dance-like movement, which are all included in the term *wenchang* (literally, civil scenes). The other is to accentuate the tempo and dynamics of combat and acrobatic scenes, which are referred to as *wuchang* (literally, martial scenes). Different sections of the orchestra are emphasized, depending on the scene (civil or martial) and aria form. The stringed instruments provide the main accompaniment for *xipi* and *erhuang* arias, and because these constitute the vast majority of Beijing opera arias, we can say that the strings are the most prominent instruments during civil scenes. Collectively, the string section is known as the *sandajian* (literally, three big pieces), referring specifically to the *jinghu*, *jing-erhu*, and *yueqin* (excluding the *xuanzi*, since it serves but a minor supporting role in aria accompaniment). Within the *sandajian*, the *jinghu* is considered the lead instrument, expected to embellish the melodic line of the aria and to echo the vocalist with occasional improvisations.

Beijing opera also makes use of melodies borrowed from Kun opera or from the various anthologies of folk and classical music. Collectively known as *qupai* (literally “labeled music” because these melodies typically had names associated with them), these melodies include both arias and pure instrumental passages. It also made use of melodies from other folk operas, known as *chuiqiang*, which use both wind and brass instruments led by the bamboo flute.<sup>453</sup> The pure instrumental music, also called scene music (*changjing yinyue*), mainly came from Kun opera, and it is used to mark important transitions or the initiation of significant events. For example, the “Water Dragon Tune” (*shui long yin*) was played to mark the arrival of an important person such as the emperor, both in real life and on the opera stage; likewise, the melody known as “Triple Thrust” (*ji san qiang*) was used to signal a feast or banquet.<sup>454</sup> These *qupai* melodies were typically played by a wind and brass ensemble, led either by the *dizi* or the *suona*.

Combat and acrobatic scenes (*wuchang*) are accompanied solely by percussion. In addition to accentuating the tempo and dynamics of the action on stage, percussion instruments can be used to provide various sound effects. The drum master (*gushi*) leads the percussion accompaniment to action scenes, beating a small drum or wooden block. Percussion patterns, known as *luogujing*, are also used to mark stage entrances, with each specific pattern identifying the entering character by rank and personality. These percussion patterns are also used to introduce and conclude arias, with particular patterns associated with each aria-type; they also serve to set the tempo for the aria.

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<sup>453</sup> For more information on *chuiqiang* music, see Xiang Cheng, Shao Hua, *Jingju zhichi yidiantong* [Essential Knowledge of Beijing Opera] (Beijing: renmin yinyue chubanshe, 2008), p. 91.

<sup>454</sup> Nancy Guy, “The Appreciation of Chinese Opera: A Reply to Ching-Hsi Perng (in Forum for Readers and Authors),” *Asian Theatre Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 254-259.

However, the use of percussion is not limited to action scenes. Rather, percussion is pervasive throughout the opera. The drum master, beating the time on a drum or wooden block, serves much the same role as the conductor with his or her baton in a Western orchestra. Furthermore, a clash of the gong or cymbals is frequently used to punctuate significant moments. Throughout the whole play, percussion provides the tempo and rhythm for singing, dancing, and speech. It is also used to modulate the rhythm of singing and action on stage, as well as to articulate the emotional atmosphere. Because percussion is ever present, it also creates a sense of continuity. Whether playing a dominant role in action scenes or a supporting role in the melodic portions of the opera, percussion is a salient feature of Beijing opera. The old saying “the drum and gong make up half the opera” (*yitai luogu bantai xi*) is hardly an exaggeration.

There are three different uses for pure instrumental music in Beijing opera. The first type consists of instrumental connectives associated with arias. These passages, known as *guomen* (literally, passing through the gate), are stereotyped tunes serving as preludes, interludes, and postludes for arias. The particular *guomen* used depends on the aria type, such as *xipi* or *erhuang*, and the *ban*. Thus, the use of a particular *guomen* as prelude lets the listener know exactly which aria-type and *ban* the following aria will be. For example, the eight-measure passage given in Figure 18 is the standard *guomen* for a *xipi yuanban* aria. All instrumental connectives within this aria will be derived from this basic passage, which could be embellished, stretched, repeated or cut to as short as two notes. According to Wichman, the use of a particular *guomen* as prelude is intended to set the mood or emotional atmosphere of the aria that is about to begin, while its repetition as interlude serves to maintain that mood during times when the performer is not singing but

the aria has still not concluded.<sup>455</sup> One can then also say that the use of the *guomen* as postlude is intended to create a sense of lingering emotion even after the aria has ended.



Figure 18. Standard *xipi yuanban* prelude.<sup>456</sup>

As an example of how percussion patterns and *guomen* are used to introduce an aria, consider the aria “I’m on the Castle Wall Viewing the Scenery” (*Wo zheng zai cheng lou guan shanjing*) from the opera *Empty Fort Strategy* (*Kong cheng ji*). In this story, taken from the classic novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*San guo yanyi*), chancellor Zhuge Liang attempts to hold off the advancing army of his enemy Sima Yi until his own army can return. Standing atop the castle wall, Zhuge cordially invites Sima and his men into the castle for a feast, assuring them there is no ambush because his soldiers are all off fighting another battle. Assuming it is a trap, Sima and his men withdraw instead, only to be defeated by Zhuge’s troops on their return. In Video Clip 5.1, we hear the percussion open with a calm pattern, followed by a short three-note *guomen* prelude that leads into the *xipi erliu* aria. Notice in particular how the slow, steady percussion pattern creates a serene, stately atmosphere. The prelude is unusually

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<sup>455</sup> Elizabeth Wichman, *Listening to Theatre: The Aural Dimension of Beijing Opera* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991) p. 246.

<sup>456</sup> Liu Guojie, *Xipi erhuang yinyue gailun* [Survey of Xipi Erhuang Music] (Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue chubanshe, 1997), p. 172. Renotated from the original cipher notation.

short, but it creates a sense of getting down to business, highlighting Zhuge's confidence in his stratagem.<sup>457</sup>

The second type of pure instrumental music is known as *xingxian*, which literally means “action string.” These action strings are short melodic patterns that can be repeated as many times as needed. As the name implies, action strings are used to accompany simple actions, such as walking or thinking, at times when the performer was not singing; they can also serve as background music during speech. Action strings can occur during pauses within arias, or else in the periods between arias while the focus of the story is on action and not emotion. A clear example of the use of an action string to accompany speech can be seen in Act IV of the revolutionary opera *Among the Reeds* (*Shajiabang*).<sup>458</sup> Although this opera was first produced in 1964, it nevertheless employs a traditional stereotyped two-measure action string that is repeated many times as heroine Auntie Aqing, in her teahouse, offers tea and cigarettes to two men she suspects are Japanese sympathizers. The repetitive pattern of the action string creates a feeling of tension as each of the three characters sizes up the others, trying to discern which side of the war each is on.

The third type of pure instrumental music is called *qupai* (labeled tunes), which were borrowed from Kun opera and even earlier sources. These tunes initially had poems associated with them, and they are known by the title of the poem they are associated with, hence the name “labeled tune.” The poems themselves are not sung in this case, but

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<sup>457</sup> For a video clip of the aria “I’m on the Castle Wall Viewing the Scenery” from the opera *The Empty Fort Strategy*, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SmMoFX716b8&feature=related>. Notice how the slow, steady percussion pattern creates a serene, stately atmosphere.

<sup>458</sup> For a video clip of this scene from Act IV of the opera *Among the Reeds* (*Shajiabang*), see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gGIWy8h1r48&feature=related>. Cue to 0:54; the *xingxian* lasts until 2:00.

nevertheless the poems are often familiar to knowledgeable audience members, and the tune is intended to evoke the emotions expressed in the poem. As we have already seen, these *qupai* pieces are used to mark important transitions in the story, such as the entrance of the emperor or preparation for battle. As such, these *qupai* melodies are also referred to as “scene music,” or *changjing yinyue*. In some cases, new words are attached to the tune, creating a *qupai* aria. In fact, this was the typical mode of aria arrangement in Kun opera.

A classic example of *qupai* instrumental music comes from the Beijing opera *Farewell, My Concubine* (*Bawang bie ji*), which was one of the most famous operas performed by Mei Lanfang. In this story, also from the classic novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, general Xiang Yu is surrounded by the enemy and, knowing the end is near, bids farewell to his horse and his favorite concubine. The new version, which premiered in 1922, added music to the sword dance for the concubine (performed by Mei Lanfang) before she thrust herself upon the blade. The background music accompanying the dance was borrowed from the aria “The Night is Deep” (*Ye shenchen*) from the Kun opera *Remembrance of the Secular World* (*Si fan*), which depicts a nun contemplating the loneliness of her cloistered life. When the melody is played to the concubine’s final sword dance, those feelings of loneliness, grief, and despair are evoked anew. This new version has survived to become part of the repertoire of classical Beijing opera today.<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>459</sup> The story of general Xiang Yu and his concubine has been retold many times on the opera stage. In the Kun opera *The Concubine’s Tale* (*Qianjin ji*), the story is told from the woman’s point of view and focuses on the love relationship between her and the general. The 1918 Beijing opera *The Chu-Han Contention* (*Chu han zheng*) took the general’s point of view, focusing more on his famous last battle; the noted *jing* (male painted face) performer Yang Xiaolou played the general, and Shang Xiaoyun, one of the four great *dan* performers, played the concubine. In 1922, Qi Rushan rewrote the opera from the concubine’s perspective, giving his collaborator Mei



Beijing opera music bore both similarities and differences with Kun opera. Both Beijing opera and Kun opera made use of pre-composed music; indeed, both made considerable use of the same stock of *qupai* melodies. However, Beijing opera also drew on stocks of *xipi* and *erhuang* melodies, reflecting the fact that it is a hybrid formed from several regional operatic traditions. An important difference between Kun and Beijing opera, however, had to do with the way in which new operas were created and passed down to new generations of performers. In the case of Kun opera, a librettist selected *qupai* melodies and composed words specifically for the new opera. Since both melodies and lyrics were written down, their exact form was set for posterity.<sup>460</sup> In the case of Beijing opera, on the other hand, there were no scores, as the performers before the twentieth century were typically illiterate. Instead, new operas were created through collaboration in rehearsal, as performers drew melodies from memory and improvised lyrics as needed. Other performers learned these operas by listening and taking part in performances themselves; thus, any particular Beijing opera was always in a state of flux.

Finally, we should point out an important difference between the music of Beijing opera and that of its Western counterpart. Unlike Western classical music, traditional Chinese music, including that of Beijing opera, was monophonic, consisting of a single

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Lanfang the lead role; Yang Xiaolou was again enlisted in the role of the general. Early in his career, Shang Xiaoyun had played *wusheng* (martial male) roles, and only later did he take on *dan* roles. Thus, when he performed the final sword dance, he drew on his earlier martial arts experience. Mei Lanfang, on the other hand, had little martial arts experience, having been trained as a female impersonator from the beginning. For that reason, Qi Rushan selected the Kun opera melody “The Night is Deep” to accompany the sword dance, which Mei performed in a much more feminine, rather than martial, style. Zhou Jiliang, *Mei Lanfang’s Three Revisions of Farewell my Concubine* (Jinwan Bao, November 1, 2004). The 1993 film *Farewell my Concubine* by director Chen Kaige portrays China’s political upheavals of the twentieth century through the eyes of two Beijing opera performers; the story revolves around a production of the opera *Farewell my Concubine*.

<sup>460</sup> In a form known as *gongchi* notation. See Figure 5.2 for an example.

melodic line. While some instruments in the orchestra may vary somewhat from the main melodic line, mainly in terms of embellishment, there was no concept of harmony or counterpoint in Beijing opera. This state of affairs prevailed until the 1960s—in spite of a century of Western music influence in China—until Yu Huiyong applied harmony in the mixed orchestra of yangbanxi.

### **Yu Huiyong's Approach to Instrumental Music**

As various attempts were made during the first half of the twentieth century to reform Beijing opera, a consensus emerged that the major weakness of the art form was its instrumental music. From its conception, Beijing opera was a forum for displaying vocal talents, with the orchestra subordinated to the role of mere accompaniment. This state of affairs is even reflected in a old saying about Beijing opera music, “Strings below winds, winds below voices” (*Si buru zhu, zhu buru rou*).<sup>461</sup> The *xipi* and *erhuang* melodies that made up the bulk of Beijing opera music were considered folk tunes, and as such they were to be played on folk instruments such as fiddles and lutes. The courtly *qupai* melodies borrowed from Kun opera were considered more refined, and hence were played on the more elegant flutes and brass instruments. Nevertheless, it was the voices of the performers that were highlighted upon the Beijing opera stage. Although other reformers recognized the inherent imbalance of this hierarchy, it was Yu Huiyong who first achieved a successful balance of vocal and instrumental music in Beijing opera.

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<sup>461</sup> Interview with Beijing opera performer Ren Guangping in Shanghai in July 2008.

Instead of making piecemeal changes, as had been the approach of the early twentieth century *dan* performers such as Mei Lanfang and Cheng Yanqiu, or the mid-twentieth century creators of revolutionary opera, Yu Huiyong took a more methodical approach, working from theory to practice.<sup>462</sup> Yu took a two-pronged approach to Beijing opera reform. First, he considered what the essential features of Beijing Opera were, and he then sought to strengthen these. Second, he looked to Western musical practices for ideas on how to improve perceived weaknesses in Beijing opera while avoiding a wholesale Westernization of the art; that is, maintaining the Chinese character of Beijing opera was of paramount importance. In this sense, Yu was following a more general approach to modernization that his country had been pursuing for about a century, namely learning from the West in order to strengthen traditional Chinese institutions.

For Yu Huiyong, the two salient characteristics of Beijing opera were its *sandajian*, that is, the string section of the orchestra, and the percussion. Therefore, any attempt at Beijing opera reform needed to take pains to preserve these two features. Although a reformer, Yu's approach was to strengthen, not do away with, tradition. Thus, while introducing Western instruments into the orchestra, he never let them overpower the traditional Chinese strings in those sections of the opera where the *sandajian* had always been prominent, namely as accompaniment to *xipi* and *erhuang* arias. In such cases, Western strings could, at most, play a supporting role, but the traditional strings had to always dominate. On the other hand, in those parts of the opera where the

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<sup>462</sup> The following information about Yu's views on Beijing opera reform was garnered from interviews with colleagues of his who worked with him during the Cultural Revolution, specifically Lian Bo, professor of theater music at the Shanghai Conservatory and Gong Guotai, composer and conductor of the Shanghai Beijing Opera Company and Yu's assistant during this period. Interview with Gong Guotai in February 2011. Interview with Lian Bo in Shanghai in February 2011.

*sandajian* had never been prominent, Western instruments could play a dominant role. This was especially the case in the composition of so-called “scene music” (*changjing yueyin*), which had traditionally employed borrowed *qupai* melodies from Kun opera and was typically performed by woodwinds and brass. Here, Yu exercised considerable creativity, composing scene music played on Western instruments that was unlike anything ever heard before in Beijing opera.

With regards to percussion, Yu continued to use drums and gongs in their traditional roles, such as introducing arias and announcing the entrance of important characters, not to mention its role as accompaniment to martial arts and acrobatics. For these purposes, Yu made use of the traditional percussion patterns, but he also did not limit himself to these, creating new patterns to fit particular circumstances. Additionally, Yu made changes to percussion practices to achieve greater balance. First, he enclosed the percussion section behind plastic walls to reduce the volume. Beijing opera was traditionally performed outdoors, and loud percussion was used to attract attention. By the turn of the twentieth century, Beijing opera had largely moved indoors, and the once appropriately loud percussion now often felt overpowering. Yu’s solution allowed percussionists to perform as they were accustomed to, while reducing the volume to reasonable levels for the audience. Second, Yu broke with the tradition of using percussion alone to accompany action on stage. Certainly, percussion still dominated in martial and acrobatic scenes, but Yu also included other instruments to provide melodic support. Here again, we see in Yu Huiyong a composer who worked within tradition but at the same time pushed convention beyond its ordinary confines.

Yu saw that a thorough modernization of Beijing opera, making it an art form with appeal and relevance to the socialist masses, required the adoption of both Western instruments and Western techniques. However, he was not in favor of a Westernization of Beijing opera, and he urged his colleagues to adhere to four principles of composition in creating new revolutionary operas, phrased in terms of four practices to avoid.

The first principle was to avoid Western melodies. While Yu espoused the use of Western techniques such as harmony and counterpoint to strengthen the music of Beijing opera, the music thus created still had to maintain a Chinese character. This does not mean Yu eschewed Western melodies altogether; after all, the socialist anthem “L’Internationale” figures in more than one of Yu’s operas. Nevertheless, that melody was familiar to everyone in the People’s Republic, almost as if the tune were a Chinese melody.

The second principle was to avoid heavy orchestration. By this principle, Yu was exhorting his colleagues to strike a balance between Chinese and Western instruments. While recognizing the need to incorporate Western instruments to expand the expressive range of the Beijing opera orchestra, Yu also recognized the danger in letting Western instruments overpower their Chinese counterparts. One application of this principle was in Yu’s insistence on the prominence of the *sandajian* during *xipi* and *erhuang* arias. This principle is also a further extension of the first. That is to say, not only must Chinese melodies dominate, they must also be played on Chinese instruments. After all, Chinese melodies played on Western instruments could lose much of their Chinese flavor.

The third principle was to avoid unusual harmony. Yu was very much aware of tendencies in the West, during the twentieth century, toward dissonance. However, unlike

his Western counterparts, who were challenging their audiences, Yu was reaching out to his. And for that reason, the music he composed had to be intuitively appealing, lest the underlying message be lost altogether. Thus, Yu advocated for a conservative approach to harmony, following the practices of traditional (that is, pre-twentieth century) Western composition that Chinese audiences already had some familiarity with.

The fourth principle was to avoid disorderly voices. Here, Yu was advocating a cautious and conservative approach to arranging multiple voices. Specifically, he was warning his fellow composers to keep each voice within its normal range and especially not to let voices cross. In other words, he was calling for adherence to traditional rules of Western vocal arrangement that contemporary Chinese audiences already were already accustomed to.

Unlike Western opera, with its individual librettists and composers, new Beijing operas were developed as collaborative efforts among the musicians and singers. Although Jiang Qing brought in Yu Huiyong to lead her yangbanxi creation group, he was still working in a milieu of “composition by committee.” Thus, it was important for him to reiterate his four principles in order to assure consistent quality and style in the work of each group member involved in musical composition and arrangement.

Especially in the early years, Yu’s position in the creation group was more one of first among equals. For example, Yu joined the creation group for *The Red Lantern* long after production was underway, with string master Li Muliang playing an important leadership role in the early stages of production. Jiang had also brought in several other conservatory-trained composers as well as Yu, and his hand can only clearly be seen in one aria of the final production, namely “Nothing Can Stop a Communist Party

Member.” However, his principles guided the entire production process, including the multiple revisions the opera underwent.

Yu also had to deal with various government officials that got involved in the production of revolutionary operas. Party cadres were present to insure the political correctness of the opera. Furthermore, local and central government officials attended rehearsal and freely voiced their opinions. Such practice was not simply meddling by the new Communist regime; rather, government involvement in opera production has a long history in China, and we have already seen how the Qing court took a hands-on approach to the patronage of Beijing opera. Nevertheless, in the years leading up to the Cultural Revolution, the involvement of high-level officials was a two-edged sword. On the one hand, government sponsorship meant the show could go on. But on the other hand, any suggestion from a powerful political figure needed somehow to be incorporated into the production, no matter how casual the remark and regardless of its artistic merit. Thus, Yu’s principles also became guidelines for the practical implementation of suggestions from politicians.

As Yu developed a solid reputation both within the yangbanxi companies he worked with and among the political elite, he began taking on a more central role as chief composer. Indeed, by the time he set to work on *Azalea Mountain*, he had assumed a role not unlike that of Richard Wagner, overseeing every aspect of production, from libretto to costumes and scenery on stage; he even worked one-on-one with performers to perfect their technique.<sup>463</sup> However, in all of his work, from his early contributions to *On the*

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<sup>463</sup> According to Yang Chunxia, who performed the main character Ke Xiang in *Azalea Mountain*, Yu acted as her voice coach, teaching her not only how to read Western music notation

*Docks* to his magnum opus *Azalea Mountain*, we can see how he implemented his principles in his work, using Western techniques to revitalize traditional forms.

### ***On the Docks: “Great Leap Forward”***

Because traditional Beijing opera was an orally transmitted art form, its practitioners had to draw from a stock of melodies known to all in the troupe when assembling new operas. But Yu was a conservatory-trained composer, not an illiterate musician, and so it would have only seemed natural to him to put down a plan of the opera on paper. Furthermore, if he was going to enrich the music with the Western practices of harmony and counterpoint, then he would have to write it out, either in Chinese cipher notation or in Western notation. Although Yu could have still relied on Beijing opera’s traditional stock of melodies, his use of written musical scores opened up new opportunities for musical creation.

Yu Huiyong was called to the production team of *On the Docks* (*Haigang*) in 1965. Jiang Qing was especially unhappy with earlier versions of this opera, in particular with its music, and she entrusted Yu with a revision of the work. Yu undertook a complete rewriting of the opera, using cipher notation, as only Chinese instruments were included in the orchestra at this time. Not only did he create new melodies from scratch, he also included elements of harmony and counterpoint, particularly with regard to the relationship between vocal and instrumental music. Furthermore, he raised instrumental music to an equal status with vocal music. In this opera, instrumental music was no

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but also how to improve her singing through embellishment, ornamentation and resonance. Interview with Yang Chunxia in Beijing in July 2006.



longer relegated to the role of background accompaniment for the singer; rather, Yu gave it just as important a role in expressing emotion and moving the story forward as the vocal music.

In *On the Docks*, Yu composed all new instrumental connectives (*guomen*) instead of relying on conventional forms. Traditionally, these connectives served to create cohesion in the aria during pauses in singing, accomplished mainly through repetition of fragments from the prelude. But instead, Yu created connectives by using various techniques to reveal the inner thoughts and feelings of the characters as well as to generate a particular emotional atmosphere. An excellent example of this is the aria “The Great Leap Forward Has Changed the Face of the Docks.” This aria also illustrates how Yu cautiously transitioned his audience from traditional expectations to an acceptance of new musical forms.

The first two couplets of “Great Leap Forward” maintain the traditional segmented structure of *xipi yuanban* arias, expressing Ma Hongliang’s reminiscence of the old days on the docks. The instrumental connectives are short, similar to conventional practice, reflecting the reserved and conservative side of the retired dockworker nostalgic for the old Shanghai waterfront. Starting from the third couplet, however, the structure of the aria departs from the typical pattern. Yu created a new metrical pattern he called *paiban* (literally, “parallel beat”) in reference to the parallel structures of the vocal and instrumental segments that followed. Here, each instrumental segment is similar in length and shape to the preceding vocal part, forming a contrapuntal relationship between voice and instruments. The instrumental connectives, parallel to the vocal passages, also create

a comic effect, almost as if the Huangpu River were echoing Ma Hongliang's excitement at seeing the changes to his old workplace.

*On the Docks* was the fifth model opera developed under the guidance of Jiang Qing, but it was the first to have a strong female character, party secretary Fang Haizhen, as the lead role. There was nothing new about females as central characters; indeed, the four great *dan* performers dominated the Beijing opera stage during the first half of the twentieth century. However, Fang Haizhen was no *qingyi* (elegant lady) of the role-type portrayed by Mei Lanfang and Cheng Yanqiu. If anything, she was more like the *laosheng* (older male) role type prominent during the nineteenth century—bold, confident, and heroic. In fact, this was the first time in Beijing opera history that a female performer had been given such an assertive lead role. With no precedent to follow, Yu Huiyong had no choice but to create a new style of music befitting the new socialist woman-leader role-type. Thus, Yu had considerable leeway in creating a musical style to convey the strength and confidence of Fang's character, and Jiang Qing, with her clear vision of a liberated woman, was instrumental in developing this new role-type.

Yu Huiyong worked closely with Jiang Qing in developing the music for Fang Haizhen. The music went through a number of revisions, and on more than one occasion Yu had to endure Jiang's sharp criticism as he strove to find the appropriate musical idiom for this character.<sup>464</sup> In the end, Yu developed fourteen arias for Fang Haizhen, far outnumbering those of any other character in the opera and clearly establishing her central role in the story. She also sings in the core aria of the opera, "Loyal to the People, Loyal to the Party," which occurs in Act Six as a three-way conversation between Fang,

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<sup>464</sup> Dai, 1995, p. 162-165.

retired dockworker Ma Hongliang, and the youth Han Xiaoqiang. This aria also represents the turning point of the story, in which Fang and Ma convince the youth—as well as the audience—that life in socialist China is vastly improved compared with the ordeals before Liberation. To make that argument compelling, Yu needed to make the music memorable, and, to be sure, the complexity of this aria raises it head and shoulders above any other in the opera.

Because many of the performers he was working with were less familiar with Western musical techniques, Yu had to serve also as mentor, working one-on-one with many of his colleagues on the production team. Yu's mentoring style can be seen most readily in his relationship with his assistant, Gong Guotai. As a recent graduate of the high school attached to the Shanghai Conservatory, Gong was perhaps more fluent in the Western musical idiom than were the seasoned Beijing opera performers in the company, but nonetheless he needed considerable guidance from his mentor. Gong was tasked with writing out the full score for *On the Docks* based on Yu's short score. A page from that short score is given in Figure 19. It shows four clefs and six voices, including the vocal (top), *sandajian* Chinese strings (second), and woodwind and brass (third) and Western strings (bottom). The details of which instrument to be used were clearly instructed right above or below each voice. For example, in measure one, which is a free meter (*sanban*) prelude to the aria, the Chinese characters specify that the melody in the second clef is to be played by *pipa* (which Yu had added to the *sandajian* string section); both voices in the third clef were to be played by woodwind, and the bottom voices were for the whole string section in pizzicato. Yu gave Gong a crash course in Western compositional

technique, which Gong later recalled as a memorable and invaluable educational experience.<sup>465</sup>

Figure 20 shows a page from the manuscript of the full score completed by Gong Guotai based on Yu's original short score. It shows the first two measures, the free meter prelude and the aria in 4/4 on the second measure. Notice the prelude was played by two flutes (no *pipa*) first, then added string section, Chinese instrument *sheng*, and clarinet, respectively

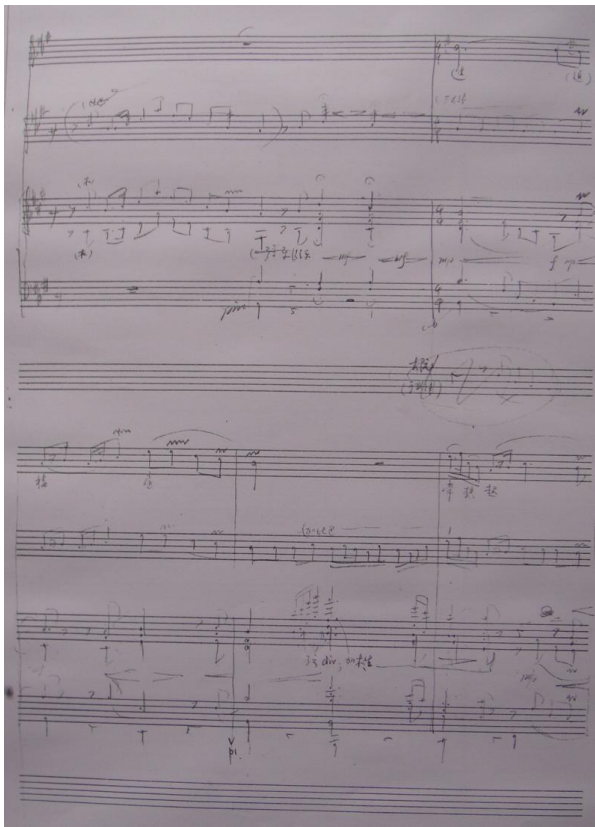


Figure 19. A page from Yu's short score for *On the Docks*. Courtesy of Gong Guotai.<sup>466</sup>

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<sup>465</sup> Interview with Gong Guotai in Beijing in February 2011.

<sup>466</sup> Original manuscript of *On the Docks*, composed by Yu Huiyong; collected by Gong Guotai. Reproduced with permission of Gong Guotai.

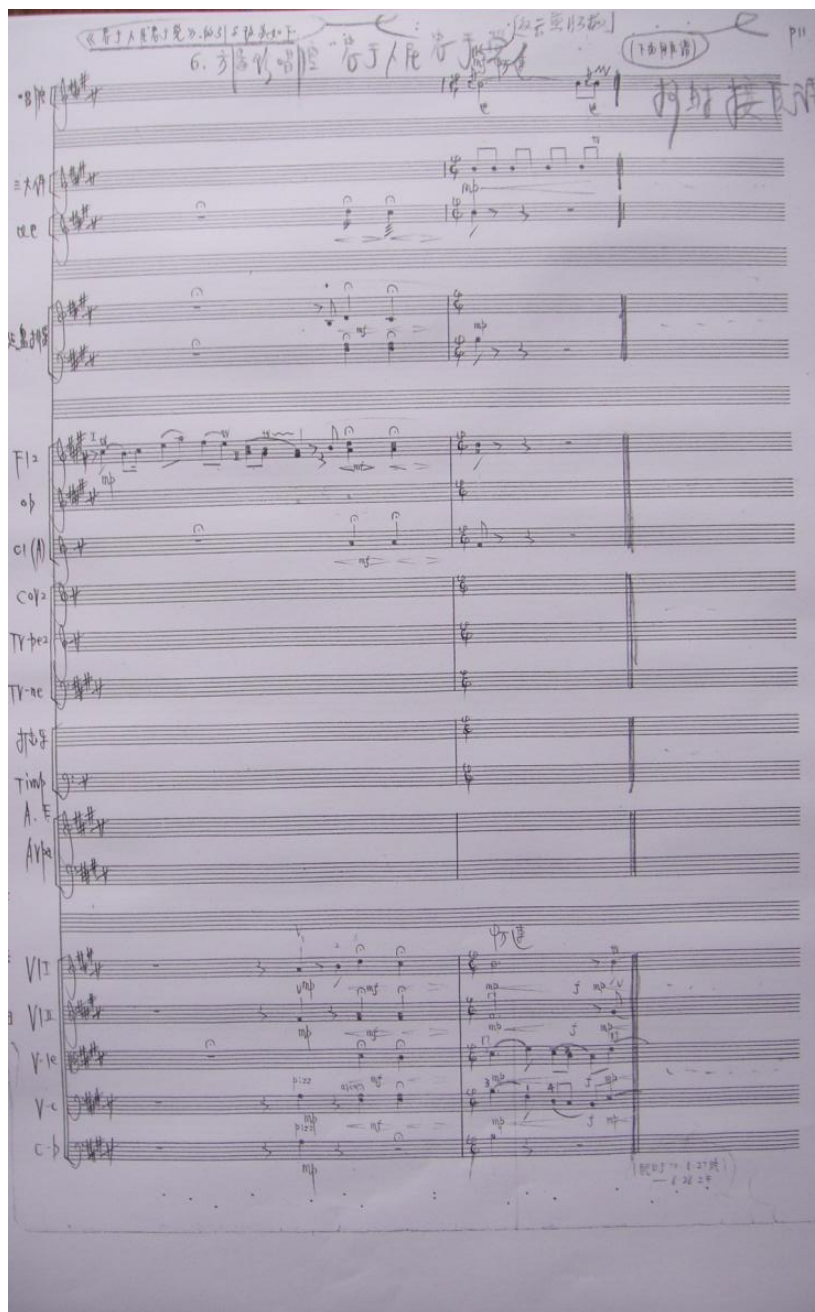


Figure 20. A page from the full score of *On the Docks* completed by Gong Guotai based on Yu's short score.<sup>467</sup>

As a music educator, Yu was keenly aware of his audience's preferences and level of sophistication. For this reason, he took a cautious approach to introducing novel

<sup>467</sup> Original manuscript of *On the Docks*, composed by Yu Huiyong; collected by Gong Guotai. Reproduced with permission of Gong Guotai.

structures and complexities into the music, hewing closer to traditional forms early on in the opera and only gradually ratcheting up the complexity as the story proceeded. Thus, by the time the story reached its climax, the composer had prepared his listeners for an aria unlike anything ever heard before on the Beijing opera stage. Both vocal and instrumental parts diverged strongly from convention as Yu wove these two threads into an integrated fabric, leaving no clear boundary between instrumental music and connectives (*guomen*) as had still been the case in earlier arias of the opera, such as “The Great Leap Forward.”

The aria begins with a slow 4/4 meter (*manban*) after a free-meter sentimental prelude that brings the listener into Fang’s deep inner world. The opening phrase moves slowly, as if it pained Fang to recall the bitterness of the old society. The eleven syllables of the opening are broken into five segments, each followed by the orchestra interjecting a melodically moving comment that momentarily takes prominence over the vocalist. Thus, as the vocal line mingles with the instrumental part, a contrapuntal relationship is created. This eleven-syllable opening line takes fifteen measures to complete, ending with a protracted melismatic passage (*tuoqiang*) that encompasses a vocal range of almost two octaves, in an instance of the voice breaking free from the lyrics.

The traditional distinction among instrumental connectives (*guomen*), action strings (*xingxian*), and scene music (*changjing yinyue*) was in part based on function, but also in part based on source. Each of these three types of instrumental music was drawn from different stocks, and this fact reinforced the perception that these were different types of music. However, Yu composed all new music for *On the Docks*, and, in so doing, he blurred the distinction between the different types of instrumental music.

This new approach to instrumental music can be seen very clearly in the opening of Act VI. First, Yu adopted the Western practice of beginning each act with an overture to set the mood, a practice unheard of in traditional Beijing opera. Furthermore, the music of this overture is far more complex structurally than even the courtly *qupai* instrumental music conventionally used for instrumental passages. The main melody of this overture includes many repetitions, while below it a variation of the socialist anthem “L'Internationale” serves as a *cantus firmus*. Yu also includes sound effects, performed by percussion, to mimic the thunder and rain of an approaching storm. The orchestra quiets down as the curtain opens, with a sudden tempo change and a swift shift from homophonic texture to a single-voice monophonic texture, serving the function of an action string to accompany the opening dialogue. Retired dockworker Ma Hongliang is pleading with the young Han Xiaoqiang to reconsider quitting his job on the docks, and the repetitions of the action string highlight the anxiety the old man feels at the youth's impetuosity, but the youth is stubborn and impatient.

The action string (in 2/4 meter) vividly depicts the emotion and mood of the two characters. The background music for Ma's lines consists of an alternating pattern of serial eighth notes and serial sixteenth notes, depicting the frustration and the anxiety the old man feels at the youth's impetuosity. The background music during Han's response repeats a slow and rhythmic pattern of dotted-quarter notes bordered by one or two short notes, colorfully describing Han's feeling of boredom and impatience. The music continues, shifting to Ma's fast pattern with four measures of dotted sixteenth notes, describing Ma's heightened anxiety; he then breaks straight into the aria. Here the composer has recognized that if the aria were to begin with the conventional prelude, the

mood would be disrupted. Likewise, as the aria ends, the dialogue continues straightaway, and the instrumental music shifts to action string accompaniment. This time, however, the background music is not monophonic but clearly contrapuntal, reusing the previous action string patterns for Han and Ma to form the two voices. The coming together of these two voices in the melody parallels the alignment of Ma's and Han's feelings as the two achieve open communication and mutual understanding. We can also view this natural shift from monophony to counterpoint as an attempt, on the composer's part, to introduce more complex musical structures to his listeners in a way that they could readily understand.

It is clear that the music here is not divided into separate parts of action string, prelude, and aria, as was the case in earlier operas. Rather, there is a seamless flow, portraying the characters' emotion and following the action of the drama through overture, dialogue, aria, and back to dialogue. Yu has broken radically with convention. In traditional Beijing opera, arias are framed by a *guomen* stock melody that serves both as prelude and postlude. Yet Yu dispenses with the *guomen* altogether, and for good reason. Beginning and ending the aria with a *guomen*, simply to follow convention, would have disrupted the flow of the action and broken the sense of urgency Ma is trying to express. Thus, we can see in this example how Yu considers the overall dramatic needs of the opera as more important than a strict adherence to convention. Because the way he has structured the music here seems so natural, his break with convention does not have the effect of diminishing the essential characteristics of Beijing opera.



## *On the Docks: Overture to Act I*

Western opera has a long tradition of beginning with an overture to set the mood, but Beijing opera has no such convention. Instead, a Beijing opera generally starts with the playing of loud percussion. Such a practice is a legacy of its folk opera roots, when operas were typically performed outdoors at events such as festivals. In those days, the beating of drums and the clanging of gongs served to announce the start of the performance and to attract an audience. By the twentieth century, the percussion opening had become convention in Beijing opera, even though it was ill fitted to theatrical venues. However, the early developers of revolutionary operas were familiar with the Western concept of an instrumental overture, and they sometimes adopted this technique, typically borrowing some pre-composed revolutionary music to be played before the start of the opera. Thus, Yu Huiyong was not the first Chinese composer to use instrumental overtures, but he was nonetheless the first to compose an original overture, which he did for *On the Docks*.<sup>468</sup>

Early yangbanxi composers treated revolutionary melodies as the new *qupai*, borrowing them wholesale for use as instrumental passages. For example, the revolutionary opera *The Red Lantern* employs the socialist anthem “L'Internationale” as the background music during the scene in which the hero, a Communist operative captured by Japanese occupation troops, and his mother are executed. Although “L'Internationale” would not have been familiar to many Chinese in the 1930s, when the opera takes place, by the 1960s in post-Liberation China, the anthem would have been

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<sup>468</sup> Zhu Weiying, *Xiqu zuoqu jifa* [Composition Technique of Theater Music] (Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe), p. 265.

quite familiar to Chinese audiences, and they would have clearly understood the symbolism behind it. For this reason, Jiang Qing insisted on its use in this scene, despite the protests of the orchestra that the effect would not be as intended if played on traditional Chinese instruments. Yu Huiyong finally solved the problem by including several Western instruments in the orchestra, thus demonstrating Jiang's and Yu's early willingness to dispense with convention if it impeded their vision for a revolutionary opera.

Yu had only been marginally involved in the creation of *The Red Lantern*, but when Jiang gave him nearly full creative control over the revision of *On the Docks*, she did however insist that he make use of “L'Internationale” once again to emphasize the international socialist theme of the opera. Yu obliged, for certainly he had no choice in the matter, but in his execution of Jiang's request, we see how Yu was thinking outside of the box in ways that his colleagues were not. Instead of using the socialist anthem as a whole for the overture of *On the Docks*, he developed an “international socialist” theme that he wove into his original composition. Yu also created another important theme for this overture. Drawing material from the revolutionary song “We Workers Have Strength” (*Zanmen gongren you liliang*), he wove this “workers” theme into his overture as well. Thus, Yu begins his opera about Shanghai dockworkers loading a ship with food aid for Africa with an overture that quotes from both the international socialist anthem and a hymn praising the working class. Here is a clear example of how Yu was able to use what he had learned about Western composition practices to revitalize a traditional Chinese art form.

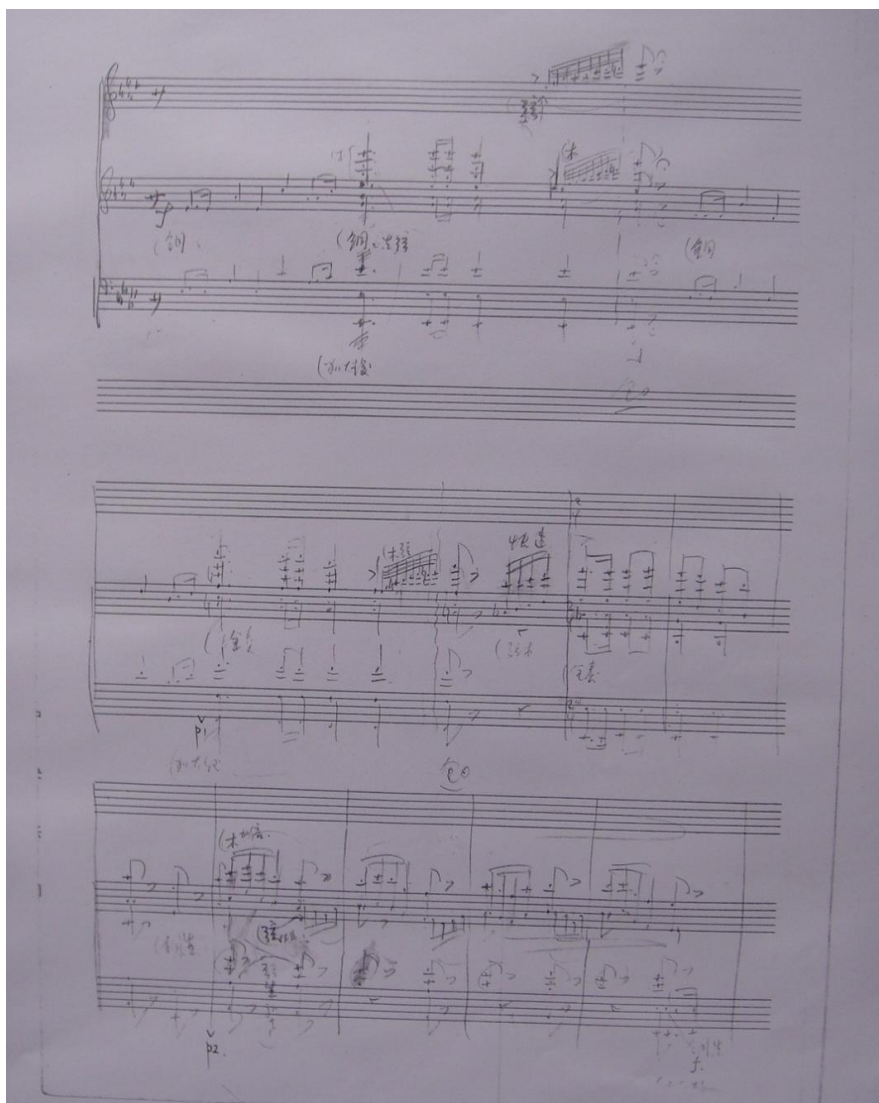


Figure 21. A page from Yu Huiyong's manuscript for the mixed-orchestra version of the "L'Internationale" theme used in the overture to Act I of *On the Docks*.<sup>469</sup>

The overture to Act I opens with an introduction, using the first seven notes of "L'Internationale" as a motif in free meter to present the "international socialist" theme in Db major. After the fermata, the theme is transposed, this time recurring in Eb. After the introduction, the main body of the overture starts with a rapid succession of a rhythmic

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<sup>469</sup> Original manuscript of *On the Docks*, composed by Yu Huiyong; collected by Gong Guotai. Reproduced with permission of Gong Guotai.

motif in a fast 2/4 time. This is the “workers” theme, a simple rhythmic pattern of four sixteenth notes followed by a quarter note, based on the revolutionary hymn “We Workers Have Strength.” Thus, it is the rhythmic pattern from the original song and not the melody per se that Yu Huiyong uses to create his “workers” theme. Next, the whole orchestra plays the first phrase of “L’Internationale” while the “workers” theme serves as ostinato on the bass. Eventually, the “workers” theme takes prominence and becomes the main voice, signified by a key change from Db to Ab major. On stage, the curtain has opened to a busy dock scene, where we see six workers tugging a rope to secure a ship to the dock. All activity on the dock is choreographed to the final portion of the overture, which eventually ends on a major triad of the Ab tonic chord. The orchestra then shifts to a typical Beijing opera prelude, led by the *sandajian*, introducing the first aria.<sup>470</sup>

The differences between traditional Beijing opera and the new yangbanxi are best illustrated by watching two representative clips. The first clip is from a traditional Beijing opera, *The Heavens Conjoin* (*Shangtian he*, date unknown), a classic tale about a princess who tries to manipulate her father, the emperor, into punishing an official who did not obey her orders. The second is the opening scene of the film version of *On the Docks*. In *The Heavens Conjoin*, the stage rhythm and the tempo of the aria are quite deliberate. Its musical language and timbre are limited due to the rigid melodic system and limited orchestra of Beijing opera. In contrast, *On the Docks* projects the idealism embodied in China’s socialist through a performance infused with an energetic tempo, animated

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<sup>470</sup> The original overture to *On the Docks*, without “L’Internationale” included and using only a Chinese orchestra can be heard in an audio clip available at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMDnu1rPg\\_8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMDnu1rPg_8). The overture extends from 0:00 to 2:18. This audio clip is from a concert rendition of the overture. Compare this with the overture in final film version available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJGDtjVfGN8&feature=related>. A page from Yu’s manuscript for the revised version of the overture can be seen in Figure 5.4.

choreography, forceful rhythms, and diversified musical accompaniment by a large orchestra.

### ***On the Docks: “Plenum Report”***

As was the case with the earlier yangbanxi such as *The Red Lantern* and *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, the opera *On the Docks* was also in a constant state of revision, at least until the movie version was produced in 1972. After the initial tumult of the Cultural Revolution had died down and Yu Huiyong was released from the “cowshed,” he was able to get back to work on re-orchestrating the opera for a mixture of Chinese and Western instruments. Changes in the structure of the opera were made as well, including the cutting of a minor character. However, this cut left a hole in the story that had to be filled. Yu’s solution was to create a new aria, “After Reading the Plenum Report” (*Xiduliao quanhui bao*), for the main character, party secretary Fang Haizhen.

In “Plenum Report,” we see that Yu had gained confidence, in just a few years, in pushing his program of reforming Beijing opera by adopting Western musical techniques. The music of his first version of *On the Docks* shows tentative steps in this direction, but Yu much more fully implemented his theory in the composition of “Plenum Report.” No doubt his confidence was bolstered by positive feedback from Jiang Qing as well as the enthusiastic response of co-workers and audiences to his innovative approach. “Plenum Report” is the opening aria of Act IV of *On the Docks*, and the seamless way in which Yu integrates overture and opening aria demonstrate how he had completely abandoned the “plug-and-play” approach of traditional Beijing opera construction. As a result, “Plenum Report” stands out as the most maturely developed of all the arias in this opera.

The most compelling feature of this entire section—from the beginning of the overture to the end of the aria—is that it is based exclusively on a simple motif (Figure 22). This motif serves as a basic building block, while at the same time creating both unity and variety by utilizing different compositional techniques. The three-measure motif is based on a standard *erhuang yuanban* prelude (Figure 22). Specifically, the three notes in the first measure of the motif are the same as in the first measure of the prelude, and the second measure of the motif contains G, B, B, E, which are the primary tones from the second measure of the prelude. Furthermore, both passages use notes from a narrow-range pentatonic scale ((D)EGABD), and the two passages share the same rhythmic features such as syncopation (Figure 22, m. 1, mm. 3-4). However, the two passages are created in fundamentally different ways and for different purposes. This aria is marked as *xipi* aria-type; however, its motif is derived from an *erhuang* prelude, which indicates Yu's intention to use this open-ended motif to cross the gap between *xipi* and *erhuang*, while maintaining the characteristics of both. Indeed, this case exemplifies Yu's mature style in its elegant melodiousness and subtle exploitation of a simple motif by applying various techniques.



Figure 22. The *erhuang* prelude on which the “Plenum Report” motif is based.<sup>471</sup>

The form of the overture is comparable to a miniature concerto of Mozart, a form that Yu was no doubt very familiar with.<sup>472</sup> The overture displays both the thematic

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<sup>471</sup> Liu Guojie. *Xipi erhuang yinyue gailun* [Survey of Xipi Erhuang Music] (Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue chubanshe, 1997), p.172. Renotated from the original cipher notation.

variety of sonata form and the colorful timbre of the orchestra. Like a symphonic exposition, it presents three themes, each in a different key and featuring contrasts of orchestral color, including extensive passages for solo wind instruments. The first theme, extending 25 measures, is in a fast tempo of Eb major, alternating even and dotted rhythms, with frequent dynamic changes and accent notes as well as sound effects, ending on a long triple forte supported by an accented fast eighth-note ostinato, vividly describing the thunderstorm that is sweeping the docks. The second theme starts fortissimo on C major, depicting the quieting down of the storm. A transition in free meter scored for the harp leads to elegant passages first by solo clarinet and then by solo flute, indicating that the storm is over and the sun is shining. The third theme enters on the same key, with all strings playing a graceful melody built on the above motif in a slow tempo of 4/4 meter, while the flute continues into this passage. It is this third theme of the overture that also serves as the theme for the following aria.

The structure of this overture reflects the shifting emotional state of heroine Fang Haizhen. Having discovered evidence of sabotage on board the ship they are loading, Fang is distressed about how to find the tainted sack of grain before the ship has to leave port, and she seeks inspiration from the words of Chairman Mao. In particular, she has chosen to read Mao's speech from the 1962 plenary session of the Central Committee, in which the Chairman calls for continuous class struggle. The ensuing aria is a soliloquy by Fang, expressing her renewed confidence after reading the report.

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<sup>472</sup> Yu was especially fond of the violin and piano concertos and sonatas of Mozart and Beethoven, and he learned to play the piano as a student at Shanghai Conservatory. Interview with Yu's daughter Yu Jiayi in Beijing in February 2011.

The curtain opens to show Fang sitting and reading from the report. The theme modulates to G major, continued by the strings but with the solo flute on top, forming two symmetrical phrases with the previous theme. The solo instrument continues the theme but keeps shifting to different instruments, first to the oboe, then to the French horn, and concluding with the Chinese reed instrument *sheng*. All the while, these solo passages form a contrapuntal relationship with the orchestra, much like what might happen in a wind concerto. As Fang puts down the book, the same theme recurs on the whole orchestra in a fast 2/4 meter, which is then transposed a fourth lower, again forming two symmetrical phrases, finally leading into Fang's aria; the overture ends on A, overlapping the same note that the aria starts with.

The orchestra yields prominence to the aria, which is designated on the score as being of the *xipi* aria-type and marked with a new type of "beat," which Yu Huiyong called *kuanban* (literally, "broad beat"), in 2/4 meter. Using the thematic material as a motif, the orchestra mutates this theme as it interacts with the solo voice, providing connectives between each segment of the aria and forming a contrapuntal relationship with the vocal line at the same time. In fact, the aria is a mixture of *xipi* and *erhuang* aria-types, as well as traditional male and female styles, reflecting Fang Haizhen's status as a new socialist woman on an equal footing with men. Most phrases do not begin on the obligatory weak beat for the *xipi* aria-type, but the aria does end on a downbeat of the tonic note *sol*, characteristic of the *xipi* aria-type for the female voice. For the last two phrases, Yu shifts to yet another new *ban*, which he calls *erliu* (literally, "two-six"). Here, the tempo quickens and the meter changes to 1/4. These last two phrases also show more *xipi* characteristics, opening phrases on a weak beat and filling the gaps between



segments with typical *xipi* connectives. As the aria dashes to a hasty end, the orchestra ends the whole section with the trademark of the thematic motif, acting as a postlude to the aria.

This work exhibits Yu's maturity of composition and counterpoint skills. Taking the overture and aria as a whole, this piece shows great variety in the material used and the prominence given to so many different instruments. Yet overall it conveys a strong sense of unity, restraint, and balance, thanks to a single motif, in its various mutations, that ties the work together.

Although Yu made significant departures from convention in his composition of *On the Docks*, there is also evidence that Yu had yearned for even more radical use of Western techniques. In 1969, when the decision was made to add the aria "Plenum Report" to the opera, Yu composed two different versions, one employing a mixed orchestra, and another using only Western instruments. The first performance of the opera with the new aria added was for the Ninth National Party Convention in April 1969, and Yu had the orchestra rehearse both versions. Yu was now more politically astute than he had been in his impetuous youth, and he carefully gauged the political temperature at the convention. It was only at the last minute that Yu decided the Western-only version would be problematic; the orchestra instead played the mixed version that is still associated with the opera today.

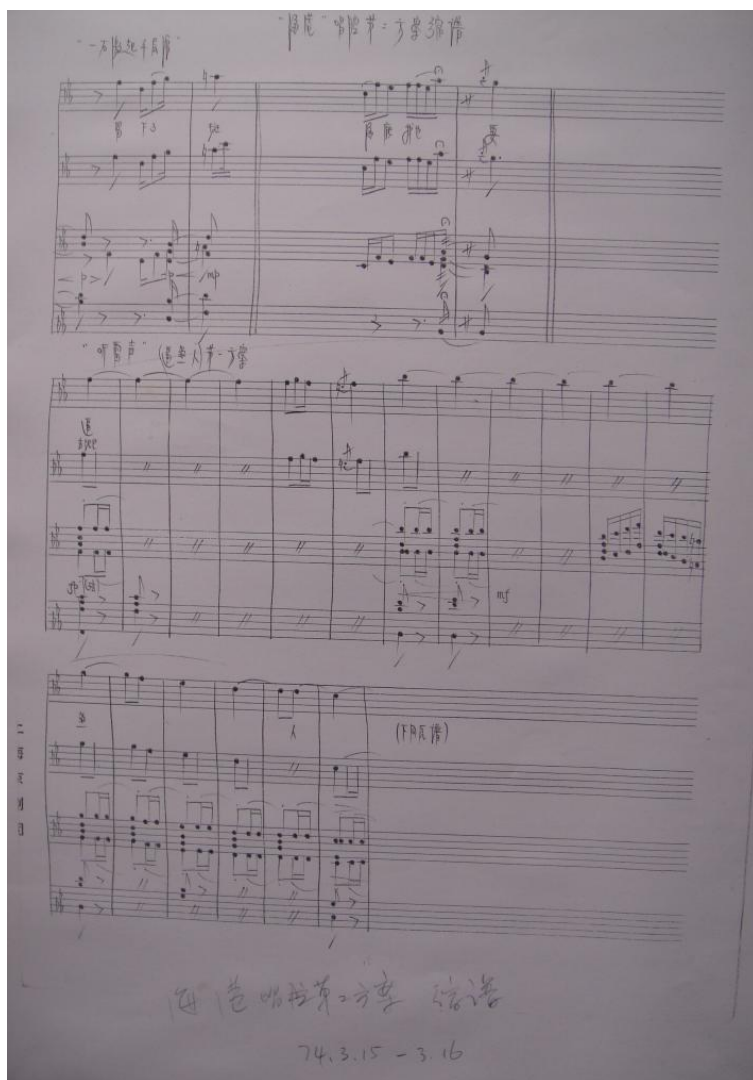


Figure 23. A page from a revised manuscript of *On the Docks*, in Gong Guotai's hand, dated March 15 and 16, 1974.<sup>473</sup>

Unlike his work on *The Red Lantern* and *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, in which he collaborated with a number of composers, Yu Huiyong had full creative control over *On the Docks*, and thus he seemed to view it as *his* opera. Evidence for his sense of ownership can be seen in extant manuscripts showing various revisions to the opera that

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<sup>473</sup> Original manuscript of *On the Docks*, composed by Yu Huiyong; collected by Gong Guotai. Reproduced with permission of Gong Guotai.

went beyond those called for by Jiang Qing. In fact, even after the movie version was released in 1972, he continued to tweak his opera, with one manuscript dated as late as 1974. See Figure 23.

### ***Tiger Mountain: Overture to Act V***

Without a doubt, the best-known work among all yangbanxi instrumental music is the overture to Act V of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, composed by Yu Huiyong.<sup>474</sup> However, without Jiang Qing's unwavering support in 1964, this would never have been composed.<sup>475</sup> During the 1964 Modern Beijing Opera Trial Performance Convention, *Tiger Mountain* was not listed among the ranks of good model works, with Beijing mayor Peng Zhen criticizing it as being "as bland as boiled water."<sup>476</sup> Although Jiang Qing needed to publicly defend the opera, privately she confided to her close circle of Shanghai friends that the *Tiger Mountain* music was "terrible."<sup>477</sup> However, Jiang believed that it had the potential to become a good opera.<sup>478</sup>

Yu worked on *Tiger Mountain* concurrently with *On the Docks*. Both works were being produced by the same company in Shanghai. Satisfied with his overhaul of *On the Docks*, Jiang Qing asked Yu to make some revisions to *Tiger Mountain* as well; while Yu made some important contributions to *Tiger Mountain*, he never took full ownership of

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<sup>474</sup> Since it was the first Beijing opera overture ever broadcast on nationwide radio, it had a strong impact on people's memory. The overture was also widely adapted for various instrumental solos.

<sup>475</sup> Shi Yonggang and Zhang Fan, *Yangbanxi shiji* [History of Yangbanxi], (Beijing: Zuoqia chubanshe, 2009), p. 115.

<sup>476</sup> Dai Jiafang, *Yangbanxi de Fengfeng Yuyu* [The Trials and hardships of the Yangbanxi: Jiang Qing, the Model Performance, and the Inside Story] (Beijing: Zhishi chubanshe, 1995), p. 16.

<sup>477</sup> Dai, p. 26.

<sup>478</sup> Dai, p. 62.

the project the way he had with *On the Docks*. Yu composed several new arias for the opera, including “Send Me to the Battlefield” (*Jianjue yaoqiu shang zhanchang*) for the young female character Chang Bao. He also created an aria for a minor character at the behest of Premier Zhou Enlai, who had attended a rehearsal, but Jiang was not pleased with it, and the premier yielded to the artistic judgment of the chairman’s wife.<sup>479</sup> Later, Jiang Qing asked Yu to add more instrumental music and arias to enrich the images of the main characters.<sup>480</sup> It was at this time that Yu composed two of the most memorable pieces of yangbanxi instrumental music, one to portray the hero Yang Zirong’s horseback ride through the snowy forest and the other to accompany the rebel troops crossing of a frozen mountain pass on skis.<sup>481</sup>

Just as was the case with “Plenum Report” in *On the Docks*, the overture to Act V of *Tiger Mountain* also integrates instrumental music with aria to form a seamless entity. The overture opens with fast-tempo percussion before the full orchestra joins to play the introduction, which establishes the mood of the piece (both overture and aria). The melody for the introduction, with its relentless rhythmic pattern of rapid notes in a sequence of upward and downward motion, as well as its asymmetric and irregular phrases and frequent dramatic changes, sets an atmosphere of impending drama and provides a musical portrait of the natural scenery of arduous mountains, towering trees,

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<sup>479</sup> Dai, 2008, p. 174.

<sup>480</sup> Interview with Ren Kein Beijing in June 2007. Li Jun confirmed that it was written by Yu and corrected on the spot during the rehearsal when the orchestra and performers were both present. Li Jun, performing artist at the Shanghai Beijing Opera Company and the current performer for main character Yang Zirong in the *Tiger Mountain*, confirmed that he heard many stories from his colleague that Yu often created music right on the spot. Interview with Li Jun in Shanghai in August 2010.

<sup>481</sup> Interview with Jing Yuehua in Shanghai in March 2011 and Lian Bo in Shanghai in February 2011.

and the sound of a horse's gallop in the distance. The theme, played by a solo French horn in its soft middle range, is laid out in two long phrases of 32 measures each in an A A' pattern, foreshadowing the primary melody and structure of the following aria, which was probably the most complicated aria for the whole opera.

The distinctive long-held notes by the French horn and constant rhythmic pattern in the string section (accompanied by the sound effect of the wind) invoke a dramatic contrast between two levels of meanings. The first is a picturesque depiction of nature (the outside world), a peaceful night in the mountains covered by snow and forest, with the clear sound of horse hooves coming from afar. The second is a depiction of the hero's spiritual inner world; he is fearless, loyal to the Party, and willing to sacrifice for the cause of liberating the people (which is the main theme of his aria). The music captures the dramatic tension and the moral strength that confidently propels the hero forward under the banner of his just cause. Together, these two images create a lively picture of natural space, scenery, and moving creatures, vividly describing the heroic character Yang Zirong on horseback dashing through the snow-covered forest in the mountains.

The melody after the theme, played by the string instruments, including the Chinese *pipa* lute and the *sandajian*, eloquently articulates the urgency and difficulty of Yang's mission, upping the consequences at stake, with a repetitive rhythmic pattern, upward motion, and a wide range of dynamic change. An air of confident ease is conveyed when Yang Zirong appears on stage, and the orchestra transitions into the aria, "The Coming Spring Will Change Mankind" (*yinglai chunse huan renjian*). The opening phrase, marked as *erhuang daoban* (literally, "leading beat"), is a standard introductory

phrase but with many innovations.<sup>482</sup> First, the phrase uses a typical Beijing opera accompaniment technique known as *jinglamanchang* (literally, “quick playing, slow singing”), but it continues with the previous tempo in 2/4 meter instead of shifting to the conventional free-meter *yaoban* that is normally used with this technique. The purpose here seems to be to maintain a rigorous rhythmic pattern that mimics the horse’s gallop. Second, although the ten-syllable phrase follows the traditional pattern of three caesurae breaking the line into segments of three, three, two, and two syllables respectively, there is no sense of a traditional interlude filling each caesura. Instead, the voice and the instruments are integrated as one entity. Especially since the opening segment uses exactly the same melody that was previously played by the French horn, the listener is given the illusion that the main theme has shifted to the voice. Furthermore, while maintaining the traditional way of dividing the phrase in short segments with the caesurae, the music no longer follows the rigorous format specifying the length of each segment; instead, the music aims to project the meaning of the words by giving prominence (longer duration) to key words in the line, such as *chuan* (pass through), *kua* (across), and *chong* (soar).

The structure of “The Coming Spring” shows how Yu Huilong maintained traditional forms while pushing convention beyond its limits. A traditional way of beginning an aria is to set the first line of the first couplet to *daoban*, a free meter; after an instrumental interlude, the second couplet switches to *huilong*, a 2/4 meter. Yu Huilong begins the aria in the traditional fashion, but after the introductory *daoban*, the increasing tempo and dynamics in the orchestra bring the character to the center stage.

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<sup>482</sup> *Daoban* is a single introductory phrase that opens the aria, taking half (the first line) of the first couplet. It is usually followed by *huilong*, using the second half of the same couplet.

However, instead of moving on to the next phrase of the aria, the orchestra shifts to a new tempo and a new melody leads to a complex horse dance.<sup>483</sup> Here, Yu tried to emphasize the sound of Chinese percussion by combining traditional percussion patterns with a melodic line to form a contrapuntal relationship. The kinetic charm of the dance fits perfectly with the orchestra's sudden released tempo, new rhythmic pattern, and melodic material. Moreover, the special sound effects further emphasize the character's bravery and ease. In other words, Yu replaced the traditional interlude with the horse dance. The aria then resumes, following the conventional cadential endings of an *erhuang yuanban* aria. However, the third couplet, which contains the phrase lending itself to the title of the aria, suddenly breaks into free-meter *sanban*. Traditionally, *sanban* is used as a device to signal the end of the aria. Here, Yu used a deceptive harmony, ending the phrase on *sol* instead of *do*, creating a sense of suspense. Indeed, Yu has tricked the listeners, for he does not end the aria at this point. Instead, the music switches smoothly from *erhuang* to a *xipi* aria-type for the last four couplets of the aria, using a short interlude with increased tempo and a simple technique of elision to modulate the key. Although this daring innovation violates the conventional rule of not mixing *xipi* and *erhuang* within a given aria, the unexpected transition created a notable contrast within an aria and greatly enhanced the power of the music as it reflected the inspiration and changes occurring in the character emotion.<sup>484</sup>

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<sup>483</sup> A video clip of the opening of Act V of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, including the overture, Yang Zirong's horse dance, and his aria, "The Coming Spring Will Change Mankind," is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBjMq9KE2uQ&feature=related>.

<sup>484</sup> Li Jun, a *jinghu* player who has played the role of Yang Zirong in recent years, told me that it was extremely difficult for the Chinese string players to comprehend and perform this transition. *Erhuang* cannot be switched to *xipi* within one aria because they belong to two different modes and the set of strings were tuned differently. However, Yu, who could play the *erhu*, worked with

The most striking aspect of this scene is the tight integration of instrumental and vocal music with dance and stage art, compared with the early yangbanxi, such as *Among the Reeds* in which the aria and movement were accompanied by different sets of instruments (i.e. the movements were accompanied by percussion only) and the movements were more conventionalized than they are in modern dance.<sup>485</sup> Clearly Yu Huiyong gave careful consideration to all of these in his creation of a thrilling stage experience that draws the audience into hero Yang Zirong's inner world. First, there is no segregation into "civil" and "martial" scenes, as in traditional Beijing opera. Instead, Yu combines the string instruments of a "civil" scene with the percussion of a "martial scene," breaking with convention. Furthermore, Yu makes extensive use of instrumental music, which takes up nearly a third of this whole section. Contemporary audiences would have immediately understood that Yu was breaking with a tradition that left little room for instrumental passages, instead giving the orchestra a commanding role, weaving instrumental and vocal elements into a tight synthesis which continuously follows the action, singing, and dancing.

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string master Wang Zhenghua to find a work-around, and then he personally explained it to the players. Li stated, "It definitely pushed the players to improve their techniques, and they learned a good lesson of modulation on their instruments, which became useful and widely applied in later operas such as *Azalea Mountain*." Interview with Li Jun in Shanghai in August 2010. Chen Lei, current composer at the Shanghai Beijing Opera Company called this *erhuang to xipi* a "long-distance modulation." Interview with Chen Lei in Shanghai in August 2010.

<sup>485</sup> This scene from Act IX of *Among the Reeds* is available at [http://v.youku.com/v\\_playlist/f17434578o1p8.html](http://v.youku.com/v_playlist/f17434578o1p8.html). Notice that movements are accompanied by percussion only and are more conventionalized than modern dance movements, such as those used in Yang Zirong's horse dance in *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*.



## **Tiger Mountain: Ski Scene**

Act IX of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* begins with a platoon of rebel soldiers crossing a snowy mountain pass with skis and ropes. Just as he had done for Yang Zirong's horse dance, Yu Huiyong composed music for this ski scene that combined the percussion patterns of traditional Beijing opera action scenes with rich instrumental music to convey a sense of urgency and exhilaration. Yu follows his principle of giving prominence to percussion in action scenes to maintain the essential characteristics of Beijing opera, and indeed some sections of this piece contain percussion only. Yet it is the instrumental music that plays a crucial role in setting the dramatic atmosphere and building tension as it vividly portrays the soldiers' struggle to overcome the challenges of weather and terrain to infiltrate the enemy camp. The music uses fast tempo and several short, simple rhythmic motifs with varied repetitions, matching perfectly the movements of the dancers on stage, who are going through the motions of skiing and mountain climbing.<sup>486</sup>

Yu makes use of recurring themes to give unity to this piece, and he brings in other themes to unite this scene with the rest of the opera as well as to convey the revolutionary message of the opera through the language of music. As the soldiers glide down the mountain, having successfully crossed the pass, the familiar French horn theme from the overture to Act V recurs, and Yang Zirong's confidence and soaring emotions are evoked in listeners once more. And as the soldiers arrive at their destination, we hear

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<sup>486</sup> This scene from Act IX of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* is available at <http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/YH4G6qSo7mU/>. Notice that movements are accompanied by a mixed orchestra.

just a few measures of a familiar tune, “The March of the People’s Liberation Army,” reminding the audience that it was heroic acts such as these that liberated the country.

Although Yu was not the sole composer for *Tiger Mountain*, his contribution is undeniable. *Tiger Mountain* was already a well-known opera in a relatively mature state of development by the time Yu joined the production team. Nevertheless, his use of a mixed orchestra and his addition of large portions of instrumental music set *Tiger Mountain* apart from the other early yangbanxi that Yu was not involved in the production of. His score indicates choreographic directions, and he worked closely with the performers to match the movements on stage to the music. Furthermore, he made frequent revisions to the score as he sought a perfect fit between music and motion, and he was well known for revising and composing new music on the spot during rehearsals.<sup>487</sup> Thus, we glimpse, in his work with *Tiger Mountain*, an inkling of the Wagnerian approach Yu would take in his later operas, such as *Ode to Dragon River* and *Azalea Mountain*. Having proven to the powers-that-be that he was fully up to the task of creating truly revolutionary model opera, Yu was given great freedom of creation and production in his later works. We can also say that *On the Docks* and *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* proved a turning point for Yu Huiyong, allowing him to build the experience and confidence he needed to put his theory of Beijing opera reform into practice.

This new version of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* provided valuable experiences for the performers, musicians, as well as audiences. Using his experience with this opera as a launching point, Yu’s future creation such as *Ode to Dragon River*

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<sup>487</sup> Interview with Beijing opera performer Li Jun in Shanghai in August 2010.

and *Azalea Mountain* have made greater progress in music. As a measure of its success, this opera was made into a symphony, and this particular overture was widely adapted as a solo for violin, accordion, and many other instruments, further proof that Yu's impact resonated far beyond his immediate contributions to any one opera, encompassing all of the performing arts and music at the height of his productivity

### Conclusion

As a living art form, Beijing opera repeatedly adapted itself to changing social circumstances and the demands of its audiences. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the need to modernize Beijing opera was recognized by many scholars.<sup>488</sup> In the seventeen years after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, there were many endeavors to create modern opera and some tentative steps toward an East-West synthesis were made, but they were piecemeal and without lasting influence. In the end, what set yangbanxi apart from other attempts at Beijing opera reform was the right combination of creative vision, inspiring leadership, and political support.<sup>489</sup>

In Yu Huiyong's modernization of Beijing opera, we see the happy confluence of just the right skill set and opportune timing. Steeped in traditional Chinese opera from childhood and classically trained at the Shanghai Conservatory, Yu already had a clearly articulated plan for Beijing opera reformation from the start.<sup>490</sup> With his deep understanding of traditional Beijing opera as well as the strengths of Western musical

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<sup>488</sup> Fu Jin, *Jingjuxue qianyan* [Introduction to Beijing Opera Studies] (Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2011), p. 142-143.

<sup>489</sup> Fu Jin, p 240-241. Interview with Gong Guotai in Beijing in February 2011.

<sup>490</sup> Interview with Gong Guotai in Beijing in February 2011.

techniques, he could envision a hybrid art form that incorporated Western musical forms while maintaining the Chinese essence of Beijing opera. Yet his books and essays on the topic would have remained nothing more than academic musings were it not for the patronage of Jiang Qing and the support of the Communist Party.

Yu was acutely aware that the major weakness of traditional Beijing opera was its instrumental music, drawn from a stock of pre-composed melodies (*qupai*) and conventional percussion patterns (*luogujing*). Lacking originality and individuality, this music could add little interpretive depth or theatric complexity to the opera's characters and events. The essence of the technique by which Yu implemented his composition is symphonic. The short motifs, the frequent modulation, the flexible and often contrapuntal texture, all clearly derive from the culmination of his own continuous studies of Western compositional techniques and more specifically, harmony, orchestration, counterpoint, and form.

Although Yu's plan for the reformation of Beijing opera was bold, once given the opportunity to put his theory into practice, he proceeded with caution. Indeed, he could not do otherwise, given the political volatility of the Cultural Revolution. At the same time, the Cultural Revolution was a highly productive period for Yu and his colleagues because of the political protection they received from Jiang Qing.<sup>491</sup> In the instrumental

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<sup>491</sup> By the time of 1967-69, Yu was well off, politically and artistically. As the head of the Shanghai Cultural Bureau and Shanghai Conservatory, Yu was given full artistic control over the revision and creation of operas based on his vision of revolutionary art, and he had the political power that he needed to have any artist to work for his project. As Dai rightly pointed out, Yu had never been so trusted in his career before becoming involved in the creation of yangbanxi. In this project, his talent was recognized and he was respected "from top to bottom," by Jiang Qing and all the performers and musicians. He was no longer criticized as the "typical pursuer of fame and profit," and he no longer need to write self-criticisms or confess his "crimes." Dai Jiafang, *Zouxiang Huimie* [Heading toward the Destruction: The Rise and fall of Yu Huiyong: Master of

music he composed for Yang Zirong's midnight ride through the snowy forest and the rebel troops' approach to the enemy camp on skis, we can already get a glimpse of the hands-on approach he would take in his later works.

We can view *On the Docks* and *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* as the testing ground for his theory. But seeing his new ideas welcomed by both the common people and the political elite, Yu was emboldened to press forward with his plan to reform Beijing opera. In his later works, such as *Ode to Dragon River* and *Azalea Mountain*, we see a mature and confident opera composer taking on a Wagnerian role, concerning himself with every aspect of opera production, from writing the score and libretto to arranging stage art and choreography. In Chapter Eight, we will look in more detail at Yu Huiyong's hands-on approach to the creation of his masterpiece, *Azalea Mountain*.

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the Maoist Model Theater] (Hong Kong: Time International Publication, 2008), p. 166-172. During an interview with Gong Guotai, I asked him what his most productive period was. He responded, "When I was working with Yu on yangbanxi." Interview with Gong in Beijing in February 2011.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: CASE STUDY OF AZALEA MOUNTAIN

Among all yangbanxi, the one most highly acclaimed by musicians and most highly received by audiences then and now is no doubt the opera *Azalea Mountain* (*Dujuan Shan*), Yu Huiyong's last major project. It is generally regarded among China's musicians and performing artists as Yu's greatest work, which reached its "fullest potential" in its endeavor to integrate the best of both folk art and Western techniques; even today, many scholars praise *Azalea Mountain* as a "thorough" model work and a brilliant conclusion to the enterprise of yangbanxi.<sup>492</sup>

*Azalea Mountain* was originally a spoken drama (*huaaju*) produced by the Shanghai Youth Art Theater Company. Jiang Qing first saw the play in Shanghai in 1963. Seeing its potential as a model revolutionary opera, Jiang brought the story to the attention of the Beijing City Opera Company, as she had done with other earlier works, and production began shortly thereafter. However, Beijing mayor Peng Zhen used his political connections to bar Jiang from any involvement in the production. Although the opera was completed in time for the 1964 Modern Beijing Opera Trial Performance Convention, it was not well received. Indeed, a regional Beijing opera company from remote northwest Ningxia also produced its own version of the story, receiving greater

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<sup>492</sup> Pan Peicheng, "Xiqu dianying Dujuan shan deshi tan" [Success and failure in the opera film *Azalea Mountain*], *Zhongguo xiqu xueyuan xuebao* 29, no. 3 (2008): 70–73.

accolades from those in attendance.<sup>493</sup> By 1966, the Cultural Revolution was in full sway, and Jiang Qing had the upper hand over Peng Zhen. In 1968, she asked the Beijing City Opera Company to revive the opera, but she was dissatisfied with the result (even Chairman Mao criticized the opera as incomplete), and so she asked Yu Huiyong in August 1970 to take in charge of the production and do a complete revision.

In April 1970, Yu was relocated to Beijing and promoted to the position of deputy director of the Cultural Affairs Office under the State Council (a proxy for the Ministry of Culture, which Mao had disbanded in 1965). Yu was kept quite busy revising music for the film version of each of the early yangbanxi, including experiments with mixed orchestra, and so he could not get to work on *Azalea Mountain* until 1972, after all the early yangbanxi had been filmed.<sup>494</sup> However, preliminary preparation, such as choosing the performers and directors, had started earlier and was completed in 1971.<sup>495</sup> Yu made a total renovation of this opera, completely changing everything, from reworking the story line to renaming the characters. There was even a suggestion to change the name of the opera at one point.

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<sup>493</sup> Although the Beijing City Opera Company version was performed by some of the most famous performers in the nation, such as Qiu Shengrong, Zhao Yanxia and Ma Lianliang, the Ningxia version was more successful and received more positive feedback from both the audience and professionals. The minister of culture even proposed a film version of the Ningxia production. It was during this performance that the lead actress Li Lifang caught Jiang's attention. By Jiang Qing's request, Li was transferred in 1965 to the Shanghai Beijing Opera Company to play the lead role of Fang Haizhen in *On the Docks*, which was undergoing a major reconstruction under Jiang Qing's patronage, with all new music being composed by Yu Huiyong. Peng Zhen's production of *Azalea Mountain* languished after this.

<sup>494</sup> Strictly speaking, there was no Ministry of Culture at this time. At the onset of the Cultural Revolution, Mao had disbanded the ministry to ferret out his enemies there. Later, the Cultural Affairs Office was set up in place of the ministry, with Wu De as the director and Yu Huiyong as vice director. Yet Wu soon learned that "Jiang Qing will agree with anything Yu says." (Dai 2008, p. 290-293). As is often the case in Chinese politics, those in official positions are often controlled by power brokers behind the scenes; thus, Jiang controlled Yu, and Yu controlled Wu. Also see Gu Baozhi, *Yangbanxi chutai neimu* [*Yangbanxi: Behind the Curtain*], p154.

<sup>495</sup> Interview with Yang Chunxia in Beijing in July 2006.

Yu took a Wagnerian approach to the project and involved himself in all aspects of the production, including rewriting the libretto, redesigning the stage art, and replacing most of the performers. He brought in his own production crew from Shanghai, including musicians, writers, directors, and instructors to help the performers hone their skills. Taking sole control of the music, he scrapped the original score and recomposed the entire opera from scratch. *Azalea Mountain* premiered on stage in 1973, and the film version was produced in 1974.<sup>496</sup>

The most notable change in the opera was a shift in focus from the male leader of the peasant rebellion to the female Communist party representative, who has been sent to transform the rebels into revolutionary soldiers so that they can join the main force of the CCP army. Thus, the revised version of *Azalea Mountain* told the story of brave revolutionary Ke Xiang, who not only represented the new socialist woman but also stood as a symbol for the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. The message of the opera was clear: only the CCP can lead China through the upheaval of revolution.

### Synopsis

*Azalea Mountain* is set in remote Hunan province in 1928, just a year after the famous Autumn Harvest Uprising led by Mao. According to Party history, the CCP was totally under the Soviet Union's influence since its creation, and it followed the Soviet

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<sup>496</sup> According to Yang Chunxia and Gong Guotai, the Yu Huiyong version of *Azalea Mountain*, among all the yangbanxi, was the opera that took the shortest time to complete and underwent the fewest revisions. Interview with Yang Chunxia in Beijing in July 2006. Interview with Gong Guotai in Beijing in July 2008.



Union's instructions to treat labor unions as the first priority and to collaborate with the Nationalist Party, which soon became unrealistic. However, Mao viewed the peasants as his largest base and believed that the people's revolution could not triumph without them. Mao's strategy was to shift the Revolution away from urban centers, infiltrate the vast rural areas of China, mobilize the impoverished villagers, generate organized troops from rural uprisings, and eventually surround the urban areas. But Mao was still a junior party member at that time and the CCP leadership did not listen to him, instead following the unpractical policies that came from Moscow, which called on a communist takeover of the urban areas first before entering the countryside. Because of that, the early CCP suffered a huge setback as most of the city underground party members were arrested during the Nationalists' "white terror" of 1927, and the CCP was on the brink of extinction at one point. Therefore, the story of *Azalea Mountain* was set against the background of a real insurrection that took place in Hunan and Jiangxi provinces on September 1927, led by Mao, who established a CCP base called the Hunan Soviet.

Act I opens with Lei Gang, the leader of a peasant rebellion, on the run. He is aided by Du Mama, mother of one of the insurrectionists who was just killed in the uprising. The rebels had been fighting against the warlord Du Shedan, but they were overwhelmed by the warlord's forces.<sup>497</sup> Lei Gang rallies the survivors, who decide to band together as the Peasants' Self-Defense League with the purpose of harassing the warlord and his men. Meanwhile, word of the Azalea Mountain uprising has reached the Communist base, and the Party has sent representatives to entreat the Self-Defense League to join the Communist army. One of the cadres is caught by Du Shedan's men

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<sup>497</sup> The "Du" of Du Shedan and the "Du" of Du Mama are pronounced with different tones and written with different characters. The two Du's are not related to each other in any way.

before making contact with the rogue band, and the other is killed in a skirmish with warlord forces. Hearing the announcement of the public execution of the captured Communist Party member, Lei Gang is curious about this envoy. Thinking his men can learn guerrilla tactics from the communist operative, Lei decides to send his men on a daring rescue, and on this note of heroic anticipation the curtain falls.

Act II begins the next day on the public square where the execution is scheduled to take place. When the members of the Self-Defense League discover that the condemned Communist Party member is a female, they hesitate, but Lei Gang insists on going through with the rescue mission. Du Shedan appears on stage with his victim Ke Xiang. Du Shedan warns the people gathered in the square about the dangers of joining the Communist Party, but Ke Xiang explains that only the Communist Party can save China. As Ke Xiang steps up to the gallows, Lei Gang and his men create a commotion within the gathered crowd, and in the chaos they are able to rescue Ke Xiang. As she is whisked to the insurgents' camp, Ke Xiang explains to Lei Gang that she has been sent expressly to make contact with the Self-Defense League.

Act III takes place several days later. Back at the Self-Defense League hideout, some members are divvying up the spoils of a raid on Du Shedan's men but are stopped by a soldier who announces a new rule from Ke Xiang that they must distribute the spoils among the poor, not line their own pockets. Irritated, the members protest that they do not take orders from women, and one of the members, who is drunk, attempts to turn the Self-Defense League against Ke Xiang, but she counters with the aria "I'm from Anyuan," showing that she is just as poor and oppressed as they are. Next, soldiers of the Self-Defense League bring in Tian Dajiang, one of Du Shedan's servants, whom they

have captured. Following the old rule of the Self-Defense League, they are going to give Tian a sound beating, but Ke Xiang intercedes. Lei Gang, who has overheard Ke Xiang's instructions, is furious and sides with Wen Qijiu, second in command. Lei demands that Ke Xiang reveal her true identity, as it seems to him that she speaks for the rich and not the poor by forbidding them to keep the seized goods from the rich and to beat their captives. But Lei and the soldiers are soon convinced by Ke Xiang's reasoning in the aria "It's a Bitter Pill to Swallow" that Tian is just as oppressed as they are. Seeing the scars on Tian's arm from Du Shedan's whip, Lei realizes that he was a fool who could not tell friend from foe, and he begs Tian Dajiang's forgiveness. In response, Tian declares his loyalty to the Self-Defense League. The Act ends with Lei admitting that he did not know the law of CCP, and he declares that they will all follow the advice of the Party representative from now on.

Act IV focuses on the growth of the Self-Defense League under Ke Xiang's leadership. The league works on self-sufficiency and mass mobilization, and as a result it gradually increases its membership. The soldiers not only learn the basics of guerrilla warfare, Ke Xiang teaches them to read so that they can study Mao's theories to develop their revolutionary consciousness. With Ke's guidance, relations between the Self-Defense League and the local peasants have improved dramatically. The Self-Defense League now serves the people, and in return the people provide aid to the Self-Defense League. Meanwhile, Wen Qijiu has defected to Du Shedan, and the two plot a trap for Lei Gang and the Self-Defense League.

In Act V, Lei Gang learns that Du Shedan's men are harassing the local villagers and have captured Du Mama, and he wants to rescue her right away. But Ke Xiang warns

him it is a trap, insisting that they hold out for reinforcements before they can rescue her. Lei Gang is impetuous, though, and provoked by Wen Qijiu, he brings a few men with him down the mountain, falling, of course, right into Du Shedan's trap. Meanwhile, Wen Qijiu tries to incite members of the Self-Defense League to defy Ke Xiang and rescue Lei Gang; after all, he argues, Ke Xiang is an outsider and has no bond with their brotherhood. Ke Xiang takes the opportunity to confront Wen Qijiu, insisting that, as a "trained army officer," it should be clear to him Du Shedan is trying to lure Lei Gang and the Self-Defense League out of their mountain hideaway. The act is brought to a close with Ke Xiang gaining control over the chaotic situation, directing the members to wait for orders from the Party and calling a Party member meeting to come up with a strategy for dealing with the critical situation concerning the life and death of the Self-Defense League.

Act VI opens with Lei Gang, caught by Du Shedan's men, now imprisoned with Du Mama. She scolds him for not listening to Ke Xiang. Lei Gang says he doesn't trust Ke Xiang because she is an outsider and therefore has no personal grudge against Du Shedan. Du Mama chides him again, letting him (and the audience) know that the other cadre that had come with Ke Xiang to Azalea Mountain and had been killed by Du Shedan was her husband. The act ends with both Lei and Du Mama hoping that Ke Xiang will stay on the mountain and not fall into the enemy's ambush, after overhearing Du Shedan's ploy to capture Ke Xiang and kill them all.

Act VII is an action packed scene, depicting Ke Xiang leading a small group of soldiers along a treacherous path down the mountain to rescue Lei Gang and Du Mama, while using a decoy to lure Du Shedan's men to another location. As Lei Gang and Du

Mama are rescued and escorted back up Azalea Mountain, Ke Xiang, Tian Dajiang, and others stay behind to hold back Du Shedan's men.

Act VIII takes place back at the league's camp, where Wen Qijiu is calling on the soldiers to leave the mountain and join the army of another warlord. When Lei Gang is reunited with Ke Xiang back at camp, he learns that Tian Dajiang has died in the rescue operation, sacrificing his life for the sake of others. Ke Xiang explains that the Communist Party is also this way, and that the Self-Defense League cannot just think about personal gain but must fight for the liberation of all mankind. It is also revealed that Wen Qijiu has been a spy for Du Shedan; he tries to escape, but he is killed by Lei Gang. The act ends with a message from the Communist army base that it has sent reinforcements to assist the Self-Defense League in destroying the local warlords of Azalea Mountain as well as an invitation to join the revolutionary army of the Hunan Soviet.

The last act is brief and devoted entirely to martial art and acrobatic movement, showcasing the various fighting scenes between the Self-Defense League and Du Shedan's troops, ending with Du Shedan and his men being captured in an animal net.

### **The Three Prominences**

Back in 1942, Mao already stated in his famous Yan'an Talk: "...what we demand is the unity of revolutionary content and the highest possible perfection of artistic form. Works of art that lack artistic quality have no force, however progressive they are

politically. Therefore, we oppose works of art with wrong political viewpoint...<sup>498</sup> As is clear, Mao's socialist art policy was an extension of the traditional Confucian view that the purpose of art, and especially music, was to educate and not to entertain. Thus, music that was created for the purpose of giving pleasure, whether it be impromptu folk singing or bawdy theater, was viewed as vulgar and of little social value. Rather, music, including opera, was supposed to provide moral edification. In the traditional Confucian worldview, morality was seen as set of hierarchical relationships and the behaviors governing them. In the new socialist worldview, morality was defined instead in terms of communist principles of social equality, dedication to the revolution, and strict acceptance of the leadership role played by the Chinese Communist Party.

Yu Huiyong was clearly dedicated to the socialist cause, and he had remained loyal to the Chinese Communist Party even when it had seemingly betrayed him. He also gave considerable thought to the implementation of socialist art policy, particularly how it pertained to the reformation of Beijing opera. The yangbanxi were intended as models to guide the production of new revolutionary theatrical works. Although Beijing operas with socialist themes had been produced since Yan'an days, what set yangbanxi apart from other revolutionary operas was a set of principles guiding the composition of the music and the construction of the plot. We have already explored in depth the principles Yu followed to create a new musical language that was meaningful to audiences in socialist China. We have also seen how Yu involved himself in every aspect of opera production, including the development of storylines. In this aspect as well, Yu followed a set of clearly articulated principles; these became known as the Three Prominences.

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<sup>498</sup> Mao Zedong, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong* [in Chinese and English] (Peking: Dongfanghong chubanshe, 1967), p. 568-69.

Yu first outlined the Three Prominences in a 1968 interview with the influential newspaper *Wenhui Bao*.<sup>499</sup> By this point in his career, Yu had proven to Jiang Qing that he was the one to implement her vision of revolutionary opera, and his political fortunes were rapidly rising. He was now serving in the capacity of minister of culture, even though technically that ministry had been disbanded at the onset of the Cultural Revolution as part of the power struggle between Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi. Thus, it was only natural for the *Wenhui Bao* to seek out Yu's opinions on the development of revolutionary opera. In that interview, Yu stated three principles that were the essence of Jiang Qing's instructions for creating revolutionary modern heroic images, which were as follows.<sup>500</sup> First, among all the characters, give prominence to the positive characters. Second, among all the positive characters, give prominence to the heroic characters. Third, among all the heroic characters, give prominence to the heroic role model.

What makes Yu's idea of the Three Prominences so important is not that they are novel concepts but rather that they express Yu's belief in the need to return opera to its role of moral edification. As Yu's colleague Lian Bo pointed out, the Three Prominences were implicit guiding principles in traditional Chinese high opera, including Kun. Indeed, there was nothing inherently Chinese about the principles either, as even Hollywood movies of that era typically followed these principles as well, even if they were not explicitly articulated.<sup>501</sup> Indeed, the reason why Yu had to emphasize the role of model opera as moral edification was that revolutionary opera had been tending away from

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<sup>499</sup> The interview appeared in the article "Let the Art Stage Became the Battleground of Promoting Chairman Mao's Thought Forever" [Rang wenyi wutai yongyuan chengwei xuanchuan Mao Zedong sixiang de zhengdi] in the major Shanghai newspaper *Wenhui bao* on May 23, 1968.

<sup>500</sup> Dai 2008, p. 235.

<sup>501</sup> Interview with Lian Bo in Beijing in February 2011.

these principles, focusing more on the evils of the old feudal order rather than the virtues of the new socialist order. And even more importantly, not enough emphasis was being placed on the centrality of the Chinese Communist Party in guiding the revolution. In other words, Yu's articulation of the Three Prominences was a call to return to traditional forms.

A good example of this lack of moral focus can be seen in the early yangbanxi *Among the Reeds*. This opera tells the story of a group of Communist soldiers who are caught behind enemy lines and of the local villagers that help them hide from the Japanese sympathizers searching for them. When this storyline is analyzed in terms of Yu's Three Prominences, we can see why *Among the Reeds* is generally considered the weakest of the early yangbanxi. In fact, all three prominences are violated in this story. First, although there is a clear division into positive and negative characters, it is the villains Diao Deyi and Commander Hu that stand center stage; they have the most colorful personalities and are given the most memorable arias. Certainly they are portrayed as evil and foolish, and they are outwitted at every turn by the wily villagers, but there is no one among the positive characters to provide a counterweight to these figures. Among the positive characters, Grandma Sha and Auntie Aqing are quick-witted, sympathetic to the Communist cause, and successful at foiling the villains' plans to capture the soldiers. Still, circumstances limit the ability of either to stand out as a truly heroic figure. One might expect the Communist platoon leader Guo Jianguang to be the natural hero of the story, but he is given no opportunity to shine either; indeed, it is his injuries that are holding the rest of the soldiers back. And while each is heroic in some



small way, none rises to the level of role model, which had to be a mature Communist Party representative.

Yu had only limited involvement in the production of *Among the Reeds*, but when he was brought into the production team of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, he reshaped the opera to bring it in line with his Three Prominences. In the early version of this opera, the central character Yang Zirong is not portrayed as a strong heroic figure. In the story, Yang is sent by the Communist army to infiltrate a Nationalist army camp; the information he gathers will be used to plan an assault on the enemy base. In an effort to insinuate himself with the enemy, he assumes a surly persona, cursing, singing racy ditties, and flirting with women. The scene is so hilarious and entertaining that it became the most memorable part of the opera for many early audience members. In Yu's revision of this opera, this scene is cut. Instead, this part of the opera focuses on Yang's sincere and caring interactions with the local people as he makes his way to Tiger Mountain. Particularly important is the trust he builds with Changbao and her father, who agree to lead the way to the mountain camp; because of the strength of Yang's character, Changbao sees him as a role model and decides to join the Communist army. In this way, he also becomes a role model for the audience as well.

The Three Prominences greatly influenced the production of *On the Docks*, over which Yu was given full creative control. The original story centered on the disgruntled youth Han Xiaoqiang, who has landed a job on the Shanghai riverfront after failing the national university entrance exam. He sees no dignity in manual labor and looks down on his co-workers as uneducated. Influenced by his uncle Ma Hongliang and the dock's party representative, Han Xiaoqiang gradually comes to accept his position on the docks

and the value of his labor. Although the original plot was a heartfelt coming-of-age story, the opera was not in line with Yu's Three Prominences. First, prominence was given to a character that was not clearly positive but rather underwent a transformation from negative to positive. Second, the heroic figures in the story, namely the uncle and the party representative, played but supporting roles. And third, neither of these two characters was developed enough to serve as role models for the audience.

In Yu's view, the heroic role model of the opera needed to be a mature leader from the Communist ranks, and so he shifted the focus of the story away from the disgruntled youth. In line with Yu's first principle, he gave prominence to the positive characters Han Xiaoqiang (who counts as positive because he is redeemed in the end) as well as to his uncle and the party secretary who mentor him; the villain Qian Shouwei, whose role was larger in the original version, is relegated to a minor character role in Yu's version. Furthermore, according to Yu's second principle, the heroic characters of the uncle and the party secretary are given prominence over the disgruntled youth. Finally, Yu recast the party secretary as the central figure of the opera, namely the heroic role model Fang Haizhen, the mature and resolute Communist Party representative. Moreover, in a nod to his patron's feminist agenda, he made this heroic role model a woman.

Yu's reworking of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* and *On the Docks* clearly show that he was already thinking in terms of the Three Prominences, especially regarding his desire to cast the spotlight on the Communist party representative as the heroic role model. However, by the time he started work on *Azalea Mountain*, he had already articulated the Three Prominences, and they were widely known. A careful

analysis of this opera reveals how Yu Huiyong conscientiously applied his principle of the Three Prominences at every level in this work.

The original story focused on Lei Gang's transformation from rebel to revolutionary, with the party representative playing only a supporting role. Lei Gang is indeed a positive and heroic figure, but the purpose of yangbanxi was to educate the masses about the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. The greatest prominence had to be given to the heroic role model; thus, Yu recast the character of the party secretary as the brave and determined Ke Xiang and placed her center stage.

In terms of stage time and singing time, we see a clear division between positive and negative characters in *Azalea Mountain*. The opera has two main villains, the warlord Du Shedan and the traitor Wen Qijiu. Although Wen Qijiu does have a brief aria, it is necessary for propelling the plot forward, and furthermore it serves to reveal his treacherous intent. Du Shedan, on the other hand, has no singing part, and stage time is kept brief for both villains. Instead, the audience learns mostly about the personalities and deeds of these two characters through dialogue among other characters. For example, in Act I, we learn from the dialogue between Du Mama and Lei Gang that her son had been killed by Du Shedan. In Act VI, we learn that Ke Xiang's husband had also been killed by Du Shedan. In other words, the viewers hear about them but rarely see them, and they get no insight into these characters' inner thoughts and feelings. Rather, it is the positive characters of the story that are given prominence; they are the ones that the audience gets to know personally.

Likewise in accordance with the Three Prominences, there is a division among the positive characters into those who are heroic and those who are not. This is accomplished

largely through the assignment of arias. Lei Gang, Tian Dajiang, and Du Mama are all heroic figures, and each is given arias to sing. Thus, the audience is given insights into the thoughts and feelings of these characters, and they are roused to sympathize with them. The other members of the Self-Defense League are indeed positive characters in the story, but they are not heroic. Thus, none of these members is given an aria of his or her own. Instead, Yu treats them as a chorus, and in this way we can see how the group is influenced by the heroic characters in the story, for example when they express their sympathy and support for Ke Xiang. There was no tradition of chorus in Beijing opera, and Yu's approach in this case illustrates once again his willingness to adopt Western techniques to strengthen Beijing opera without surrendering its Chinese essence.

Finally, Yu gives the greatest prominence to the heroic role model Ke Xiang, the mature and resolute Communist party representative. Not only does Ke Xiang have more arias to sing than any other character in the opera, each of the four character conflicts in the story is centered on her. Chinese audiences of the Cultural Revolution era would have readily understood the symbolism in each of these conflicts.

The first conflict involves the struggle between Ke Xiang and Lei Gang for leadership of the Self-Defense League, which is the main line of the story. The even-tempered Ke Xiang of course represents the disciplined leadership of the inner core of the Communist Party, while the hot-headed Lei Gang represents the undisciplined rank and file of the party, devoted to the socialist cause but still in need of leadership from the Party's Central Committee.

The second conflict is between Ke Xiang and Wen Qijiu, and it symbolizes the struggle between the revolution and the counter-revolution. In spite of Wen Qijiu's effort

to sell out the Self-Defense League to the warlord Du Shedan, Ke Xiang astutely sees through his treachery, and the message here is plain: Only the Communist leadership can guide China away from counter-revolutionary tendencies.

The third conflict involves Ke Xiang's relationship with the Self-Defense League. These rebels were accustomed to keeping the booty seized from raids on Du Shedan's men, but Ke Xiang teaches them that they must use their gains to help the poor. These encounters between Ke Xiang and the Self-Defense League clearly symbolize the role of the Communist party as moral compass for the great masses of uneducated Chinese peasants and workers, who must be trained to think in terms of a new socialist order that places the good of the many over the good of the few.

The fourth conflict is between Ke Xiang and Du Shedan. In the scene where Ke Xiang is about to be executed, Du Shedan publicly sentences her to death for violating "the rules of the party and the laws of the nation." In response, Ke Xiang bravely demands: "Which party? Which nation?" Thus, it is clear that Du Shedan represents the Nationalist Party, which was beholden to the warlords that had held de facto control over China before 1949.

In addition to using the Three Prominences as a guiding principle in the development of the plot and characters of *Azalea Mountain*, Yu Huiyong also followed this dictum in the construction and distribution of arias. Those involved in the original production of *Azalea Mountain* recall that Yu often spoke in terms of three levels of aria, which he called basic aria (*jiben changqiang*), main aria (*zhuyao changqiang*) and core

aria (*hexin changqiang*).<sup>502</sup> The distinction among these three levels had to do with length and musical complexity as well as with the centrality of the message conveyed in the aria. There is only one core aria in the entire opera, Ke Xiang's "Luan Yun Fei" ("Storm Clouds Gather"). As the heroic role model, it is only reasonable that Ke Xiang should sing the single most important aria in the opera. We will shortly see that the remaining arias were also constructed and distributed according to the Three Prominences.

### **Production of Azalea Mountain**

It can be said that Jiang Qing and Yu Huiyong existed within a symbiotic relationship. On the one hand Jiang, as former actress, had an intuitive vision for the reformation of Beijing opera and the political wherewithal to drive the reform forward, yet she was unable to articulate the details of that vision. On the other hand Yu, as a music scholar, had a clearly articulated plan for reform but lacked the political power to put his theory into practice. In the early yangbanxi, Jiang was firmly in control of the production process, and Yu's contributions to *The Red Lantern* and *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* can best be viewed as test cases for his theory. But Yu quickly earned Jiang's trust, as evidenced in the fact that she handed him full artistic control of the music for *On the Docks*, thus breaking with the tradition of composition by committee. Yu was likewise the sole composer for *Ode to Dragon River* (1972), and as a result the music of this opera was more unified, tied together with devices such as

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<sup>502</sup> Interview with Gong Guotai in Beijing in February 2011. Interview with Yang Chunxia in Beijing in July 2006.

recurring themes and motifs. However, Yu's theory for Beijing opera reform included more than just music; rather, it encompassed every aspect of Beijing opera production.

After the onset of the Cultural Revolution had solidified her husband's grip on power, Jiang Qing's authority in the cultural realm could no longer be questioned. And as Jiang grew to trust Yu Huiyong more and more, his political fortunes improved dramatically, culminating in his appointment as Minister of Culture. No doubt it was obvious to all that Jiang Qing was still the power broker behind the scenes, but nevertheless Yu did have a lot more freedom and resources at his disposal when it came to producing a new version of *Azalea Mountain*.

In his work transforming the three-hour-long stage versions of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* and *On the Docks* to the shortened two-hour format for film, Yu already demonstrated his ability to involve himself in all aspects of the production, including not only music but also lyrics, acrobatic movements, choreography, gestures, and stage design. Yet the hands-on approach he took in the production of these operas was but a mere foreshadowing of the Wagnerian role he would play in the production of *Azalea Mountain*.

Frustrated by the reception of *Azalea Mountain* at the 1964 Beijing Opera Convention and generally displeased with the quality of the opera at that point, Jiang Qing gave the Beijing City Opera Company a second chance to do a complete overhaul of the opera in 1968, but the result still did not meet up to Jiang's exacting standards.<sup>503</sup>

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<sup>503</sup> Forming a production team of more than thirty persons, the Beijing City Opera Company "was given a lot of time and resources to complete the revision." Actor Qiu Shengrong was even released from detention by the Red Guards and allowed to join the production team. Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution—A History*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 67.

She thus turned to Yu Huiyong. However, instead of bringing him into the production team already working at the Beijing City Opera Company, she asked him to start from scratch, allowing him to pick the members of his own production team. Yu sought out performers, directors, writers, and other members of the crew that fit his vision of the shape the opera should take. And because he was now serving in the role of Minister of Culture, Yu got what he asked for. As just one indicator of his rising power, we can consider his strained relationship with the National Beijing Opera Company. While working on *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* in 1969, Yu's request for the use of one of the company's performers had been summarily denied.<sup>504</sup> But now, no one at the company dared to refuse a request from Yu Huiyong, despite the hard feelings at having lost control of the opera.

In terms of performers, Yu sought out potential over experience. It is telling that all of the main characters of the original cast of *Azalea Mountain* were under thirty; even Liu Guixin, who played the role of the elderly Du Mama, was only 26. Yu was attempting to produce a whole new kind of Beijing opera, and he clearly did not want seasoned performers set in tradition; indeed, he no doubt saw this as one of the reasons why the Beijing City Opera Company had not been able to meet Jiang's expectations. Instead, Yu selected a cast of talented young actors and actresses that were open to developing a new style under Yu's tutelage.

Yu did not write the libretto himself, but he did oversee a team of writers that developed the plot and lyrics, and he continued to shape the drama as it moved from draft into rehearsal. Bucking the trend among the yangbanxi toward the colloquial idiom, Yu

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<sup>504</sup> See Dai 2008, p. 279.



insisted on a poetic language that would be notable both for its brevity and for its beauty. Traditional Beijing opera, as an amalgam of regional operatic forms, had developed a language that was poetic but difficult to understand. Revolutionary Beijing operas, in an attempt to appeal to the widest possible audience, tended to employ language that was both more colloquial and at the same time more prosaic than that of traditional Beijing opera. This was especially true of the spoken dialogue in early revolutionary operas, which often came close to natural speech with little regard for rhyme or rhythm. However, Yu insisted on aesthetics over realism in the writing of the libretto for *Azalea Mountain*, insisting on rhythmic lyrics structured as rhymed couplets. The libretto was written in Mandarin, thus making it understandable to most Chinese, yet it was the poetic form that would make the language memorable.<sup>505</sup>

Although *Azalea Mountain* was a well-known story, Yu recast the plot and characters in terms of the Three Prominences, which required that the central character of the opera be a heroic role model. Thus, the focus of the story had to shift from the leader of the peasant rebellion to the communist party representative. Of course, the heroic role model would also have to be an example of the new socialist woman, given Jiang's feminist agenda. However, Yu was aiming for more than just a reincarnation of Fang Haizhen from *On the Docks*. Pompous and pedantic, Fang Haizhen seemed to have achieved a level of socialist perfection few could ever hope to attain. Instead, Yu

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<sup>505</sup> In his *Studies on the Relationship between Melody and Lyrics of Traditional Chinese Music* of the early 1960s, Yu had already made the case for composing music for opera arias that fit the natural tonal and intonation contours of the language. In spite of the trend toward using colloquial language in revolutionary opera, the language of traditional Beijing opera occasionally crept into the early yangbanxi, making more difficult to understand.

envisioned a central figure for the opera that was charming, likable, and intelligent, but most of all thoroughly human.

In the character of Ke Xiang, Yu Huiyong sought develop a heroic role model that audiences would want to emulate. Fang Haizhen may have been resolute in her loyalty to the Communist Party, but she also acted from a position of security as a member of the political establishment. Few members of yangbanxi audiences were elite party members, let alone ultra-elite party officials. Ke Xiang, on the other hand, was driven forward by faith in the Communist Party despite the dangers involved. It was Ke Xiang's faith in the virtues of socialism and the leadership of the Communist Party that was to be conveyed to audiences in this opera.

Shaping the Ke Xiang character involved more than just writing lines for her to speak and music for her to sing. Yu had selected the young Kun and Beijing opera actress Yang Chunxia to play the role of Ke Xiang, but she had no experience or training relevant to the role she was about to perform.<sup>506</sup> Her previous roles had all been *qingyi* (elegant lady), and she was accustomed to performing with subdued voice and restricted gestures. In a 2006 interview with the author, Yang recalled:

I had no clue what the spiritual inner world of this character was like. My initial training in the old way of singing, speaking, gesture, and movement for the maidenly roles were useless for establishing the heroic image of Ke Xiang. The traditional *qingyi* role portrayed an elegant and virtuous old-fashioned female who fit the male dominated

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<sup>506</sup> Yang had trained in Kun opera and joined the Shanghai Youth Beijing and Kun Opera Company (*Shanghai qingnian jingkun jutuan*) in the early 1960s. Interview with Yang Chunxia in Beijing in July 2006.

feudal society, which expected proper ladies to ‘smile without showing their teeth; to move without showing their feet.’<sup>507</sup>

Thus, Yu would have to completely reshape this young actress to fit the needs of a heroic socialist woman.

Yu brought in a team of specialists to work with Yang on the four training regimens of Beijing opera: singing, recitation, acting and martial arts (*chang, nian, zuo, da*). Her martial arts skills were especially weak, as most of her previous training had been in the more elegant Kun opera, which placed far less emphasis on acrobatics and swordsmanship. Yet in contrast to the lady-like sword handling of Mei Lanfang, Yu insisted Yang follow a martial arts training regimen traditionally intended for male *wusheng* performers; after all, Ke Xiang was a new socialist woman who could lead with the same strength and determination as a man. Yang also had to learn a matching set of dance movements and gestures to convey confidence and determination.

Yu also brought in two speech specialists from the Shanghai People’s Art Theater to teach her new methods of vocal production and expression. As a native of Shanghai, Yang spoke Mandarin with a heavy accent. This had not been a problem for Yang during her years in Kun opera, which is sung in a southern dialect similar to that used in Shanghai, and likewise when she had performed Beijing opera, which had its own stylized language sufficiently removed from modern Mandarin. However, Yu insisted *Azalea Mountain* be sung in standard Mandarin, and Yang received help from two experts, one to train her on pronunciation, the other to teach her vocal techniques for establishing the character through changes of timbre and dynamics. Finally, Yu sent

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<sup>507</sup> Interview with Yang Chunxia in Beijing in July 2006.

Yang and the rest of the cast to the Jinggang Mountain area of southern Jiangxi province, where the story of *Azalea Mountain* is supposed to take place, to experience firsthand the lifestyle of the people there.<sup>508</sup>

Through these efforts, Yu was able to shape the Ke Xiang character into a role model figure with mass appeal. Without doubt, Ke Xiang is among the most memorable of all the yangbanxi characters. The degree to which audiences emulated her zeal for the revolutionary cause is difficult to assess; they did, however, imitate more superficial aspects of the character. For example, Ke Xiang's hairstyle was extremely popular among Chinese women for years after the premier of the movie version of *Azalea Mountain*.<sup>509</sup> Much of the appeal of this character derived from a refined stagecraft that combined dance with acrobatic movements and choreographed every single move and gesture, while Yang Chunxia's versatile vocal performance launched her to the status of popular star.<sup>510</sup>

Because Yu was responsible for assembling the production team, he was already very familiar with the abilities of the performers before he began composing the music to the opera. Thus, he was able to tailor the music to the strengths of each performer; he further refined these strengths in extensive one-on-one sessions. And having picked

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<sup>508</sup> Interview with Yang Chunxia in Beijing in July 2006.

<sup>509</sup> Some scholars have argued that the image of the Party representative Ke Xiang signaled a loosening of the political grip on a populace so accustomed to a culture of conformity; as such, it became a fashion icon that inspired a nationwide "hair revolution," changing the style of women's hair in 1970s China. For more detail, see Nicole Huang, "Azalea Mountain and Late Mao Culture" *Opera Quarterly* Vol. 26, No. 2-3, 2010, pp. 402-425.

<sup>510</sup> See "Yu Lan xingzou zai yingshi he xiju zhijian" [Yu Lan: Straddling between Film, Television and Opera], *Xin Wanbao*, October 29, 2005. The sensuous appeal of model works has been noted by several scholars, such as Xiaomei Chen, *Acting the Right Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), p. 32-37.

young actors and actresses that he could mold to his vision, he wrote music for each that pushed them toward the potential he perceived in each of them. Since Beijing opera was an oral tradition, performers traditionally learned new works from masters instead of from scores, and only a few members of the cast could read even simple notation. Furthermore, Yu's score was more complicated than that of traditional operas, and so even those who read music struggled to understand their parts. As a result, Yu resorted to the tradition of the master instructing the performers in their roles.

The role of Ke Xiang demanded more in terms of vocal technique than was required of any previous yangbanxi role. In particular, it called for a female voice that would create a commanding presence on stage, flexible enough to take on traditional male styles of singing and strong enough to contend with a large orchestra and choral forces. Furthermore, the singer would have to produce sustained and exposed tones in a wider range than had ever been done before in Beijing opera. Yang Chunxia recalled how Yu Huiyong not only taught her how to sing each of her arias, he also helped her develop an entirely new style of singing far different from that to which she had been accustomed:

Master Yu was very patient but also very strict, paying attention to the details of each word and phrase. He taught me many things, from reading notation to singing embellishments (*runqiang*). He often demonstrated for me and helped me to sing in a new way, no longer using a sharp and weak *qingyi* (elegant lady) voice, but rather combining falsetto with the natural voice. I eventually found the right voice for this

character in both singing and speaking, in a timbre and tone with strength and breadth that showed confidence, courage, sophistication and charm.<sup>511</sup>

As a result of these one-on-one sessions, there was a tight fit between the performer and the music, further heightening the overarching sense of unity in this work.

The final stage of production, including instruction of the performers and rehearsal, lasted a year, during which time Yu sequestered the production team, working them long hours, including weekends and holidays. Far from perceiving such a situation as stifling or confining, those involved in the production described it as an exhilarating experience.<sup>512</sup> Yu had created for his production team a safe haven against the political storm ravaging the country. Within this enclave, this group of talented young artists enjoyed a level of creative freedom few others in the country could know. Yu also encouraged an atmosphere of open dialogue where all members were free to offer suggestions for improving the opera.<sup>513</sup> As a result, the members of the production team developed a deep sense of loyalty to “Master” Yu, and they still speak of him with great respect.

### **Yu’s Principled Approach to Composition**

Most of the critical acclaim for *Azalea Mountain* is directed toward its music, which is, as we have already seen, widely regarded as far superior to that of any of the

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<sup>511</sup> Yang Chunxia always referred to Yu Huiyong as Yu *xiansheng*, or “Master” Yu. Interview with Yang Chunxia in Beijing in July 2006.

<sup>512</sup> Among those involved in the production of *Azalea Mountain* were Gong Guotai, Zhang Jianmin, and Yang Chunxia. All three described the experience in a highly positive manner. Interview with Gong Guotai in Beijing in July 2008. Interview with Zhang Jianmin in Beijing in July 2011. Interview with Yang Chunxia in Beijing in July 2006.

<sup>513</sup> Interview with Yang Chunxia in Beijing in July 2006.

previous yangbanxi. Critics and audiences alike praise the freshness of the music and the depth with which it resonates in the listener. And certainly it is true that the music not only aptly reflects the spirit of the times represented by the opera, it also touches on more fundamental and universal aspects of human emotion, hence its lasting appeal. Yet, in the final analysis, it is not just the tunefulness and emotionality of the music that accounts for *Azalea Mountain*'s success; rather, we also need to consider the principled approach Yu Huiyong took to composing this opera in explaining its lasting appeal.

It is important to keep in mind that the yangbanxi were called “model” operas precisely because they were intended to be models for a new form of revolutionary Beijing opera. Thus, when Yu Huiyong advocated his idea of the Three Prominences, he intended it as a guiding principle for the construction of revolutionary opera and not just a statement of his own personal philosophy of opera composition. Yet by the time he set to work on *Azalea Mountain*, he was also serving in the role of Minister of Culture, and so he no doubt felt the need to lead by example.<sup>514</sup> And thus we can see in this opera a particularly careful application of this principle, not only in the development of the plot and characters, but also in the music itself.

In the distribution of arias in *Azalea Mountain*, Yu conscientiously followed the Three Prominences. The first rule of the Three Prominences states that among all the characters, prominence should be given to the positive characters. Since assigning singing parts is the chief mode of giving prominence to a character in an opera, it follows that negative characters should not be given singing parts. And indeed this is the case, as

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<sup>514</sup> As a principle composer of the yangbanxi, Yu Huiyong was acutely aware that his main responsibility at the Cultural Affairs Office of the State was to ensure the quality of yangbanxi, which, as he stated in many occasions, was the sole purpose of establishing this government institution at the first place. (Dai 2008, p. 288-293).

the villain Du Shedan is not even a single line to sing. Traitor Wen Qijiu does have one brief aria, but it is necessary for propelling the story forward, and it also served to reveal his duplicity. However, neither Du Shedan nor Wen Qijiu is given much time on stage, in line with the principle of giving prominence to the positive characters.

The second rule of the Three Prominences states that among all the positive characters, prominence should be given to the heroic characters. This rule applies specifically to the members of the Self-Defense League. They are clearly positive characters, and yet they are not heroic, as they are undisciplined and easily swayed by Wen Qijiu's treachery. In order to highlight the Self Defense League as group of positive but not heroic characters, Yu treats them as a chorus. In other words, the rebel band is given a certain level of prominence by singing as a group but not as individuals. Since the concept of chorus was unknown in Beijing opera, this is a striking example of how Yu was willing to adopt Western techniques to strengthen existing forms.

The third rule of the Three Prominences states that among all the heroic characters, prominence should be given to the heroic role model. All of the heroic characters have arias to sing; for example, Lei Gang has eight arias, and Du Mama has three arias, one of which is a duet with Lei Gang. The duet between Lei Gang and Du Mama is yet another example of how Yu adopted Western techniques to strengthen existing forms, as the concept of a duet was unheard of in traditional Beijing opera. However, the heroic role model Ke Xiang has ten arias to sing, including the most complex arias of the opera.

Furthermore, Yu adhered to the principle of the Three Prominences in the composition of instrumental music for *Azalea Mountain* as well, particularly with regard



to his use of recurring motifs. Yu created motifs for each of the main characters, Ke Xiang, Lei Gang and Du Mama, as well as one for the Self-Defense League, which occur frequently in both vocal and instrumental music, serving as the most important organizational device in the opera. And since Ke Xiang is the central figure, that is to say the heroic role model, it is not surprising that Yu composed not one but four different motifs for her, each reflecting a different aspect of her character. When combined, these four motifs form the Ke Xiang theme, the single most important recognizable feature of *Azalea Mountain*, as it appears in various guises throughout the opera.

In addition to the principle of the Three Prominences, Yu also articulated another guiding principle, specifically directed toward the creation of music, which he called the Three Accuracies (*san duitou*).<sup>515</sup> First, the music should accurately reflect the time period of the story (*shidai duitou*); thus, melodies from China's feudal past were inappropriate for operas set in modern times. Second, the music should accurately reflect the personality of the character who is singing (*xingge duitou*); in other words, the music should reveal something about the character that cannot be gleaned from the lyrics or plot. And third, the music should accurately reflect the emotions of the character that is singing (*ganqing duitou*); specifically, the music needs to convey a depth of emotion beyond what is reflected in the lyrics. In a nutshell, the Three Accuracies provides Yu with his rationale for dispensing with the age-old tradition in Beijing opera of using stock tunes and pre-composed melodies. Instead, Yu was advocating for a new style of musical theater in which the music was intentionally composed to reach depths of emotion never before fathomed in Beijing opera.

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<sup>515</sup> Interview with Gong Guotai in Beijing in July 2008.

Through the principle of the Three Accuracies, Yu was defining a new role for music in revolutionary Beijing opera. Traditionally, Beijing opera had focused on the performer; the aria served largely as a vehicle enabling the performer to showcase his talents.<sup>516</sup> In this sense, the recycled music of traditional Beijing opera served as little more than accompaniment, and emotion was conveyed through virtuosity, not melody. This would no longer be the case in revolutionary opera, Yu was insisting. Instead, the opera would be about the music, which would dominate the opera and do much more for propelling the story forward than mere words or actions could do.

In this sense, we can see that Yu's thinking was along the same lines as that of noted Western musicologist Edward Cone. In his influential book *Opera as Drama*, Cone also argues for the position of music as final arbiter:

It is an important principle of music-drama that every important motivation must at some point be translated into musical terms. It cannot be merely talked about or acted: it must be heard as music... Comprehension of [music drama] cannot be derived from a reading of the book alone. In any opera, we may find that the musical and the verbal message seem to reinforce or to contradict each other; but whether the one or the other, we must always rely on the music as our guide toward an understanding of the composer's conception of the text. It is this conception, not the bare text itself, that is authoritative in defining the ultimate meaning of the work.<sup>517</sup>

Although there is no reason to believe that Yu Huiyong was directly knowledgeable of Cone's writings, we can see that Yu was keenly sensitive to the musical zeitgeist of the mid-twentieth century, not just in China but across the Westernized world.

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<sup>516</sup> Traditionally, Beijing opera performers were almost invariably men, even those who played female roles.

<sup>517</sup> Edward Cone, "The Old Man's Toys: Verdi's Last Opera," *Perspectives USA* 6 (1954): 191.

Yu did not articulate his principle of the Three Accuracies until relatively late in the Cultural Revolution, yet he was clearly already thinking along these terms in the early 1960s, when he was still a scholar at the Shanghai Conservatory. As Yu expressed in his 1964 article “Regarding the Problems of Modern Theme Beijing Opera”:

For modern theme Beijing opera to exist on the stage, the foremost requirement is to have high artistic quality, which means in terms of music, it should continue to increase its ability of artistic expression and inspiration. Even the most passionate poem exists on a level of emotional reserve that music automatically passes, because music can express emotion more directly and accurately. Thus, an aria can express stronger, deeper, and more complex feelings than what is expressed in the lyrics.<sup>518</sup>

It was statements such as these that originally drew Jiang Qing’s attention to Yu Huiyong. Although Jiang was notoriously unable to articulate her vision for the reformation of Beijing opera, she clearly had a keen sense of the musical zeitgeist as well. On a number of occasions, Jiang is reported to have insisted: “If there is an irresolvable conflict among other sections of the opera, comply with the music.”<sup>519</sup>

### **Music Analysis: Act I**

Many operas end with a death, but rarely does an opera begin with one. *Azalea Mountain*, though, is one of those rare exceptions. Opening on a scene of terror and

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<sup>518</sup> Yu Huiyong, “Regarding the Problems of Modern Theme Beijing Opera,” *Shanghai xiju*, 1964.

<sup>519</sup> Dai 2008, p. 288-293. Gong Guotai separately confirmed this report. Interview with Gong Guotai in Beijing in February 2011.

tragedy, the story is propelled forward with a sense of urgency. Yet from this beginning of death and despair arises a renewed hope for a better future.

The curtain opens to a darkened stage and the sounds of dogs barking and guns shooting. Calls to “Get Lei Gang!” can be heard from afar. A search party brandishing torches crosses the stage, and then we catch a glimpse of a man emerging from the shadows, swinging to safety on a vine. “Get him!” a voice commands.

As the sun rises, we see a young man emerging from the rocks where he has been hiding. He sits as he tries in vain to smash the chains that bind him. An old woman gathering firewood walks past, and seeing the man in chains, offers him her hatchet. After the man has removed his chains, the woman offers him a sweet potato from her basket. A dialogue in rhymed couplets then begins.

YOUNG MAN:       A long-dried sprout meets the dew;  
                          Each drop shall be remembered.<sup>520</sup>

OLD WOMAN:       Every leaf comes from the same root;  
                          We are all oppressed people.

YOUNG MAN:       The favor of one drop will be  
                          Rewarded with a fountain.<sup>521</sup>

What is your name?

OLD WOMAN:       My family name is Du.

YOUNG MAN:       Du? Who else is in your family?

OLD WOMAN:       My son Du Shan, oppressed by the local warlord,  
                          He went to fight with Lei Gang, but he has not returned.

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<sup>520</sup> A Chinese proverb.

<sup>521</sup> Also a Chinese proverb.

YOUNG MAN: Du Shan? You are his mother?

OLD WOMAN: And you are?

YOUNG MAN: Lei Gang.

OLD WOMAN: Where is Du Shan?

YOUNG MAN: Your son, my brother... has died a martyr.

The old woman drops her ax and trembles as the young man helps her to sit down upon a rock. Seamlessly, the dialogue transitions into song.

OLD WOMAN: Countless blood and tears; how could he die  
Before avenging his father's death?

YOUNG MAN: Do not think our martyr has wasted his blood;  
Each drop sprouts an azalea blossom to renew our land.  
Dear lady, do not weep; I shall seek your son's revenge.  
From this day, you are my own white-haired mother.<sup>522</sup>

The young man drops to his knees and calls the old woman "Mama." And thus the audience is introduced to two of main protagonists of *Azalea Mountain*, rebel leader Lei Gang and his adopted mother Du Mama.<sup>523</sup>

The action, dialogue and song of the opening scene flow naturally and logically. Led and signified by the music, the audience's emotions are gradually raised and intensified, as the feelings of the characters change from suspicion to acceptance and then to appreciation. Here music plays a crucial role in directing and intensifying the emotions, and at the same time, it leads one to think deeply about questions of morality,

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<sup>522</sup> A term of respect in Chinese.

<sup>523</sup> According to Yan, this opening was entirely Yu's idea, and it is very different from the opening of the original *Azalea Mountain* story.

liberty, and responsibility. Especially after Du Mama learns that her son has died, the dialogue turns into a poignant aria expressing deeper and stronger feelings that go beyond the capacity of words alone. In a nutshell, there is no more natural or appropriate time to begin an aria than here.

Yu Huiyong created motives for all the main characters, and we are introduced to each motif at the same time we are introduced to each character.<sup>524</sup> Thus, we first hear the Lei Gang motif when we see the young man emerging from the shadows on a vine. We do not yet know who the man in the shadows is, but the motif we heard then is repeated when Lei Gang introduces himself to Du Mama, and thus we make a connection between these two moments.



Figure 24. The Lei Gang motif.<sup>525</sup>

The Lei Gang motif consists of a three-measure sequence, as shown in Figure 24. The motif is built on a pentatonic Chinese mode *zhi* (ABDEF#), in which A is the tonic. It brilliantly resembles the character of Lei Gang, which is simple, straightforward, and forceful, as the overall shape of the motif appears to be heading in an upward direction

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<sup>524</sup> Yu's use of motifs in *Azalea Mountain* is well known. It is occasionally mentioned in passing in Chinese music history textbooks, without any detailed discussion. For example, Chinese musicologist Ju Qihong stated in his recent book *The Music History of the People's Republic* that "While maintaining the flavor and characteristics of the Beijing opera, Yu Huiyong selected some Western compositional techniques, such as recurring motifs, in combination with the expressive symphonic orchestra and Beijing opera percussion..." Ju Qihong, *The Music History of the People's Republic 1949-2008* [Gongheguo yinyue shi 1949-2008] (Beijing: Central Conservatory Press, 2010), p. 125.

<sup>525</sup> Renmin yinyue chubanshe bianjibu. [Editorial Board of People's Music Press]. *Jingju yangbanxi zhuyao changduan jicui* [The Major Arias from the Model Operas]. (Beijing: People's Music Press, 2002), p. 218. Renotated from the original cipher notation.

toward a high goal. His eagerness is expressed in the increased pace from eighth to sixteenth notes that quickly reach their goal, a higher A on b2 of m. 2. However, the motif loses its momentum at its highest note A, because it has landed on a weak position and is accompanied by an unsteady G#, which could only lead in one direction, that is, going down to F#. Thus, not only is the fall unavoidable, it is also a hard fall, as the motif ends on a less stable F# on the down beat. Therefore, the motif leaves the impression of instability, boorishness, and impetuosity, starting on the right tonic note but in the wrong position (the weak beat, m. 1), and it falls in the middle of nowhere, thus vividly describing the characteristics of Lei Gang and where he is standing at the beginning of the opera.

Figure 25. The Du Mama motif.<sup>526</sup>

<sup>526</sup> Renmin yinyue chubanshe bianjibu. [Editorial Board of People's Music Press]. *Jingju yangbanxi zhuyao changduan jicui* [*The Major Arias from the Model Operas*]. (Beijing: People's Music Press, 2002), p. 226. Renotated from the original cipher notation.

the highest pitch A, which vertically forms a bright A major triad chord (with added sixth). However, it is a false hope, because A is not the tonic. The motif moves down, swings between E and an unstable F# (m. 2 and m. 3), eventually ending strongly on a downbeat E. The motif brilliantly reflects Du Mama's searching for the truth and her ordeals in life, establishing a heroic image of Du Mama as a strong, resilient, and wise woman, with a clear focus.

The Lei Gang and Du Mama themes recur frequently throughout the opera, occurring each time there is a significant moment for the character represented by the motif. In this sense, Yu is using recurring motifs in much the same way that Wagner employed his leitmotifs. For example, in the opening dialogue between Lei Gang and Du Mama, as well as in their ensuing aria, much of the music we hear is woven from these two motifs. In this way, we develop a deeper understanding of these characters through music. Thus, when we hear Lei Gang's motif again as he gives Du Mama the news of her son's death, we can sense through the music Lei's qualities of directness, honesty, and empathy. Likewise, the abrupt end of the motif at this point seems to show how Lei Gang is trying hard to hold back his emotions.

Du Mama's first aria, which is led by her motif, is in a free meter of the *xipi* aria-type. I will label Du Mama's poignant aria as a basic aria, because it is short, consisting of only a single couplet, and it is simple both musically and emotionally, conveying just the simple emotion of grief. Because it is sung in unmeasured meter (*sanban*), it flows smoothly from the preceding dialogue; in particular, the use of Du Mama's motif instead of a traditional stereotyped prelude allows for a real-time expression of emotion. It is also worth mentioning that the dialogue between the two uses plain language peppered with



idioms that clearly identify them as country folk; nevertheless, the language is poetically structured into rhyming couplets. Thus the shift from speech to song is quite natural, because the form and style of the lyrics remain the same. Du Mama's one-couplet aria ends on the syllable *wang* (death), at which point her motif is heard again, followed by a long melismatic passage that leads into Lei Gang's aria, which immediately follows as a response.

Lei Gang's aria has two couplets, which uses the same *xipi* aria-type to convey a sense of continuity. The first phrase is in a new *ban* called *erliu*, in a firm 2/4 beat, as Lei tries to comfort Du Mama, reassuring her that her son has not died in vain. The music intensifies on the second couplet, changing to a 1/4 meter with an increased tempo, following with five consecutive three-syllable patterns. As the emotion builds up to the highest level, Lei Gang unexpectedly bursts into his sentimental final line, "From this day, you are my own white-haired mother." The music ends on a short and strong beat of the tonic, reflecting Lei's determined personality and high moral stand, vowing to take care of Du Mama as his own mother and to avenge her son's death. With this pledge, Lei Gang sets himself up as a hero, accepting the responsibilities typically expected of a traditional heroic male. Du Mama's aria counts a basic aria because of its brevity; Lei Gang follows with his own aria, which is a longer and more complex than Du Mama's, but still brief enough to be considered a basic aria.<sup>527</sup>

After Lei finishes his aria, the remaining members of the League come on stage, and Lei introduces them to Du Mama, saying, "She was Du Shan's mother, but now she is mine." Just then, Du Mama's grandson Xiao Shan comes back, telling her that he saw

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<sup>527</sup> A video clip of Du Mama's and Lei Gang's arias at the beginning of Act I is available at <http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/ofSEJYiL5b0>, at 3:20-4:50, accessed on Sep 26, 2011.

his father's head hanging on a flagpole on the square, with an announcement saying, "Whoever joins the Peasants' Self-Defense League, this will be the way his life ends. His whole family will suffer calamity. We will catch every one of them and kill them all." Lei Gang, in a towering rage, grabs his knife and cries, "Let's go!" But Du Mama stops them and tells Lei Gang to give her the knife. Continuing, she speaks again in rhymed couplets: "The green vines grows along the mountain, the sheep follow the ram. You need to find a leader and stop running blind." Lei listens calmly and then responds with an aria lamenting that his group, in imitating the famous Autumn Harvest Uprising of last September, has gone "three times up and three time down."<sup>528</sup> He admits they need help from the Communist Party if their rebellion is to succeed.

Lei Gang's rhymed monologue is accompanied by music, which is a variation of Lei's motif, which we had previously heard. The music lucidly describes the salient characteristics of Lei Gang, as the variation of the motif rises and falls three times. The first variation starts on D and ends on a lower G, while the second variation starts on A and ends on a lower E. Finally, the third variation, which is essentially the real motif, also starts on A and ends on a lower E. In addition, each time the variation rises higher than its previous move, however, it always falls lower than where it started, with a bare repetition of the last note echoing in a lower octave, vividly intensifying the dramatic effect. Moreover, what is genius here is that it is the third variation that essentially brings the music back to its initial motif. However, the motif ends up repeating itself—that is to say, the last measure of the motif—three times, without changing, vividly depicting Lei

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<sup>528</sup> A Chinese idiom meaning a difficult life.

Gang's current predicament of having no direction and ending up nowhere. At this point, the fourth variation starts and leads to Lei Gang's main aria in *xipi yuan ban*.

This aria counts as one of Lei Gang's main arias not because it contains longer couplets but because it contains more important information describing Lei Gang's inner world, including his setbacks, frustrations, and yearnings. Therefore, the music for this aria, as one can imagine, is notably more complex, as Yu uses a variety of musical ideas to convey the moods and images of the characters. Unlike the previous two arias, which were plain and with almost no connectives between the lines and within the caesurae, this aria is packed with instrumental interludes and postludes, especially during the opening couplet, in which each caesura is faithfully executed with an interlude, and longer connectives are employed at the end of each line. In addition, each line ends with a long melisma (*tuoqiang*), a hallmark of Beijing opera that provides singers with an opportunity to showcase their virtuosity. Although the music for these passages is fixed, as if leaving little freedom for the singer, it still gives a sense of improvisation and more important, it provides abundant opportunity and space for instrumental music.

Unlike the traditional monophonic accompaniment that mimicked vocal lines, the orchestra in this opera plays a much more important role than in previous yangbanxi. At the beginning of this aria, the 14-measure opening phrase involves an eight-measure-long melismatic passage (*tuoqiang*) where the instrumental music takes prominence over the voice, and it blends into an extended eleven-measure interlude after the voice ends. Clearly, the composer's main interest here is to use the orchestra to project a more profound and intangible emotion for the listener.

Indeed, the music is aptly attuned to the text, as Yu draws on the characteristic pitches from different aria types and uses a variety of musical ideas to convey the moods and images of the lyrics. The score is marked as *xipi*, and the opening phrase does indeed use the standard *xipi* cadential pitches. However, instead of beginning on a weak beat, as required of the *xipi* aria-type, the opening phrase begins on the downbeat. This rhythmic pattern of Lei Gang's opening line is forceful and vigorous, mimicking the rhythm of natural speech and revealing Lei Gang's tenacity and resilience as he sings his opening line: "Three times up and three times down, enduring countless storms." In the second line, "Countless brothers have let their blood dye the mountain red," the structure changes, and the phrase begins on a weak-beat, which is the most salient feature of the *xipi* aria-type. However, the music does not end on the designated tonic pitch *do*, but instead it ends on a lower *sol*, which is in fact the cadential pitch for the *fan-xipi* aria-type. The *xipi* aria-type traditionally used to express joyful and enthusiastic emotions, while *fan-xipi* is used to express extreme emotions, especially deep sadness, desperation or despair. Therefore, the change of the aria type here more properly expresses Lei Gang's sadness. However, in the next line, "Being defeated, further longing for the Party," the phrase departs from the designated *fan-xipi* pitch and ends on an unstable note, either for the *xipi* or *erhuang* aria-type. That is to say, the tonality of the phrase is ambiguous. This vocal gesture conveys the emotional status of Lei Gang as feeling lost and not having yet found the Party. Line four, "With no gander, the flock of geese has no place to fly," picks up the pace, as the seven syllables are reduced into two measures, showing his impetuous and eagerness. Contrary to the previous vague and restless short phrase, line five, "The dark night is waiting for the light," is set on a broader and longer

phrase occupying sixteen measures in a clear *erhuang* aria-type, evoking a sense of endless night, as if one were longing for the daylight. The first line of the final couplet, “Ah, Party, you are the lighthouse,” is delivered in a manner similar to recitative, accompanied by Lei’s motif. The last line, “Where are you?” is constructed syllabically in the same vein as the previous recitative, and it comes to rest on a stable tonic pitch of the *erhuang* aria-type in free meter, revealing Lei Gang’s determination to find the “Party.”

In this aria, Yu has masterfully matched the music to the lyrics. Although he violates the convention of not mixing aria-types, he does so for good reason. By using the emotionality already associated with each aria-type, he is able to express shifts of feelings much more succinctly than he could have if he had followed convention. In other words, Yu breaks the rules intentionally to extract deeper meaning from the music. Furthermore, the changes of tonality enhance Lei Gang’s image and depicts his psychological condition, which was not explicitly contained in the lyrics.

The extent to which Yu overhauled *Azalea Mountain* can be best discerned by comparing a sound clip from the 1964 version with the 1972 version Yu composed. The early version is very similar in character to traditional Beijing opera. Notice how the aria follows the formulaic pattern of prescribed cadential pitches and is accompanied by a small ensemble. Yu’s 1974 version exhibits rich musical sonority, including harmony, counterpoint, and the interweaving of motifs into the melody.<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>529</sup> Act I can be viewed at <http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/ofSEJYiL5b0>, accessed on Sep 26, 2011. Lei Gang’s theme begins at 0:47; arias between Lei Gang and Du Mama, at 3:20-4:50, Lei Gang’s three modified motifs at 7:36, and Lei Gang’s second aria at 8:27.

## Musical Analysis: Act II

*Azalea Mountain* is unusual among operas in that most important character in the story does not even appear until Act II. At the end of Act I, we learn that a Communist party representative is about to be executed, yet we learn nothing about this character, not even the gender. As the curtain opens for Act II, we see Lei Gang and the members of the Self-Defense League disguised as peasants and street hawkers, positioning themselves and exchanging secret signals.

With the announcement of “Bring out the Communist!” we hear Ke Xiang’s theme, heralded by horns in a fanfare-like bright unison. Ke Xiang’s theme leads into the first line of her opening aria, which she singing from offstage: “The proletariat fears not the monstrous blizzard.” The phrase ends with a long melismatic passage and is followed by thunderous percussion as the guards come onstage. Ke Xiang’s theme rises again, played by the whole orchestra, evoking a sense of resolution after the chaotic percussion sound that accompanied Ke Xiang’s stunning entrance.

To the surprise of all, we see the prisoner is a woman, not a man. Poised like a statue is Ke Xiang, a beautiful young woman with fierce eyes. She is dressed in blue pants and a white tunic that is torn and bloodstained; her hands are bound in chains. She continues her aria, singing, “I will shed my blood for freedom, I will fight as long as I live, I am filled with elated spirit.”

To be sure, Ke Xiang is not the first heroic figure in yangbanxi to face execution. In fact, this scene is clearly reminiscent of Li Yuhe’s execution scene in *The Red Lantern*. We even hear the familiar socialist anthem “L’Internationale” as Ke Xiang is led to the gallows. Yet Ke Xiang is not the type to surrender meekly to her fate. In perhaps

the most memorable and innovative stage presentation ever created for yangbanxi, Ke Xiang and the guards break into a choreographed scene that integrates all four basic Beijing opera performance techniques, singing (*chang*), recitation (*nian*), acting (*zuo*), and martial arts (*da*). In traditional Beijing opera, performers used the long flowing sleeves of their gowns, known as “water sleeves” (*shui xiu*) to express emotion. The sleeves of Ke Xiang’s tunic fit snugly about her wrists, so instead she uses the chains draped from her arms as if they were “water sleeves.” Throughout the rest of the aria, her singing is brilliantly enhanced by a carefully choreographed sequence of elaborate dance and still poses (*liangxiang*), a traditional performance technique that freezes action to create a tableau effect. All together, the spectacle lasts nearly six minutes.



Figure 26. Ke Xiang theme.<sup>530</sup>

A close examination of the music can be illuminating. The most important and innovative component of this scene is the opening theme for Ke Xiang, which is shown in Figure 26. As we can see, the theme contains two phrases separated by the dotted bar line. Clearly, the second phrase is a restatement of the first at fifth higher. Unlike the case with the previous Lei Gang and Du Mama motifs, it is better to refer to this phrase as a theme instead of a motif because, as we will see later, it contains four separate motifs, often occurs separately at various locations throughout the opera, in both arias and

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<sup>530</sup> Renmin yinyue chubanshe bianjibu. [Editorial Board of People’s Music Press]. *Jingju yangbanxi zhuyao changduan jicui* [The Major Arias from the Model Operas]. (Beijing: People’s Music Press, 2002), p. 203. Renotated from the original cipher notation.

instrumental passages, and each is associated with different emotions and symbolic meanings. Figure 27 shows the breakdown of the four motifs that are combined to form the Ke Xiang theme.



Figure 27. Breakdown of the four motifs making up the Ke Xiang theme.<sup>531</sup>



Figure 28. The standard Beijing opera *erhuang* prelude.<sup>532</sup>

A careful inspection of the Ke Xiang theme reveals that it is closely related to the standard Beijing opera *erhuang* prelude, as shown in Figure 28. Comparing the Ke Xiang theme of Figure 26 and the standard Beijing opera *erhuang* prelude of Figure 28, we can see a clear resemblance between the two. In particular, the shape of their openings and ending are almost the same. In other words, motif “a” uses the same pitches of the first measure of the *erhuang* prelude. Likewise, motif “b” utilizes the keynotes from the second measure of the *erhuang* prelude. Motif “c,” on the other hand, looks very different from the third measure of *erhuang* prelude; however, they both emphasize the same pitch “sol”, which is D in motif “c” and G in m. 3 of the *erhuang* prelude. Motif “d” and fourth

<sup>531</sup> Renmin yinyue chubanshe bianjibu. [Editorial Board of People’s Music Press]. *Jingju yangbanxi zhuyao changduan jicui* [The Major Arias from the Model Operas]. (Beijing: People’s Music Press, 2002), p. 203. Renotated from the original cipher notation.

<sup>532</sup> Liu Guojie, *Xipi erhuang yinyue gailun* [Survey of Xipi Erhuang Music] (Shanghai: Shanghai yinyue chubanshe, 1997), p. 172. Renotated from the original cipher notation.



measure of the *erhuang* prelude both end on eighth notes *la do*, which are E G in motif “c” and A C in m. 4 of the *erhuang* prelude.

There are additional similarities between the Ke Xiang theme and the *erhuang* prelude as well. First, they both have a narrow range within an octave. Second, they are both flexible, as we know the *erhuang* interlude could be expanded, reduced, and varied, according to different *ban* and situations. Likewise, we will see that Ke Xiang’s motifs are also flexible and can be broken into smaller motifs.

There are also clear differences between the Ke Xiang theme and the *erhuang* prelude. The first difference has to do with tonality. The *erhuang* prelude clearly bears characteristics of the Chinese *shang* mode, based on the pentatonic scale of *re mi sol la do re*. The Ke Xiang theme, however, points to the characteristic of a major mode. While the main pitches project its identities connected with the *erhuang* mode, a close scrutiny reveals a clear major triad is built in the theme, as indicated by the first note of each motif, and especially by the sharp of the fourth degree C#, as *erhuang* normally will not include C, much less a C#. Alternatively, it could also be seen as I (a, b)-V (c)-I (d) progression. At any rate, the character of the major mode makes the theme sound much brighter than the *erhuang* mode could produce. The second difference between the two has to do with the significance of each passage. The *erhuang* prelude has little meaning associated with it; it is simply a standard musical passage used by the orchestra to lead into an *erhuang* aria. The Ke Xiang theme, on the other hand, is associated quickly with the heroic role model, with new layers of meaning continually being added on as the opera progresses. It is in this sense that the Ke Xiang theme is like a Wagnerian leitmotif.

The score of the Ke Xiang theme shown in Figure 26 has little emotional significance on its own. However, as it is repeated through the opera with varied instrumentation and altered recurrence, and when it is combined with vocal lines and other motifs, the psychological significance of the theme is gradually revealed. In the end, this musical passage represents and describes the character of Ke Xiang, who is revealed to possess wit, courage, and confidence.

In Ke Xiang's opening aria of Act II, her theme is used mostly in its entirety, first as the prelude to the aria, and then twice as instrumental interlude during the aria. The theme creates a positive, energetic, and heroic image with its fast rhythmic force of dotted notes and the prevailing sonority of a consonant G major triad, both melodically and harmonically. In addition, there are a few places where the short component motifs are used alone. In the first section, the opening phrase "The proletariat" is built on Ke Xiang's theme, which is a real imitation of motif "a" and a modified imitation of motif "b." In the second section, the long melisma of the second phrase, "I am filled with elated spirit," includes the motif "c." In the third section when Ke Xiang sings about her "mission" to Azalea Mountain, motif "b" is used for that word. And in the final section, the motif "d" is used when she sings the verse, "I will change the execution field into a battle ground, talk the revolution, and refute the Nationalists."

In sum, the motifs that make up the Ke Xiang theme are like motivic seeds. They will recur in various guises throughout the opera in both aria and instrumental music, become associated with various emotions and symbolic meanings. For convenience, these figures are identified in as motif *a b c d*. Motif "a" becomes associated with the proletariat and occurs whenever the working class is mentioned. Motif "b" comes to

represent Ke Xiang's mission to Azalea Mountain and expresses her confidence and dedication to the cause. Motif "c" occurs through the opera to express bitter feelings, particularly with regards to empathy for the oppressed. Finally, motif "d" symbolizes victory. Thus, these motifs, combined to form the Ke Xiang theme, work together to portray the heroine as a complex character who is driven by her dedication to the revolutionary cause and confident of its eventual triumph.

### **Act III: Aria 1**

Act III takes place several days later. Back at the Self-Defense League hideout, some members are divvying up the spoils of a raid on Du Shedan's men but are stopped by a soldier who announces a new rule from Ke Xiang that they must distribute the spoils among the poor, not line their own pockets. Irritated, the members protest that they do not take orders from women, and one of the members, who is drunk, waves a pistol in Ke Xiang's face and taunts her. But Ke Xiang deftly disarms the belligerent man, thereby earning the respect of the other members of the Self-Defense League. Explaining that she too is from an oppressed family, she begins one of the most memorable arias in the opera, "I'm from Anyuan":

1      家住安源萍水头，

Jiazhu Anyuan Pingshuitou,

I'm from Anyuan Pingshuitou,

2      三代挖煤做马牛。

Sandai wamei zuomaniu.

We're all miners and work like beasts.

3 汗水流尽**难**糊口，

Hanshui liujin nanhukou,

With the sweat of our brow we barely get by,

4 地**狱**里度**岁**月， 不**识**冬夏与春秋。

Diyuli dusuiyue, bushi dongxia yuchunqiu.

Below the earth we pass the years, never knowing what season it is.

5 **闹**罢**工**， 我父兄怒斥**工头** 英勇**搏**斗，

Nao bagong, wo fuxiong nuchi gongtou yingyong bodou,

When we went on strike, my father and brothers fought like heroes,

6 壮志未酬， 遭**枪**杀， 血**溅**荒丘。

Zhuangshi weichou, zaoqiangsha, xuejian huangqiu.

But in the end, the ground was covered with their blood.

7 那**贼****矿**主心比炭黑又下**毒**手，

Nazei kuangzhu xinbi tanhei you xiadu shou,

That evil mine owner, with his heart black as coal,

8 一把火**烧**死了我**亲**娘弟妹， 一家数口尸骨**难**收。

Yiba huo shaosile wo qinniangeime, yijia shukou shigu nanshou.

He burned our home, and not a trace of my family remained.

9 秋收**暴**动**风**雷**骤**，

Qiushou baodong fengleizhou,

The Harvest Rebellion was like a thunderstorm,

10 明灯照亮我心头。

Mingdeng zhaoliang woxintou.

A bright light illuminated my thoughts.

11 才懂得翻身必须枪在手，

Cai dongde fanshen bixu qiangzaishou,

I finally understood, freedom comes from the barrel of a gun,

12 参军，入党， 要为那天下的穷人争自由。

Canjun, rudang, yaowei natianxiade qiongren zheng ziyou.

I joined the army and the Party to fight for the freedom of China's poor.

13 工友和农友，一条革命路上走，

Gongyou he nongyou, yitiao geming lushang zou,

Workers and peasants, walk the same revolutionary road,

14 不灭豺狼誓不休！

Bumie cailang shibuxiu!

We pledge not to stop till we've wiped the tyrants out!

The aria is labeled as *fan-erhuang*, which is an aria-type commonly used to express bitter and sad emotions. However, the musical vocabulary of the aria stems from extended *fan-erhuang* and is free from the tonal restraint of the designated mode. The

aria is introduced with a prelude (mm. 1-3), which is a variant of the Ke Xiang theme, set in the lower register of E major, in a moderate tempo. A comparison of the original theme, presented in Figure 29, and the prelude, presented in Figure 30, shows that three motifs (*a*, *b*, *c*) were utilized and woven into the aria and instrumental part, marked by three different shapes. The rhythmically augmented motifs “a” and “d” not only sets a mood of reminiscence but also helps to establish the tonality. Especially, the prolonged G# (second note on m.1) makes its major mode much clear than the original theme, as the prominent pitches in the prelude (see B, G#, E, G#, E on m.1) clearly project the tonic triad of E major. Not surprisingly, these notes also serve as the cadential pitches; for example, the first segment ends on E (m. 5), first phrase ends on G# (m. 8), and the second phrase ends on B (m. 14, not shown in the above score), which indicating that these tones are on the highest level of the structure.

Yet, the aria not only has a strong Beijing opera flavor but also sounds very natural, as the melodic contour of the music fits the tonal patterns of the spoken language so well. For example, in speech the first syllable, *jia*, is spoken with a high even tone, and the second syllable, *zhu*, is spoken with a falling tone; this tonal contour was matched by the descending pitches of G#-F#-E. Likewise, the low falling-rising tone of the sixth syllable *shui* is reflected in the contour of notes B, E, and B, in which the first B (b1 at m.7) was borrowed from the preceding syllable *ping*. In addition, *shui*, as sung in melismatic fashion, adeptly integrating motif “c,” (see circled B-A#-G#, m. 7), which is reinforced by the instrumental accompaniment, and again, echoed in next measure in the instrumental interlude (m. 8, circled). Furthermore, the poetic feature of the first couplet, which is seven syllables per line, is also captured by a symmetrical phrase of 5 measures

each. The extensive recycling of all the Ke Xiang motifs makes this aria quite remarkable. As seen in the Figure 30, in the first five measures of this aria, three motifs have been used and the motif *c* has been repeated four times, in addition to the opening prelude, which is a modification of the entire Ke Xiang theme.

In spite of the exquisite craftsmanship in weaving these motifs seamlessly into the fabric of the music, the meaning of the lyrics is still projected clearly. Indeed, the music enhances the audiences understanding of the lyrics, first by mimicking natural speech contours, and second by enhancing the meaning of the lyrics with musical motifs that have already taken on emotional significance in the minds of the listeners. In the end, the conciseness, the rhythmic and harmonic simplicity, and the relatively lower vocal range of this first phrase, all work together to create an image of the protagonist, a party cadre, who is dependable and trustworthy from the very beginning.<sup>533</sup>



Figure 29. Kiang theme broken into composite motifs, repeated from Figure 26.

The aria “I’m From Anyuan” exemplifies Yu Huiyong’s approach to Beijing opera reform, maintaining the essential character of the art form while freeing adopting new techniques to strengthen its power of expression. In this aria, there are clear traditional Beijing opera elements, in particular in terms of its overall structure. Yu makes use of the traditional aria-type, *fan-erhuang*, to convey an overall sense of

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<sup>533</sup> A video of the aria “I’m from Anyuan” from the opera *Azalea Mountain* is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DaSO74FM--M&feature=related>, accessed on Sep 26, 2011. The segment extending from 0:15 to 0:45 will be shown at this point in the presentation. The Ke Xiang theme starts at 0:15 and ends at 0:23.

poignancy and bitter sorrow. Furthermore, shifts in the singer's emotions are reflected in the score through changes in *ban*, in accordance with convention. Thus, on the surface at least this aria has a very traditional structure.

## 21. 家 住 安 源

京剧《杜鹃山》柯 湘唱

【反二黄中三眼】  
慢起

Figure 30. Excerpt from the aria “I’m from Anyuan” from the yangbanxi *Azalea Mountain*. Compare this with the original Ke Xiang theme, presented in Figure 29.<sup>534</sup>

Although Yu uses traditional forms, he pushes them beyond their conventional boundaries, welding a tight bond between the meaning conveyed in the lyrics and the emotion conveyed in the music. The aria begins with a *ban* known as *zhongsanyan*, a

<sup>534</sup> Zhu Weiying, ed., *Xiqu zuoqu jifa* [Techniques of Theater Music Composition] (Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe, 2004), p. 243.



moderate tempo that clearly conveys sorrow and anguish Ke Xiang feels as she reflects on the loss of her family. Section two then shifts to *yuanban*, doubling the speed of section one to portray her family's heroic fight during the miners' strike.<sup>535</sup> However, in the end of this section, when Ke Xiang describes the demise of her family: "Not a trace of my family remained," the music breaks into the unmeasured meter (*sanban*) for the last two syllables. Here, the whole orchestra stops and the sheer voice carry great significance through pure difference of pitches, changes of dynamics, and shades of vocal timbre. Ke Xiang's unaccompanied halting voice is extended with a long melismatic passage on the syllable *nan*, which creates an immediate dramatic effect of deep emotion, evoking the sound of weeping and sobbing. The subtle use of the unmeasured meter creates the effect of improvisatory ornamentation and the pause before the last syllable establishes a moment of static sensation that allows the listener to absorb, reflect, and contemplate the implications of the event. The delayed final syllable *shou*, suggests that Ke Xiang is choking on the unbearable pain of losing her entire family.

Another innovation occurs in section five, where Yu modified the traditional *ban* known as *liushui* (literally, "flowing water"). Determined to avenge her people's oppression, Ke Xiang steels her nerves and sets out to join the Communist fight to liberate the oppressed people of her land. Here, the tempo of *liushui* aptly reflects this new determination. Yet, in addition to using the *liushui ban* in a fast and strong 1/4 meter, Yu set the lyrics in a manner of recitative that is similar to Western opera, to convey a sense of anticipation and the excitement of a united force of workers and

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<sup>535</sup> Literally meaning "basic beat," *yuanban* is traditionally used to begin an aria, in a sense serving as a starting point from which to modulate to other *ban* expressing different emotional nuances.

peasants fighting for the same revolutionary cause. As the heroine delivers the final lines in a determined spoken voice, the orchestra continues to play in a pattern of sixteenth and dotted sixteenth notes that highlight the determination and urgency of Ke Xiang's call to revolution: "Workers and peasants, walk the same revolutionary road, We pledge not to stop till we've wiped the tyrants out!" Thus, the meaning of the lyrics is enlivened by the hasty recitative and enforced by the instrumental accompaniment playing an even faster elaboration of the recitative music.

In sum, the aria presents five strongly contrasting ideas in a clear through-composed form of five sections. The structure of the aria displays a hybrid form that incorporates the features of Western opera, art song, and Beijing opera. For example, the first section of the aria carries the characteristics of the the Beijing opera *fan-erhuang* aria-type, but it also displays Western influence. For example, it has the clear tonality of E major, with first two phrases ending on G and B. The third phrase ends on F#, a dominant chord, and the last phrase ends on the downbeat E, with a clear harmonic progression of I6-I, V7-I.

Yu Huiyong also swept away many Beijing opera conventions in the composition of this aria. First, the phrases do not follow the order of cadential pitches typical of Beijing opera arias. Second, Yu does not make frequent use of interludes at caesurae in the lyrics, again contradictory to standard Beijing opera practice. Instead, he uses a compositional technique known as superposition, in which inner-voice tones in the instrumental accompaniment are shifted above the principal vocal line at the end of a contrapuntal relationship with the voice line. He also uses a variety of symmetrical

phrases (1 and 2) and asymmetrical phrases (3 and 4), in contrast to the rigid couplet structure of traditional Beijing opera.

### Act III: Aria 2

After Ke Xiang finishes singing the aria “I’m from Anyuan,” soldiers of the Self-Defense League bring in Tian Dajiang, one of Du Shedan’s servants, whom they have captured. Following the old rule of the Self-Defense League, they are going to give Tian a sound beating, to vent their anger at his master. But Ke Xiang intervenes with the aria “It’s a Bitter Pill to Swallow,” reminding them that this man is just as oppressed as they are. The lyrics are as follows.

“It’s a Bitter Pill to Swallow”

1 普天下受苦人同仇公愤,

Putianxia shoukuren tongchou gongfen,

Throughout the world the oppressed masses suffer indignation,

2 黄连苦胆味难分。

Huanglian kudan weinanfen,

It’s a bitter pill to swallow,

3 他推车,你抬轿,同怀一腔恨,

Tatuiche, nitaijiao, tonghuai yiqianghen,

Whether you push a cart or carry a load, there’s hatred in your heart,

4 同恨人间路不平。

Tonghen renjian lubuping.

You hate the injustice of this world.

5 可曾见他衣衫破处留血印,

Ke cengjian ta yishan pochu liuxueyin,

Just look at his tattered, blood-stained clothes,

6 怎忍心旧伤痕上又添新伤痕?

Zenrenxin jiu shanghen shang you tian xin shanghen?

How can you lay new scars atop old ones?

Like the previous aria, this aria is written in the aria-type known as *fan-erhuang*, but is in a faster tempo. A new variant of Ke Xiang's theme serves as the prelude, as shown in Figure 31. Just as was the case with the previous aria, the opening of this aria is based on a version of the Ke Xiang theme that has been modified and metrically expended from the original version. It begins on the last two notes of motif "a," and then motif "b" is modified with dotted notes. Motif "d" is omitted, and the theme ends on an unexpected B on a subdominant chord (iv of F# minor), creating a sense of expectation, but more importantly, setting the theme to a minor mode.

The structure of the aria is also through-composed. However, it bears a distinctive characteristic of Chinese folk music known as *yu yao wei* (literally, "a fish biting its tail"), which means that each phrase starts with the same note that the previous phrase ended on. Therefore, the form is flexible and the melody is memorable. In addition, it enhances the narrative nature of the content, instead of demanding or challenging the

group members. In spite of that, the aria has two clear sections, marked by the change of the *ban*. The first section is the opening phrase, made of the first line, “Throughout the world the oppressed masses suffer indignation,” which becomes the summation of the entire aria. The line consists of ten syllables, which Yu breaks into two segments. The first segment consists of six syllables and is set in the free meter (*sanban*); this segment is further separated into two groups. The first three syllables, meaning “throughout the world,” is sung syllabic, using the first three notes from motif “b” (A-C-B). The next three syllables, corresponding to “the oppressed masses,” is broken into a long melismatic passage, emphasizing the last two syllables *ku* and *ren*, which starts with the motif “c” (see m.4, E-D#-C#-E) and ends on a long A (See Figure 32, m. 4), the last note of the motif “b.” Again, these two motifs are echoed in the instrumental interlude (mm. 5-7). For the next four syllables, the music returns to *yuanban* in 2/4 meter (m. 8) and ends the phrase on a half cadence (V7), which is unresolved and calls for continuation.

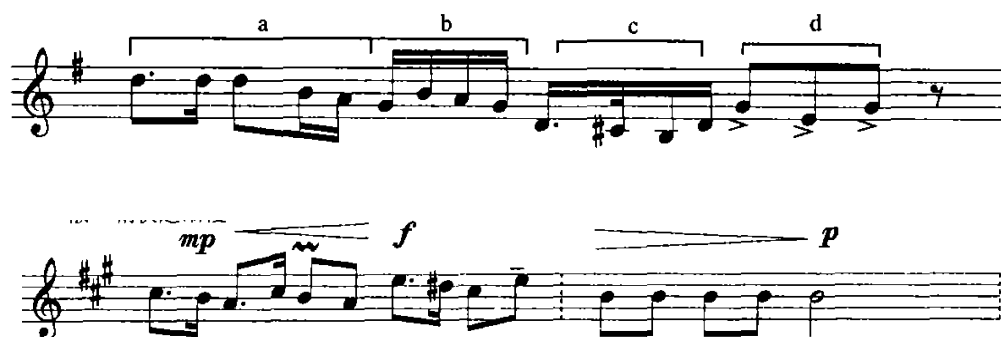


Figure 31. Compare the Ke Xiang theme on the top with the opening of “It’s a Bitter Pill to Swallow” on the bottom. Compare this with the Ke Xiang theme, presented on the top line.<sup>536</sup>

<sup>536</sup> Renmin yinyue chubanshe bianjibu. [Editorial Board of People’s Music Press]. *Jingju yangbanxi zhuyao changduan jicui* [The Major Arias from the Model Operas]. (Beijing: People’s Music Press, 2002), p. 202 and p. 211.

(柯湘白):“雷刚同志!”

*mp* *f* *p*

3 【反二黄原板】慢起渐快 (金)

*mp* *mf* *f*

普 天 下 受 苦 人

6 中快

*mf* *f*

同 仇 共 愤,

(三大件)



Figure 32. The first two pages of the score “It’s a Bitter Pill to Swallow” from Act III of *Azalea Mountain*.<sup>537</sup>

After a long interlude, the music changes to a new *ban* called *erliu* (literally “two six,” it is slower than *yuanban*). *Erliu* is originally an aria type associated only with *xipi*,

<sup>537</sup> Zhu Weiying, ed., *Xiqu zuoqu jifa* [Techniques of Theater Music Composition] (Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe, 2004), p. 252-253.

often used to give a concise narration of events.<sup>538</sup> However, it is adapted in *erhuang* here, as it fits this new section perfectly. Following the “fish biting tail” rule, the phrase starts on F#, using the same note that the last phrase ends, and it ends the phrase on B.

Throughout the aria, this rule is largely followed. However, the next phrase starts on C#, instead of the ending note B. Yet, there are other ways to explain it. One is, it could be seen that there are two notes C# and B used (representing “*huangli*” and “*kudan*”, these are well-known bitter-taste ingredients used in Chinese medicine) at the end of the phrase, as the grace note C# is attached to B, which, sure enough, C# and B are the notes are the two notes that the next phrase starts with. (Alternatively, it could be seen that the phrase ends on B, and the next phrase starts on C#.) Since B and C# are next to each other, it could be meant that these two notes are hard to tell them apart. Furthermore, Yu used the modified motif “c” (E-D#-E-D natural-C#), embellishing the syllable *nan* (difficult), the chromaticism and descending motion distinctly exemplified the meaning of the lyrics *weinanfen* (Literally, cannot tell the difference).

Comparing the aria “It’s a Bitter Pill to Swallow” with the previous aria “I’m from Anyuan,” one can see Yu’s mastery of a personal musical language that represents a fusion of diverse Chinese music styles and consistent application of Western techniques and elements. Although both arias are labeled as the *fan-erhuang* aria-type, “Pill” is in minor mode, but “Anyuan” is in major mode.<sup>539</sup> Not surprisingly, the alteration of the tonality is shaped by the harmonic language and modification of the original Ke Xiang theme. The two main arias of Act III, “I’m from Anyuan” and “It’s a Bitter Pill to

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<sup>538</sup> See Nancy Guy, *Peking Opera and Politics in Taiwan* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2005), p. 172.

<sup>539</sup> Aria “It’s a Bitter Pill to Swallow” is in a Dorian-like Chinese mode known as *shangdiao* (*re mi sol la do*) with *re* as tonic, which is the standard mode for male voices for *erhuang* aria-type.



Swallow,” complement each other in a yin-yang relationship. With the first aria in a major mode and the second aria in a minor mode, the two create a balanced effect, combining melodic variety and continuity in the music on the one hand, and highlighting the difference and connection in the text on the other hand. It is no doubt the reciprocal relationship between these two arias that make them the benchmark of modern Beijing opera excellence.<sup>540</sup>

The Act III ends on the note that Lei Gang recalls how he too had been oppressed, suffering along with the great masses at the hands of the wealthy. He also recognizes that he has not separated right from wrong, mistaking class brothers as class enemies, and, regretting his past behavior, begs Tian Dajiang’s forgiveness. In response, Tian declares his loyalty to the Self-Defense League. The act concludes with Lei Gang admitting that he did not know the law (*wangfa*) of the CCP, and he declares that they will all follow the advice of the Party representative from now on.

## Act V

Among all the arias in the *Azalea Mountain*, there is only one core aria, which appears in Act V, where the dramatic conflict reaches its climax. To fully appreciate this aria, it is helpful to know what happened earlier in this act before she sings.

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<sup>540</sup> These two songs are among the most popular in yangbanxi and are among the frequently ordered songs in Karaoke Box. Interview with an anonymous person who works at a Karaoke chain store in February 2011. The Karaoke versions can be found at the youtube, for example, “It’s a Bitter Pill to Swallow” can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gl8pH2kKIM&feature=related>, accessed on September 30, 2011.

To smoke out the Self-Defense League, the evil warlord Du Shedan has sent his men to raid the village of Azalea Mountain, ordering them to set it ablaze and capture Lei Gang's adopted mother, Du Mama. Lei Gang wants to rescue her, but Ke Xiang warns him it is a trap. Provoked by Wen Qijiu, Lei Gang brings a few men with him down the mountain, falling of course, right into Du Shedan's trap. Meanwhile, Wen Qijiu tries to incite members of the Self-Defense League to defy Ke Xiang and rescue Lei Gang.

Pursued by enemies outside and challenged by inside enemies (Wu Qijiu and his clan), Ke Xiang is confronted with a life-or-death decision to save this confused and restless peasant army out of the crisis. This aria captured Ke Xiang's inner psychological activity, in which she ruminates over the difficulties facing her and the League now that Lei Gag has gone to almost certain death. Yet, as the aria draws to a close, she reflects on the exhortations of Chairman Mao and finds new resolve to continue her mission.

1 乱云飞松涛吼群山奔踊。

Luanyunfei songtaohou qunshan benyong.

Storm clouds gather on the horizon, the trees rustle in the wind.

2 枪声急军情紧，肩头压力重千斤。

Qiangshengji, junqingjin, jiantou yali zhongqianjin,

The pressures mount like a thousand pounds upon my shoulders,

3 团团烈火烧我心。

Tuantuan liehuo shaowoxin!

The blazing inferno around me burns me to the core!

4 杜妈妈遇危难毒刑受尽。

Dumama yuweinan duxing shoujin,

Du Mama suffers at the hands of the warlord,

5 雷队长入虎口他九死一生。

Leiduizhang ruhoukou jiushi yisheng.

And Lei Gang is caught in a web he cannot escape from.

6 战士们急于救应，人心浮动，难以平静。

Zhanshimen jiyu qiuying, renxin fudong, nanyi pingjing,

Fellow soldiers are restless, eager to go to the rescue,

7 温其久一反常态，推波助澜，是何居心。

Wenqijiu yifanchangtai, tuibo zhulan, shihe juxin?

What evil plan does Wen Qijiu have in his heart?

8 毒蛇胆施诡计险恶阴狠。

Dushedan shiguiji xian'e yinhen,

Du Shedan has set his evil trap,

9 须提防内生隐患，腹背受敌，危及全军。

Xudifang neisheng yinhuang, fubei shoudi, weiji quanjun,

With enemies to our front and back, the whole army is in danger,

10 面临着胜败存亡，我的心沉重。

Mianlingzhe shengbai cunwang, wodexin chenzhong.

Confronted with a life-or-death decision, my heart is heavy.

(Here the aria is interrupted.)

FEMALE CHORUS:

My heart is heavy, I look out the sky, thinking of Wujing.<sup>541</sup>

KE XIANG:

If only I could see the red flag among the mountains, Mao pointing the  
way, his glory shining on earth and in heaven.

(Here the aria resumes. Mixed chorus omitted here)

11 想起您，力量倍增，从容镇定，

Xiangqinin, liliang beizeng, conrong zhending,

When I think of you, my strength redoubles, and I am calm,

12 依靠党，依靠群众，坚无不摧，战无不胜，

Yikaodang, yikao qunzhong, jianwubucui, zhanwubusheng,

Rely on the Party, rely on the people, and we are invincible,

13 定能够力挽狂澜挫匪军，壮志凌云！

Dingnenggou liwanguanglan zuofeijun, zhuangzhi lingyun!

For sure we will win against the bandit, and our great goal will be  
reached!

This eight-minute aria, known by its first three words, “*Luan yun fei*” or “Storm  
Clouds Gather,” represents the most notable example of Yu Huiyong’s maturing  
compositional style. From the very beginning of his career, Yu Huiyong advocated for

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<sup>541</sup> Wujing refers to the Jinggangshan region where the story of *Azalea Mountain* takes place. Mao and his army were located in that region at the time the story takes place.

the integration of new compositional techniques and musical practices to strengthen Beijing opera, and we have see him applying this approach in all of his yangbanxi works. Yet this aria in many ways represents the pinnacle of his innovative approach. In “Storm Clouds Gather,” we see increased application of new compositional techniques and vocabulary as well as an unprecedented mixture of performing styles.

As Yu increased his integration of Chinese and Western operatic practice at all levels, he pushed the boundaries of convention while maintaining the essence of Beijing opera. On the surface, the aria follows the conventional Beijing opera structure together with its designated tempo; for example, the aria starts with a free meter *daoban* (leading beat), which is followed by a quick tempo *huilong* (returning dragon) in 1/4 meter, and then it continues in a slow 4/4 meter *manban*, a 2/4 meter *yuanban*, a 1/4 meter *duoban*, ending with a free meter *sanban*.<sup>542</sup> But a detailed scrutiny of the score indicates that this aria is not simply a musical rendition based on the lyrics; instead, it is an organic combination of orchestra, lyrics, and aria. Especially, as we will discuss later, this structure leaves more space for the orchestra.<sup>543</sup> Therefore, the link between music and lyrics is developed further in this aria by adjusting the text and integrating new techniques and music styles. In this aria, the shift from one section to another is not only indicated by a change in *ban*, as would be expected in traditional Beijing opera, but also accompanied by a change of tonality and music style. Thus, the structure of the coherent

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<sup>542</sup> *Daoban* is a single introductory phrase that opens the aria, taking half (the first line) of the first couplet. It is usually followed by *huilong*, for the second half of the same couplet. Its structure is based on the first phrase of *yuanban*.

<sup>543</sup> Yang confirmed that Yu cut off nearly half of the original couplets, so there will be more room for the orchestra. In addition, Yu has made many revisions to the overall structure as well as the details of the lyrics structure, often making changes on the spot during rehearsal. Interview with Yang Chunxia in Beijing in August 2009.

sections seems logical, even inevitable, as it is closely associated with rapidly changing events and emotions. For example, the first couplet, “Storm clouds gather on the horizon, the trees rustle in the wind; the sound of pistol, the crisis situation, the pressures mount like a thousand pounds upon my shoulders,” is divided into two sections. The transition from *daoban* in section one to *huilong* in section marks a shift in mood on the part of the singer; additionally, this transition is marked by a change in tonality and, even more remarkably, by a change in music style. As it turns out, the music vocabulary for the *huilong* section is not based on Beijing opera but rather is borrowed from the regional Huai opera.<sup>544</sup> This indicates that Yu was not specifically seeking to westernize Beijing opera but rather to integrate new forms from whatever source so long as they could be useful. In other words, he has created a new version of *huilong*.

The aria is sung by a female heroine; however, the cadential pitches used in the opening phrase (*daoban*) are typical of the heroic older male *laosheng* role type of nineteenth-century Beijing opera. Indeed, such features have appeared in early yangbanxi, which makes the first section of “Storm Clouds Gather” reminiscent of an aria sung by Li Yuhe, the hero of *The Red Lantern*. However, “Storm Clouds” makes use of a much wider vocal range, as it crosses the gender boundary, in addition to the frequent dynamic changes and more complicated melismatic passages. Yet, despite these male features, the singer deliberately delivers the passage in a female vocal style based on the singing method of the famous *dan* female-impersonator Chen Yanqiu.<sup>545</sup> In addition, while the opening line is structured in a very traditional style, with three caesurae

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<sup>544</sup> Interview with Gong Guotai in Beijing in July 2008.

<sup>545</sup> Performer Yang Chunxia had originally studied the method of Chen’s rival Mei Lanfang, and she had to learn the method of Chen Yanqiu specifically for this part. Interview with Yang Chunxia in Beijing in August 2009.

breaking the line into segments of three, three, two and two syllables respectively, the segments are not filled by the unified conventional instrumental connectives. Instead, all the interludes in this section are created in a unified fashion through the same compositional technique (imitation), and used the same material of the inverted motif “c” of the Ke Xiang theme. Thus, the music for the opening section not only displays a hybrid feature of a mixed operatic styles but also indicates a novel musical style that integrates Western techniques with conventional forms to represent the new socialist women as heroic role model, who is no less than their male counterpart.

Yu creates a continuous musical flow that depicts Ke Xiang’s surging emotion through frequent changes of tempo, dynamics, and orchestra color. As the aria is a soliloquy, one certainly expects, by this point in the opera, to hear her theme in this piece as well, and indeed Yu makes extensive use of the Ke Xiang theme, as a whole and the four motifs that it comprises, through compositional techniques such as thematic expansion, transposition, inversion, and repetition. Much of the music, both vocal and orchestral, is woven from recurring motives that are associated with particular people, such as Ke Xiang herself, Du Mama, Lei Gang, and the soldiers, enhances the text with which they appear. Therefore, in addition to using the Ke Xiang motives in this aria, Yu Huiyong also uses other motifs to bring unity to the piece and to bind it tightly to the rest of the opera. For example, when Ke Xiang mentions Lei Gang or Du Mama in the aria, we also hear the Lei Gang or Du Mama motif. Thus, the emotions we have already developed towards these characters are recalled, and we feel for them in much the same way as Ke Xiang feels for them. In this way, Yu Huiyong has fully integrated the music

with the lyrics, allowing the music to carry emotional significance beyond that which the words alone could convey.

The image displays a musical score for the aria "Storm Clouds Gather." It is divided into two main sections. The top section features a single melodic line on a treble clef staff, marked with four segments labeled 'a', 'b', 'c', and 'd'. The bottom section consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system includes a treble and bass clef staff with dynamic markings of *mf* and *ff*, and a section labeled "(全奏)". The second system also has a treble and bass clef staff, with a tempo marking of "渐慢" (Ritardando) and a dynamic marking of *p*. The bottom system includes a treble clef staff with a tempo marking of "渐快" (Accelerando) and a dynamic marking of *mp*. The score is written in a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature.

Figure 33. The score on the bottom shows the opening of the aria "Storm Clouds Gather." Compare this with the Ke Xiang theme, presented on the up.<sup>546</sup>

<sup>546</sup> Zhu Weiying, ed., *Xiqu zuoqu jifa* [Techniques of Theater Music Composition] (Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe, 2004), p.259.



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渐慢 *p* 原速

*f* (加琵琶)

53

加鼓 (X X X X 0 X X)

266

57

0 X X 0 X X X X 0 0 X)

61

渐慢

mf

64

慢速

mf

pizz.

Figure 34. Instrumental music occurring between sections 2 and 3 of “Storm Clouds Gather” from Act V of *Azalea Mountain*.<sup>547</sup>

<sup>547</sup> Zhu Weiyin, p. 266-267.

Yu's style exudes emotionality, expressing both the breadth and depth of feeling that this complex character experiences. This style allows the orchestra to merge with the vocalist, thus taking on greater significance within the aria. In other words, the orchestra is no longer subordinate to the vocal line but instead reigns over the lyrical dimension, becoming a signifier of emotion. Throughout this aria, the Ke Xiang theme is further developed in various permutations, some close to the original, as in the prelude (Figure 33), and others quite distant, as in the interlude (Figure 34). As seen in Figure 6.10, a modification of the Ke Xiang theme is introduced into the prelude to the aria. The long upward rushing string tremolos, the sudden dynamic change from *mezzo forte* to *fortissimo*, the intensified percussion, the tightened speed, the higher tessitura and harmonic coloring, all converge to vividly create a striking atmosphere of terror and tension, clearly describing the adversity that Ke Xiang is facing at this point in the story.

The instrumental interlude between the section two and three is another fine example (Figure 34.). Following the long melismatic passage on the finale syllable of *huilong*, "The blazing inferno around me burns me to the core," the long connective at first sounds immediately tense and agitated. The Ke Xiang motives are barely noticeable, appearing as real motive ("b" and "c" at m. 53), tonal transposition and rhythmic imitation (mm. 56-57, motive "c") in the hasty tempo, shortened rhythmic pattern, increased harmonic and textural density, and intensified metrical dissonance. However, after two audible octave leaps (m. 59 and 64), the music calms down and the Ke Xiang theme becomes clear and prominent, announcing a change of mood as the protagonist

expresses her deep concern toward Lei Gang and Du Mama in next section, to which we will turn next.<sup>548</sup>

The melody for section three is sensuous and poignant. The slow and emotional *manban* (slow meter) in 4/4 sounds almost like cantabile in an Italian opera, bearing an improvisatory quality with many fluctuations of tempo that reflect changes of mood and deep emotions. Here the vocalist returns to a female manner of singing, shifting back from the *laosheng* (older male) vocal style of *huilong* section. The opening phrase, *Dumama yuweinan duxing shoujin* (“Du Mama suffers at the hands of the warlord”), follows the conventional structure closely, as the ten-syllable line is broken into four segments of three, three, two and two syllables each, and is followed faithfully by instrumental connectives. The first segment, *dumama*, is filled by the orchestra playing Du Mama’s motif in its original form, as it is identified by the sung text. The second segment is stretched, punctuating the last syllable, *nan*. Ke Xiang’s motive “c” is heard first in a long melismatic passage in both the vocal and instrumental part, and then at the end note of the voice, where the orchestra forms a contrapuntal line above, murmuring a touching phrase made of Ke Xiang’s motives “b” and “c.” The end of the phrase, sung in an embellished and melismatic passage, is especially noteworthy. While the first syllable, *shou*, uses part of the material from Du Mama’s motif, first in transposed position and then in retrograde, the last syllable, *jin*, ends with the same motivic pattern, in its

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<sup>548</sup> Act V can be viewed at [http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/Rc2\\_TnALHC8](http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/Rc2_TnALHC8), accessed on September 26, 2011. Ke Xiang’s theme begins at 17:43, her core aria begins at 18:13; section 2 starts at 19:03; the connective between section 2 and 3 starts at 19:41, section 3 starts at 20:04 (20:14 Du Mama’s motif); first chorus at 23:34-24:05, second chorus at 24:25-36, and aria ends at 25:38. A karaoke version of the aria can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5BlvVp1BY&feature=related>, accessed on September 26, 2011.

retrograde inverse, but without the last note, as if suggesting that the suffering has no end; thus, the music sounds both touching and agonizing, vividly evoking the cruelty and persecution that Du Mama has suffered. The second phrase, sung to the line “Lei Gang is caught in a web he cannot escape from” is created in a similar way, in which fragments of the Lei Gang motive are heard, interweaving with Ke Xiang’s motif “c,” which is unmistakably associated with the psychological and symbolic meaning of Ke Xiang’s empathy, compassion, and concern. By keeping the audience aware of deeper meanings and the relationships of dramatic events and feelings, the motives elucidate the psychological course of the drama.

A new middle section seems to start, signified by a long interlude with increased tempo, but *ban* remains the same, as Ke Xiang sings the couplet about the soldiers being restless and wanting to rescue their leader, and Wen Qijiu taking the advantage of Lei Gang’s plight to lead the group astray. She continues to sing about how Du Shedan has set his evil trap and how she is facing a life-or-death decision. Although the new couplet is marked by the shift from *manban* to *yuanban* and the meter has changed from 4/4 to 2/4, the change is almost inaudible, since it occurs during the increasing speed from the previous *ban*, and more peculiarly, there is no connective marking the change. The absence of such seems to imply that both Wen Qijiu and Du Shedan are no different; one is the enemy hiding inside, and the other is outside, which is indeed what the next line states. As Ke Xiang’s last line, “Confronted with a life-or-death decision, my heart is heavy,” her final syllables are repeated by an off-stage female chorus, extending into two long phrases, starting with the same pitch that Ke Xiang ends, using the “fish biting tail” technique.

Ke Xiang's solo voice enters a new section again in *duoban* in 1/4 and this time, her last line is echoed by an off-stage chorus of mixed male and female voices singing mostly in thirds and fourths. Evidently, a new pattern similar to call and response is applied in this aria, which has rarely been used before in yangbanxi.<sup>549</sup> The mixed voices respond in fortissimo, clearly producing a powerful climax. Such a technique was entirely new to Beijing opera, which had no tradition either of chorus or of call and response.<sup>550</sup>

The aria "Storm Clouds Gather" is without a doubt the most complicated, innovative, and dramatic aria ever composed for the Beijing opera stage. The aria is eclectic and multifaceted, representing the most fundamental characteristics of Beijing opera on one hand, but also bearing a resemblance to the Western opera on the other hand. For example, its structure might remind one of the Rossini model for Italian dramatic opera. The prelude before the aria sounds like orchestra introduction, the contrasting *daoban* and *huilong* could be heard as *scena* preceding *cantabile*, which is a perfect *manban*. Likewise, the relatively fast middle sections of *yuanban*, *duoban*, and choruses fit the definition of *a tempo di mezzo*, and the accelerating last sections of *yuanban*, *duoban*, and *sanban* clearly belongs to the faster *cabaletta*.

Of the many distinctive traits evident in this aria, the one feature that emerges as the broadest and at the same time the subtlest is Yu's exceptional skill in developing recurring motifs. Without a doubt, this technique had been used by many Western composers, such as Wagner, but Yu Huiyong is indeed the first Chinese composer ever

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<sup>549</sup> Yu had experimented with the call and response technique once before, in the opera *Ode to Dragon River*.

<sup>550</sup> It should be noted that call and response was a technique employed in some regional operas as well as Kun. In sum, Yu borrowed techniques, regardless of the source, as he saw usefulness for them in his compositions.

used this technique.<sup>551</sup> And yet, his use of motifs is highly individual and mature. Each motif presents a vivid depiction of the personality of the character it represents. Indeed, these motifs, when woven into the music of the opera, do more for describing the personalities and shifting emotional states of the characters than does the action on stage. In this sense, it is the music that breathes life into the characters of Ke Xiang, Lei Gang, and Du Mama. For example, in the permutation of the Ke Xiang motifs (such as in Feature 6.11), one can feel her momentary weakness, frustration, and willpower to overcome the adversity, although it is never verbally expressed. Yu's use of recurring motifs is consistently tied to the drama. The text and situation make the recall of the motives appropriate, and in each instance the orchestra takes on the role of presentation and implied interpretation. By continuously pursuing the highest artistic quality and subtle integration of the techniques from both Chinese and Western practice, Yu uses his unique music language to create the most striking of heroic characters, with shifting moods, changing minds and deep emotions.

## Conclusion

In *Azalea Mountain*, we can see how Yu Huiyong achieved a true Gesamtkunstwerk. That is to say, the opera is realized as a sort of symphonic drama organized around the Ke Xiang theme, which occurs frequently in every act and is woven into the fabric of many of the arias. Indeed, even when Ke Xiang is not on stage, her theme can still be heard, as for example in Act I when she has not even made her first

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<sup>551</sup> There is no evidence Yu had anything more than a passing familiarity with Wagner's concept of a *leitmotif*.

appearance on stage.<sup>552</sup> Thus, the theme precedes the character, further emphasizing the centrality of Ke Xiang as the heroic role model.

Throughout the opera, the Ke Xiang theme changes with every appearance, through timbre, register, and contrapuntal texture, as well as through compositional techniques such as transposition, inversion, and expansion in both instrumental music and arias. It is thus through all this variation of one central theme that Ke Xiang's role as the key heroic figure is cemented. And since Ke Xiang's leadership of the Self-Defense League symbolizes the Communist Party's leadership of the Chinese people, we know in the end that the opera is really about the central role of the CCP in New China.

At the same time, the people of China do have a role to play in the reconstruction of their nation on socialist principles, and likewise the people of Azalea Mountain have a role to play in propelling the story forward. Thus, we see that Yu weaves the motifs of the other characters into the key instrumental passages of this opera as well. For example, the overtures to Acts II, III, and IV are based on the Self-Defense League theme, clearly representing the yearning of the Chinese people for liberation from oppression. Likewise, the overture to Act V is based on the Lei Gang theme, as the turmoil of this act is the result of Lei Gang's impetuous behavior, while the overture to Act VI is based on the theme of Du Mama, who chides Lei Gang for not following Ke Xiang's orders. Again, the message is clear: the people cannot free themselves from oppression by their own efforts but only under the leadership of the Communist party. In the end, the familiarity

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<sup>552</sup> The whole opera can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDIk5hvNF7Q&feature=related>. The Overture for Act I is in an ABA' form. It starts with the Ke Xiang theme at 0:00-0:35, the middle section is the Self-Defense League theme, and the Ke Xiang theme ends the overture at 1:25-1:30.



of these repeating motifs provides a continuous narrative that allows the audience to grasp the underlying message at a deep emotional level.

*Azalea Mountain* represents integration at a political level as well. Like several other yangbanxi, it affirms Jiang Qing's agenda of equal rights for women, this time in the form of the young woman Ke Xiang as heroic role model. However, *Azalea Mountain* also subtly advocates for the rights of China's ethnic minorities. Although the Chinese Communist Party was dominated by the majority Han ethnic group, it could not have succeeded in its revolution without the active support of China's fifty minority ethnic groups. *Azalea Mountain* is set in a region of China occupied by the Miao ethnic group; many of the villagers and members of Self-Defense League, including Lei Gang, are identifiable as Miao by their head garb. On the other hand, Communist party representative Ke Xiang is clearly Han, as is Du Mama and some members of the league. There is not a single mention of ethnic difference in the entire opera, and yet the unspoken message rings loud and clear: All of the ethnic groups of China have suffered the same oppression, and all of the ethnic groups must work together to build a better society. Furthermore, the positive portrayal of the Miao minority also no doubt sent a subtle message to the Han majority in the audience that they must respect the minority ethnic groups and treat them as equals. The inclusion of Miao folk music in the opera further reinforces that message.

Yu achieved an unprecedented synthesis of musical forms in *Azalea Mountain*. Compared with Wagner's motifs, Yu's are especially apt for their simplicity, memorability, adaptability, and expressiveness. Yu's style was eclectic, revealing his

Chinese heritage and his rigorous Western music training at the conservatory.<sup>553</sup> It displays a highly individual synthesis of Beijing opera tradition with Western elements and dramatic psychology. Yu's endeavor of expanding the Beijing opera vocabulary and exploring new source of musical sound is evident, as seen in the way that Yu seamlessly wove together Chinese and Western musical systems as well as in the way that each aria clearly goes beyond the restrictions of Beijing opera. In abiding by the Western harmonic system, Yu abandoned the old formulas of cadential pitches and interludes at caesurae, structuring arias instead as a contrapuntal relationship between voice and instrument.

While Yu's musicianship shows most clearly in his writing for voices—every word of the text was understandable—his use of orchestra has achieved equivalent results in this opera. The instrumental music is written in an accessible harmonic idiom that is aligned with Chinese tradition, and the lyrical nature of the Chinese melodies supports this scheme. The music expands beyond the dimensions of the text and is effective at creating an atmosphere that is characteristically Chinese in its essence, while the details of aria and dialogue are folded into a musical flow that is tuneful, dramatic, and fitting for the characters and situations.

In keeping with Beijing opera tradition and character, Yu's music always seeks a good balance and avoids extreme use of new techniques and western practice, such as unresolved harmony. Instead, he depends upon judicious use of occasional imitation, ostinato, and cantabile melody as well as such characteristic devices such as sequence and

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<sup>553</sup> At the Shanghai Conservatory, the basic training is commonly known as the four basics: harmony, counterpoint, orchestration, and composition, which is adapted from the Western system.

counterpoint, which are more aligned with Chinese tradition and the lyrical nature of the Chinese melody support this scheme

Yu's melodies are basically diatonic, at times can even be called bi-modal, but with a strong pentatonic flavor and little use of chromaticism. The only exception to this is the chromaticism of Ke Xiang's theme, which is very prominent and is probably the most noticeable feature of her sound image, especially motif "c," which is more widely used than any of the other Ke Xiang motifs. The instrumental music also includes traditional *qupai* melodies such as "The Night is Deep" (*Ye shencheng*), which has been a staple of Kun and Beijing opera for centuries. However, Yu does not use the melody wholesale; rather, he weaves a musical fabric from it that includes percussion and additional music composed by him to serve as the overture to Act VII, which accompanies an acrobatic and martial arts scene much like the ski scene in *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*.

We can deem *Azalea Mountain* a Gesamtkunstwerk not just because of the rich integration of musical forms from different traditions but also because of the tight weave between music and lyrics. Yu implemented his principle of the Three Prominences through clever use of dialogue. Instead of giving stage time to villain Du Shedan, we learn about his vile nature through dialogue among the positive and heroic characters of the story. Or else, we see the consequences of his cruelty as it has been inflicted upon the positive and heroic characters, as for example when Ke Xiang shows the others the scars on Tian Dajiang's arm that he received from his master's cruel whip. Likewise, it is through the conversation between Du Mama and Lei Gang that we learn of Du Shedan's responsibility for the death of Ke Xiang's husband.

*Azalea Mountain* has been praised by critics and audiences alike as the most refined and moving of the revolutionary Beijing operas, the true model opera among all the yangbanxi. Yet the lasting appeal of this opera is not simply due to happenstance. Rather, it is the product of a man with a clear vision of the future of Beijing opera who had been given the resources and political power to put his theory into practice. In that sense, *Azalea Mountain* is not only the pinnacle among the yangbanxi, it is a true masterpiece of Beijing opera.

## CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION

From a historic point of view, yangbanxi is the continuation of a long theatrical tradition, the natural trajectory of Beijing opera. Beijing opera is a living art form that has constantly adapted to the needs of society. In the eighteenth century, when Chinese society was flourishing, beauties and dandies graced the Beijing opera stage, providing lighthearted entertainment. In the nineteenth century, as the nation suffered from rebellion within and foreign encroachment without, heroic generals and statesmen dominated the stage, providing audiences with temporary escape to a nobler time. At the turn of the twentieth century, as the Chinese population became more urban and educated, Beijing opera had to adapt to a rapidly changing environment; furthermore, Beijing opera had to contend with new forms of entertainment, such as spoken drama and motion pictures.

Many performers, such as Mei Lanfang and Chen Yanqiu, were actively involved in Beijing opera reform, yet as Beijing opera scholar Fu Jin concluded, the attempts of early theater reform had very little success in a truly artistic sense.<sup>554</sup> First, the so-called crisis of Beijing opera in the early twentieth century was largely a perception of the intellectual class, who compared the art form with Western opera and found it lacking. For these Western-trained scholars, traditional Beijing opera represented an antiquated social order they were glad to be rid of; if Beijing opera were to survive and be of value,

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<sup>554</sup> Fu Jin, *Jingju Xue Qianyan* [Frontier of Beijing opera study] (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2007), p. 143.

it needed to take on the important social issues of the day in a manner similar to Ibsen's dramas.<sup>555</sup> [This fits in with May 4th iconoclasm...] However, the majority of the performers and Chinese people "did not see the necessity of reform and did not recognize the achievement of the reform."<sup>556</sup>

Second, there was lack of financial and governmental support. In a tumultuous environment in which performers depended on their skills and performance to make a living, it is unrealistic to expect them to devote all their energy and efforts to reform; not only do they jeopardize their own livelihood, they also risk ostracism from their peers. Certainly the intellectual class that clamored for reform did not have the financial wherewithal to actualize any of the reforms they envisioned. Even their attempt to publish a magazine to promote interest in Beijing opera was short-lived.<sup>557</sup> As a complex art form, Beijing opera needed governmental and widespread social support beyond the

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<sup>555</sup> For example, a group of scholars represented by Hu Shi, Qian Xuetong and Liu Bannong, taking Western culture as an absolute standard, attempted to deny the legitimacy of Chinese folk culture and wanted to eliminate the old theater and replace it with new Westernized spoken drama. Qian and Liu considered Chinese theater as a symbol of barbarianism with no value and compared it with the foot binding required of women and the braids required of men during the Qing dynasty. Qian stated that "China should have real theater (*xi*), that is, Western style theater." Liu Bannong and Qian Xuetong, "*Jin zhi suowei pingjujia*" [Who is this so-called critic?], *New Youth*, Vol. 5: 2, p. 186-188. Fu Sinian, from an aesthetic point of view, criticized Chinese theater as having no beauty or value. He claimed that the old theater should be overthrown so that a new theater could be established. He stated: "The stories and performances were all bad, and therefore it all depended on singing to attract an audience. If the story and performance were good, it would no longer need music." Fu Sinian, "Zailun xiqu gailiang" [Regarding Theater Reform], *New Youth*, Vol. 5: 4, p. 349-350.

<sup>556</sup> Fu Jin, 2007, p. 142.

<sup>557</sup> Yu Shangruan, "The Movement of National Opera" (*Beijing Opera Literature*), p. 86. Yu Shangruan (1897-1970), who also studied theater at the Columbia University in the U.S., returned to China in 1925. He became a theater professor at several universities, and in 1935 he was one of the scholars who accompanied Mei Lanfang on his U.S. tour. He also translated Ibsen's *The Doll's House*, which became the most successful spoken drama in 1930s Shanghai. The female role Nora was performed by Jiang Qing. Yu Shangruan and others established the magazine *Xinyue* (*New Moon*) in 1928 to promote the national opera and new literature movement, but the endeavor was short-lived, ceasing publication in 1933 after only seven issues.

means available to the handful of reform-minded performers and scholars. Furthermore, change would have to come from within and take place slowly. As Mei Lanfang lamented: “Obviously I’d like Beijing opera to be perfect over night, but reality and my own experience tell me that we have to proceed slowly.”<sup>558</sup>

Third, there was a lack of a theoretical base, especially a lack of musical conformity. As was explained earlier (also in Chapter Three), it was largely the foreign-trained scholars, especially those trained in theater such as Zhao Taimou and Yu Shangruan, who argued for Beijing opera reform, while those who called for the abolition of Beijing opera were mainly those without experience abroad. In terms of Beijing opera music, these foreign-trained scholars also realized that the biggest and most difficult problem for Beijing opera was not the content but the music. Yet, they understood that this problem could not be easily resolved by the performers alone; as dramatist and educator Zhao Taimou pointed out, it required “a genius like Wagner.”<sup>559</sup> Yu Shangruan, who was Zhao’s colleague and who also studied theater in the U.S., echoed Zhao, claiming that although there was not yet a play that had reached a perfect synthesis in singing, dancing, and music in Chinese theater, “it was possible to reach such level in the

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<sup>558</sup> Mei Lanfang, *Wutai shenghuo 40 nian, dierji* [My 40 years of stage-life, vol. II] (Beijing: Pingming chubanshe, 1954), p. 50

<sup>559</sup> Zhao Taimou (1889-1968), who had studied theater at Columbia University in the United States, later served first as the president of the Shandong Experimental Theater Academy and then as president of Qingdao University. Jiang studied at both schools when Zhao served as president. Jiang later married Huang Jing, student leader at the Shandong University and Zhao’s brother-in-law. For more about early scholars and Beijing opera reform, see Li Xiaodi, *Minchude xiju gaige* [Theater reform in the republic era] (Taiwan: Central Research Academy Modern History Institute, 1993), p. 295.

future.”<sup>560</sup> This sentiment regarding the weakness of Beijing opera music reverberated throughout the first two thirds of the twentieth century.

### **Completion of the Beijing Opera Modernization**

Many scholars seem to have acknowledged that yangbanxi signified a transformation from a traditional form to a modern form. For example, Zhu Keyi in her dissertation praised Mao for his “brilliant art policy” of “leading and perpetuating the transformation of traditional Beijing opera into modern Beijing opera.”<sup>561</sup> However, these scholars generally provide no criteria for assessing this modernization process, and thus there is no way to determine when the transformation started and whether the process was ever completed.

Modernism is generally used in the West as a comprehensive term that embraces major developments in the arts during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It became a global pursuit in the twentieth century, and it had different connotations and contexts for different fields.<sup>562</sup> The emergence of Chinese art music in the early twentieth century, for example, can be seen as an alignment with certain aspects of modernism. Sociologist Song Zhanyou stated that the first sign of Beijing opera transformation

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<sup>560</sup> Li Xiaodi, p. 296.

<sup>561</sup> Zhu Keyi, *yuyanxue shiye zhong de yangbanxi* [Yangbanxi from a linguistics perspective] (Henan: Henan University Press, 2004), p. 350-56.

<sup>562</sup> Joakim Tillman, “Postmodernism and Art Music in The German Debate” in Judith Irene Lochhead & Joseph Henry Auner (eds.) *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*. (New York: Routledge, 2002). “Modernism is a work-oriented, rationally organized, and despite its break with tradition—latently tradition-based kind of new music.” p. 77.



toward modernity was the change in performance venue from teahouses to the commercial theaters.<sup>563</sup>

From a musicological point of view, the significance of such a transition was not only social and economic but also artistic, as it not only forced the artists to become more professional and audiences to become more civil, it also raised the perception of Beijing opera as a legitimate art form. Following this shift in venue, we see a series of new ingredients being brought to the traditional Beijing opera stage, such as new dance movements, costumes, props, and technical devices such as changing scenery or Western elements such as pianos and violins. Nevertheless, such superficial changes alone do not constitute modernization. Instead, more fundamental structural changes are required before we can rightly say that the modernization of an art form has been completed.

A more important sign was the change in social status of Beijing opera performers from hired entertainers to independent artists. Those who rose high in the ranks, such as Mei Lanfang and Cheng Yanqiu, could even hire scholars to help them develop new operas and to refine their techniques. Although scholar-performer collaborations were common in the Kun opera of the Ming dynasty, the relational hierarchy was reversed; the artists were servants of the scholars, and they performed for the glory of their masters. Twentieth century performing artists such Mei Lanfang and Cheng Yanqiu, on the other hand, were now artistically and financially independent. They could choose whom to team up with, and they could stop the collaboration if they wanted to, just as Mei Lanfang

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<sup>563</sup> Song Zhanyou, “Tianzhan Theater House and *Haipai* Beijing opera.” (Song, a researcher at the Shanghai Social Science Academy, was kind enough to share this unpublished manuscript with me.)

did with Qi Rushan. Regardless of their considerable fame, these performers still incurred considerable social bias against them.<sup>564</sup>

The final step in Beijing opera modernization was a restructuring of its music according to contemporary standards. It was Yu Huiyong's scholarly research on Chinese theater music in the late 1950s and early 1960s, resulting in the writing of two books, that served as a theoretical framework for yangbanxi development.<sup>565</sup> Indeed, music is the vital element of Beijing opera. However modern the ideology or other elements are, if the music remains unchanged, then the process of transformation is incomplete, as musicologist Paul Robinson expressed, "Things that exist in the text and that do not find expression in the music... cease to exist."<sup>566</sup> As we know, traditional Beijing opera music includes percussion, fixed melodies (*qupai*), and arias, which were rarely composed anew but were rather drawn from large stocks of melodies familiar to opera performers and audiences alike. Thus, the attraction of opera was neither novel stories nor novel melodies but rather the virtuosic displays of the performers. The weakness of Beijing opera music was clear to performers such as Mei Lanfang and Cheng Yanqiu, but they were unable to do anything about it.<sup>567</sup> In the report he wrote after his return from Europe,

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<sup>564</sup> It was not until after Liberation, and especially during the Cultural Revolution, that Beijing opera performers saw their social status improve. As art workers and employees of the government, their profession was now considered socially acceptable.

<sup>565</sup> These two books are: *The Relationship between Melody and Lyrics of Traditional Chinese Music* and *Research on Theatrical Art Music*, which were recently published in 2008 and 2011 by Central Conservatory Press. Chinese musicologist Ju Qihong has called Yu's work the most valuable research in its field. Ju Qihong, *The Music History of the People's Republic 1949-2008* [Gongheguo yinyue shi 1949-2008] (Beijing: Central Conservatory Press, 2010), p. 125.

<sup>566</sup> Paul Robinson, "Is Aïda an Orientalist Opera?" *Cambridge Opera Journal* vol. 5, no. 2, 1993, p. 135.

<sup>567</sup> As it is expressed in Mei Lanfang's biography, the main reason that he left Qi Rushan and the "civilized opera" was because he felt the musical standards in the traditional Beijing opera had been compromised in this new style. Mei Lanfang, *Mei Lanfang zizhuan* [Autobiography of Mei Lanfang] (Beijing: Zhonghua chubanshe, 2005), p. 85-105.

Cheng called for the adoption of Western musical techniques such as harmony and counterpoint, in addition to advocating for the development of new operas through the use of professional librettists, composers and directors.<sup>568</sup> Thus, it can be said that Cheng had an early vision of what later came to be known as yangbanxi. It is also quite likely that Jiang Qing's thinking on the subject was greatly influenced by Cheng, as he visited her in Moscow during her convalescence there, and they discussed the need for Beijing opera reform at length during that time.<sup>569</sup>

Many theater leaders were aware of the problems. Zhang Geng, former president of the China Theater Academy, aptly stated: "The opera cannot sustain itself if the music does not reach the highest quality."<sup>570</sup> But Jiang Qing had performing experience that others lacked. In particular, she had a keen sense for discerning the right people—the nation's best and most talented—for a given task, and she had the political resources to help them accomplish her mission of Beijing opera reform.<sup>571</sup> In particular, she needed

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<sup>568</sup> Cheng Yanqiu, *Report of Investigation on European Theater and Music By Cheng Yanqiu* (Beijing: Shijie bianyiguan, 1933). Among all the Beijing opera performers, Cheng Yanqiu, who had spent more than a year in Europe, was the one with the clearest ideas and most keenly aware of the need for reform. He wanted to preserve its Chinese essence while employing techniques from European opera that could strengthen the art form and make it more accessible to twentieth-century audiences. However, he admitted that he lacked the ability to carry out the reform, and he even considered staying in Germany to study Western opera, but he gave in to the pleas of friends and family to return to China.

<sup>569</sup> Cheng visited Jiang in January 1957 when he was touring the Soviet Union and five other socialist countries. Zhang Yihe, *Past Stories of Performers (Linren Wangshi)* (Changsha: Hunan Wenyi Shubanshe, 2006), p. 353. Cheng was very excited after meeting Jiang, saying, "Jiang is indeed an expert." Both Jiang Qing and Zhou Enlai were fans of Cheng. Zhou and Cheng were also very close and Zhou even recommended Cheng for membership in the Communist Party in 1957; however, Cheng died the next year, and his membership was established posthumously.

<sup>570</sup> Ling Xi, "Minutes of the Ministry of Culture meeting on Beijing Opera," *China Cultural News*, March 9, 1994.

<sup>571</sup> Jiang Qing not only handpicked the librettists, composers, performers, even the ballet dancers, she worked them relentlessly. She also took all the heat and did the unthinkable, by replacing the established famous Beijing opera performers who naturally took the lead role in early yangbanxi, in order to give younger performers the opportunity to develop their talents. For example, she

the talents of Yu Huiyong to finally achieve the synthesis that Zhao Taimou and Yu Shangruan had envisioned. In other words, Jiang Qing was the thread that pulled the entire fabric of Beijing opera reform together, and her greatest insight was in understanding that Beijing opera reform could not be piecemeal or only go halfway, but rather that it had to be a complete overhaul if it were to be of lasting significance. In an interview, Yang Nailin, one of the composers of *Red Cliff* and composition professor at the Central Conservatory of Music, spoke at great length on Jiang Qing's leadership, expertise, and most essentially, her choosing the right persons for the task, saying "Jiang Qing had acute insight and sharp intuition. She was most crucial for the success of yangbanxi. Without Jiang Qing, there will be no yangbanxi and even ten Yu Huiyongs would be useless."<sup>572</sup> Indeed, the correct leadership, especially the ability to discern, is critical.<sup>573</sup> According to Wang Zengqi (1920-1997), a writer who had worked closely with Jiang Qing before and during the Cultural Revolution, Jiang Qing believed the

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replaced Li Shaochun (1919-1975) with young performer Qian Haoliang (1934-) to play the lead role of Li Yuhe in *The Red Lantern*. She replaced the original famed female-impersonator Zhang Junqiu (1920-1997) with Liu Changyu (1942-) to play the seventeen-year old female role in the same opera. The above facts were generated from many interviews with the Beijing opera performers, composers, and directors, conducted in Shanghai and Beijing from 2006 to 2011. The consensus among the Beijing opera performers is overwhelmingly positive toward Jiang Qing and yangbanxi. They also rejected those opinions accusing Jiang Qing of hindering the development of other regional operas, including traditional Beijing opera.

<sup>572</sup> Interview with Yang Nailin in June 2011. Many performers, composers, and musicologists shared this view during their interviews.

<sup>573</sup> Possibly concerned with the direction that the Beijing opera was being taken by the cultural leaders (before Jiang Qing), Mei Lanfang wrote an essay in early 1960, raising a question of leadership and the ability to distinguish: "If there is an outstanding innovation but it was limited by the rules of this old form, I believe that the rule should be broken. But the knowledge to discern the good from bad is crucial: Is it a good innovation? Is it of artistic value? With no such ability but only a narrow mind, the result will be disastrous..." Mei Lanfang, *Mei Lanfang wenji* [Collected Writings of Mei Lanfang] (Beijing: zhongguo xiju shubanshe, 1962), p. 112.

reason why Beijing opera reform after 1949 failed was its poor quality, especially in terms of its music, which had made it incapable of competing with traditional opera.<sup>574</sup>

### **Yu Huiyong and the Completion of Beijing Opera Modernization**

After 1967, Beijing opera, as well as the rest of the performing arts, came under the jurisdiction and surveillance of Yu Huiyong. His systematic approach was based on his thorough knowledge of Chinese and Western music practice and well-developed theory. There are a number of reasons why Yu succeeded.

First, his theory gave him a clear set of steps to follow in the modernization process. Although he had to refine his theory through experience, he had a clear end point in mind to strive toward, and this fact set him apart from his predecessors, who attempted piecemeal reform without an overall framework.

Second, he approached reform incrementally, adopting various techniques slowly and keeping a good balance of old and new. Adopting Western techniques to bolster the music of Beijing opera, Yu understood, was akin to walking a tightrope. The wholesale adoption of the Western musical system would destroy the essence of Beijing opera, yet the capricious application of Western instruments and techniques would not solve the fundamental problem. Thus, while using Western music techniques to enhance the

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<sup>574</sup> Wang Zengqi, *Wang Zengqi wenji diwuji* [Collected Writings of Wang Zengqi. Vol. V], (Shanxi: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1993), p. 381. Wang also stated that Jiang Qing watched more than 2,000 traditional Beijing operas and many reformed Beijing operas in the 1950s. He also acknowledged, “Jiang Qing especially emphasized the quality of the music. She listened to every aria in yangbanxi and attended many rehearsals of *The Red Lantern* and *Among the Reeds*.”

expressiveness and richness of the music, Yu maintained the distinctive flavor and characteristics of the Beijing opera tradition.

Third, Yu had the resources and support to carry out this reform. Without Jiang Qing's leadership, Yu Huiyong would have had no opportunity to implement his theory for Beijing opera modernization. Furthermore, without extensive resources from the central government, it is doubtful any reforms he implemented would have had lasting influence. Filmed versions and local amateur productions quickly disseminated the yangbanxi among the population at large, weaving them tightly into the fabric of Chinese culture. Thus, the yangbanxi became independent, not just personal projects of Jiang Qing or Yu Huiyong.

It is undeniable that Jiang Qing's support for Yu Huiyong's experiment contributed greatly to its success. Yu's innovations, such as the use of a mixed orchestra and his application of the Three Prominences, were not only encouraged by all the leaders under Mao, they were also widely disseminated. As Beijing opera scholar Fu Jin observed, any kind of innovation has to go through a process of dissemination and imitation, and only then will it become a new pattern of behavior in the population; without such a process, no new act can become an organic part of tradition; instead it will be viewed merely as idiosyncratic or accidental behavior, with no significance to the development of culture.<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>575</sup> Fu Jin, 2007, p. 133-36. The novelties Mei and Cheng introduced were perceived as part of their performance that should be protected and kept secret, not a renovation of the art form itself.

Once yangbanxi had been fixed as the film version, there was a big push at transplanting it into regional operatic forms.<sup>576</sup> Many professional Beijing opera performers had the opportunity to observe the rehearsals on site and learn from the original yangbanxi performance companies.<sup>577</sup> In addition, amateur groups across the country staged their own productions of model operas, often receiving professional guidance.<sup>578</sup> Furthermore, a great number of yangbanxi arias achieved the status of pop songs, and they were adapted as solos, duets, quartets, and ensembles for various Chinese and Western instruments during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>579</sup> In this sense, then, creating yangbanxi through designated performing troupes (*yangbantuan*) may be seen the most efficient way to speed up the process from innovation and imitation to form a new tradition.

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<sup>576</sup> *People's Daily* reports, "During the last two years, forty-eight transplanted yangbanxi were created." Xi Yuan, "Wenyi deming xinchengguo" [The new product of the art revolution], *People's Daily* December 2, 1975.

<sup>577</sup> In an interview, the author Yang Nailin, composition professor at the Central Conservatory of Music, vividly recalled his experience of attending such a yangbanxi training class in 1974 as well as his first-hand observation of Yu Huiyong directing a rehearsal of *Azalea Mountain*. Interview with Yang Nailin in Beijing in June 2011.

<sup>578</sup> See An Ge, *Gege bushi chuiniupi* [I'm not pulling your leg] (Guangdong: huacheng chubanshe, 2009) p. 102-05, and p. 117-120. An Ge offers a vivid depiction of how a group of urban youths who had been sent to remote Yunnan province decided to produce their own version of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* after watching the film version. One member of this group, Yu Zhigang, wrote out the score by listening to radio broadcasts of the opera; Yu put together an orchestra making use of whatever talent was available, including one musician who played the accordion. This amateur production was well received, and the group toured the region to give performances. Yu Zhigang is now a musicology professor at the Central Conservatory; he related this story to me and also referred me to An Ge's book. Interview with Yu Zhigang in Beijing in May 2011.

<sup>579</sup> These arias and instrumental works are still popular today. Yangbanxi arias fill the playlists of karaoke clubs, and Yu's instrumental works are still widely played as well. Violin sonatas, many based on themes from yangbanxi, were popular during the Cultural Revolution and have recently been recorded and made into CDs, sold in many bookstores under the category of "Red Classic." Violinist Pan Yinglin and composer/pianist Chen Gang, who were very popular during the Cultural Revolution, still tour today, performing pieces from that time period. (The author attended one of their concerts in 2011 in Shanghai). Interview with Chen Gang, composition professor at the Shanghai Conservatory in July 2011. Interview with Pan Yinlin, concertmaster of Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra, in Shanghai in May 2010.

In this way, yangbanxi completed the process of Beijing opera modernization. Top-down support from the central government gave yangbanxi the opportunity to develop and flourish in a safe environment where innovation was encouraged. The filming of these model operas led to a rapid dissemination of these works throughout the country, reaching even the remotest areas of the nation. Furthermore, bottom-up practice in the form of amateur performance groups and regional opera transplants also received support from central and local governments, such that within the span of a few short years, Beijing opera had not only regained its status as the national art form but now appealed to an even wider audience than ever before. Thus, through the process of its music innovation, dissemination, and constant self-perfecting during the Cultural Revolution, yangbanxi raised Beijing opera music to a new height and gave it a new life while completing Beijing opera's transformation from a traditional form to modern form.

### **Factors Underlying the Success of Yangbanxi**

Beijing opera was at the core of Cultural Revolution efforts to transform Chinese culture. Among the nineteen yangbanxi produced during this period, the large majority were operas. Although a handful of model ballets and symphonic works were created early in the Cultural Revolution, no more new works were created based on these models. However, revolutionary Beijing opera production continued throughout the entire period. In a sense, Beijing opera proved the greatest challenge to Chinese cultural modernization. It was one thing to take Western art forms such as ballet and symphony and to modify them with Chinese characteristics. It was another thing altogether, however, to take a traditional Chinese art form and to reshape in a modern form.



At the core of the cultural reform movement was the effort to create a new national identity. Beijing opera is a symbol of Chinese cultural identity, and the most distinctive feature of Beijing opera is its music. Because of its oral transmission through master-apprentice relationships, it had to rely on a formulaic performance system, and this situation is what made Beijing opera so resistant to change. Instead, what was needed was a top-down approach to guiding the reform. Because it had government support, the yangbanxi effort had access to the nation's greatest resources and talents, and thus it could proceed quickly with implementing the plan for Beijing opera reform that Yu had envisioned.

After Liberation, the new Chinese government was trying to establish a new national culture. Although this period, and especially the decade of the Cultural Revolution, is viewed—especially in the West—as one in which China turned inward and rejected foreign influences, this is simply not the case. The new Communist government continued a general policy that was first pursued by the late Qing court, namely the selective adoption of both Western elements and traditional Chinese elements in order to create a new culture that was still Chinese in its essence but responsive to the needs of China as it integrated into the emerging global—and Western dominated—economic and political system. This perspective is succinctly expressed in Mao's aphorism, "Use the past to serve the present, use Western things to serve China."<sup>580</sup> Even the adoption of communism reflects this integrative approach; that is to say, Mao did not advocate a wholesale adoption of Marx's economic theory; rather, China would practice communism with Chinese characteristics.

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<sup>580</sup> Mao Zedong, "Letter to Lu Dingyi," *Mao Zedong shuxin ji* [Collected Letters of Mao Zedong] September 27, 1964. Lu Dingyi was the minister of propaganda at the time.

If we consider this integrative approach to Western culture in twentieth-century China, then the degree to which Yu Huiyong incorporated Western music practices into traditional Beijing opera is not at all surprising. Nor should we wonder why the Communist regime would tolerate—no less actively support—such a Westernization of a traditional Chinese art form. Certainly the government could not tolerate a complete Westernization of Chinese culture, and Western elements that were perceived as threatening were rejected, especially during the Cultural Revolution. Likewise, elements of Chinese culture that were perceived as hampering modern progress were repressed as well. Yu's genius lay in his ability to skillfully navigate between Western and Chinese traditions, using what worked and discarding what did not, regardless of the source.

In fact, yangbanxi do not just demonstrate instances of “using Western things to serve China” in the sense that Western elements could be used to bolster traditional forms. Additionally, Western forms could be taken and modified with Chinese characteristics as needed. The term yangbanxi includes more than just the model revolutionary operas; ballets and orchestral works produced during this time fall into this category as well. Yangbanxi ballets such as *The White-Haired Girl* and *The Red Detachment of Women* provide an interesting case study. There was no tradition of ballet in China, and so one would expect this quintessentially Western art form either to have been rejected entirely as non-Chinese or else to have been adopted wholesale in its Western form. But neither is the case; rather, these ballets exhibit strong Chinese characteristics, both in the music and in the dance, which are based on traditional Chinese forms and not Western ones. Thus, in the post-Liberation period, the Chinese performed ballet with Chinese characteristics much as they practiced communism with Chinese

characteristics. The same can be said for the orchestral and choral works of the time, such as *The Yellow River Cantata*.

Yu and Jiang shared a vision for creating a modern and national style of Beijing opera that would integrate the best of Chinese folk and fine art as well as Western techniques. One goal was to create opera of the highest quality that also had relevance for their compatriots, reflecting the experiences and aspirations of twentieth-century Chinese audiences. In this sense, Yu was very much in tune with other twentieth-century composers, such as Bartok and Stravinsky, who sought to develop a new national musical identity based on a synthesis of folk music tradition and modern compositional techniques.

In addition, Yu and Jiang had a second goal as well, one that was even grander. Their hope was to build a repertoire of operas that would serve as a model for modern opera composition, hence the term “model opera.” The concept of a model that is widely disseminated for public emulation has a long history in Chinese culture, and it was especially used during Mao’s time as a means for establishing new social norms. Thus, there is no reason to think Jiang or Yu envisioned a future of Beijing opera in which a handful of works were to be repeated ad nauseam to the exclusion of all else. Quite to the contrary, many new revolutionary operas based on these models had already been produced, and more were still in development when the Cultural Revolution came to a sudden end.<sup>581</sup>

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<sup>581</sup> For example, the Uighur production of *The Red Lantern* in the early 1970s was a huge success, which was attributed to its choreography, composition, and orchestra. People traveled thousands of miles to watch performances. A film version premiered in September 1975 and garnered both popular and critical acclaim. Regional productions were required to follow the original libretto, stage design, and lighting, so any yangbanxi adaptation meant a substantial break with local folk

## Impact of Yangbanxi

As all the traditional operas naturally belonged to the category of “Four Olds” (old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits), the revolutionary model operas became the only flower to bloom. The impact of model operas was extensive and permeated every aspect of musical existence.

First, the revolutionary model opera stimulated a variety of professional music creations. For example, pianist Yin Chengzhong was inspired by the model opera and created a new music combination, a piano accompaniment of the Beijing opera *Red Lantern*, which not only brought hope to the pianist but also saved the piano from being smashed as a bourgeois instrument. Besides symphonies and string quintets based on the model opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* and *On the Docks*, a symphonic cantata was created based on model opera *Among the Reeds*. Reviews of these compositions during the Cultural Revolution reveal that they were on the whole successful, with each reaching the highest achievement in its area, being far more sophisticated than previous efforts, which either sounded very Western or more like mere orchestrations of folk songs. Beijing opera had a major influence on many instrumental genres. Newly composed violin, piano, and accordion music during the Cultural Revolution imported musical notation signs and rhythmic features from Beijing opera, expanded performance

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traditions. Besides its translation to Uighur, the most substantial change to *The Red Lantern* was its adaptation to traditional Uighur music, known as *muqam*, and Uighur folk songs. Its orchestra followed Yu’s new model and combined Uighur and Western instruments along with traditional Beijing opera percussion. Wulan Jie, a Mongolian musicologist, commented that the success of the Uighur version of *The Red Lantern* inspired the production of other ethnic minority versions of yangbanxi, including those in Mongolian that he participated in. Interview with Wulan Jie in Beijing in July 2011.

techniques and increased the sonority of music. These changes were very popular and welcomed by audiences and musicians.

Second, model opera stimulated the development of other arts. The most successful examples were the two revolutionary ballets *The Red Detachment of Women* and *The White-Haired Girl*. The quality of their stage production, choreography, music and orchestration reached the highest level of Chinese ballet since 1949, replacing performances of *Swan Lake* and its ilk. Model opera also led to the reformation of regional operas. Many regional operas had to break away from convention or overcome limitations in order to adapt to model opera. For instance, Shanghai Yue Opera Company broke its traditional all-female cast and added male performers and created arias for males. Other opera companies had to expand conventional music language by absorbing local folksongs and melodies from other operas. The interactions between operas enriched their repertoires and brought new life to the old form.

Third, the popularization of yangbanxi led to a significant increase in music activity that provided a fertile training ground for amateur musicians. As the policy that arts should serve the needs of the working class became a social norm, concerts and operas were no longer limited to the concert hall or theater in the big cities and to privileged upper-class audiences. More often than not, performances took place in factories, army bases, and villages. This idea of serving the working class became so popular that it created a great need for local performance groups. Many local units, including each school, factory, district, region, city, and village, established musical ensembles, and often received financial assistance and professional guidance. In some of the most remote areas of China, spare-time artistic troupes performed portions or full-

length theatrical productions of model Beijing operas. Many schools and factories also established their own choirs and took part in competitions at the district and city level. The singing activities also stimulated amateur composers to create new songs. There were nationwide song-writing competitions, with winning songs frequently being published and broadcast.

Fourth, the expansion of music activities due to yangbanxi enriched people's lives and made music more accessible to a broader range of working-class people. Music had never reached so many people, and it had never had been so relevant to them. The goals and aspirations of the working class was magnified and reappeared on stage in songs, dramas, and modern Beijing operas. Popular musical activity was devoted to serve the cultural interests of rural people and engaged a diversity of people in music creation and activities. The popularizing of revolutionary model opera also propagated Western music and introduced Western instruments to people that had never experienced these before.

Indeed, from beginning to end, Jiang Qing's art strategy envisioned a central place for culture in China's development. At a time when China was undergoing revolutionary social change, yet faced with widespread illiteracy as a result of cultural and educational deprivation at the hands of an oppressive privileged class, visual arts, especially model Beijing operas, were of special importance. Putting aside Jiang Qing's political agenda, one should not fail to account for the fact that Jiang Qing and her followers legitimized, reinforced and nurtured a popular culture that appealed to the Chinese masses, which had been oppressed and had been in a serious cultural famine for generations. To the majority of Chinese, especially those in rural areas, there was not the same sense of musical famine that some elite musicians or upper-class listeners

experienced during the Cultural Revolution. For these people, it was a time of cultural liberation. While musicians may have grown bored performing the *Yellow River Concerto* or model works over and over again, rural people were experiencing music at this level of sophistication for the first time. One of the most significant outcomes seems to suggest that the real benefits of this popular culture might have been the nurturing of the offspring of Chinese workers and peasants, such as today's internationally renowned musicians Tan Dun and Lang Lang.

### **Legacy of Yangbanxi**

The legacy of yangbanxi and its cultural pertinence is evident today. However, this admittedly generous view does not imply approval of the Cultural Revolution or of all of Jiang's art programs and policies, for indeed yangbanxi was developed at the expense of other genres and styles that fell outside her vision of revolutionary art. However, government suppression of those arts that did "not meet the requirement of the revolutionary needs" may have assisted in yangbanxi's rapid maturation. The creators of yangbanxi, especially Jiang Qing and Yu Huiyong, selectively adopted Western practices to transform an esoteric cultural tradition into an unprecedented manifestation of Chinese popular culture that was far from simple propaganda. This new form clearly served the goals of a new social order that refocused the arts on the common people. Through its appeal to both old and young, literate and illiterate audiences, and its association with politics and cinema, yangbanxi music had clearly entered the realm of both popular and high culture. Yangbanxi was the final product of a modernization movement lasting over half a century; it reshaped the nation's musical culture and continues to play a significant

role today; in that sense, we can say that Beijing opera is still a living art form with the power to adapt to modern society



## CHAPTER TEN: EPILOGUE

### End of the Cultural Revolution

The Cultural Revolution lasted a decade; starting with a bout of social upheaval, it also came to an end with round of popular unrest. In January 1976, the beloved Premier Zhou Enlai passed away, and people filled the streets to express their grief, not just in Beijing but also in cities around the country. Zhou had had a reputation for integrity, a statesman who had always kept a level head within a political culture of extremism and ruthlessness. And so this spontaneous popular display of mourning for the premier was also seen as a tacit protest against Mao and his policies. These spontaneous gatherings continued for months, until a massive demonstration on Tiananmen Square in April turned violent, and security forces were sent in to quell the uprising.<sup>582</sup> Meanwhile, Mao's health was also in rapid decline, sparking a behind-the-scenes struggle for succession between Hua Guofeng and Deng Xiaoping. Hua managed to implicate Deng in the Tiananmen uprising. Stripped of all of his official positions within the party, Deng withdrew and bided his time. Hua also produced a note in Mao's handwriting naming him the next chairman of the CCP.<sup>583</sup> And so when Mao died in September 1976, Hua

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<sup>582</sup> Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: Norton, 1990), p. 646.

<sup>583</sup> After Mao's death, the note became Hua's talisman, which was publicized, reading: "With you in charge, I am at ease." See more detail in *Mao's Last Revolution*. p. 434. However, years later during Jiang Qing's trial, it became clear that what Hua revealed was only the first line of the note; the second line read: "If there is problem, go to Jiang Qing." This line forms a perfect

Guofeng assumed the helm of the government. Despite legitimizing his leadership as Mao's handpicked successor, Hua must have recognized that his greatest enemies would be those who had been closest to Mao (and perhaps had other ideas about the chairman's last wishes). In October, Hua ordered the arrest of the so-called "Gang of Four," which included Mao's wife Jiang Qing.

Yu Huiyong was not one of the Gang of Four, as he was simply not that important politically. Yet his close association with Jiang Qing during the Cultural Revolution did land him in jail. This was not the first time Yu had found himself in prison due to political vagaries beyond his control. Indeed, he had spent several months in the "cowshed" at the start of the Cultural Revolution. At first, it seems Yu assumed he would weather this political storm as well. On August 21, 1977, he was given leave for a family visit, and he told his wife then that he believed he would be free soon, after which he wanted to retire to his native Shandong to teach music in a local culture center or elementary school.<sup>584</sup> However, Yu's hope was totally crushed the next day, when Hua Guofeng, in his political report during the Eleventh National Conference that month, denounced Yu Huiyong by name as the second closest ally of the Gang of Four, labeling him a "political careerist, traitor, anti-revolutionist, rogue and gangster" on national radio. On hearing this, Yu seems to have lost of hope of regaining his freedom, and two weeks later he took his life.<sup>585</sup>

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rhymed couplet with the first line. Given the fact that Mao was a very prolific poet, it is now widely believed that Mao wrote this instruction to Hua as a couplet, not as just one line of six words. According to Dai, Mao was hoping that Hua would take care of his wife after his death. Interview with Dai Jiafang in Beijing in October 2010.

<sup>584</sup> Interview with Ren Ke in June 2007.

<sup>585</sup> The first name that Hua denounced was the Shanghai Mayor Ma Tianshui and the second was Yu Huiyong. Dai Jiafang 2008, p. 492.

Jiang Qing, on the other hand, was more resilient. She languished in prison during Hua Guofeng's tenure as chairman. But by 1980, Deng Xiaoping had managed to nudge Hua and his supporters out of the leadership of the CCP, replacing them with his own protégés. Although he had no significant titles of his own, Deng was now the de facto ruler of China, and he was setting the nation on a new course of openness and economic development. He put the Gang of Four on trial, which was televised nationwide, and there Jiang Qing displayed her characteristic quick wit and sharp tongue, making a mockery of what was clearly nothing more than a show trial anyway. After her release from prison, she remained under house arrest and lived under an assumed name; it was not until 1991, when she was diagnosed with cancer, that she committed suicide while in the hospital.

### **Breaking the Silence**

A moratorium on the discussion of the Cultural Revolution extended into the 1980s. It was perhaps wise for the government to stifle research and commentary on that period, as it gave the country time to heal [your voice?]. The only major exception to this was the Gang of Four trial, which served as a national catharsis, regardless of the legitimacy of the justice that was meted out.<sup>586</sup> All reminders of the Cultural Revolution were removed from public display as well. Revolutionary banners and posters came down, revolutionary music disappeared from the airwaves, and yangbanxi vanished from

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<sup>586</sup> Jiang Qing and the Gang of Four were accused of supporting Lin Biao in his failed 1971 coup d'état attempt. While the others confessed to all accusations against them in hope of leniency, Jiang defied all accusations, insisting that she was only following orders. "I was Mao's dog," she notoriously said, "and I bit whomever he told me to bite." Spence, p. 681.

theater stages and cinema screens. The Chinese instead heeded Deng Xiaoping's call to "get rich first" and focused their efforts instead on rebuilding the economy. It was almost as if the nation had forgotten about the "decade of disaster."

This moratorium was broken during the Chinese New Year of 1986—one decade after the end of the Cultural Revolution. During its annual gala event celebrating the holiday, the national CCTV television network broadcast a performance by renowned singer Liu Changyu of a well-known aria that she had famously sung in the revolutionary model opera *The Red Lantern*. The response following this event was polarized. Some critics praised Liu's performance, expressing nostalgia for the yangbanxi; others condemned the performance, resentful of any reminder of that bitter period. A public debate of the merits of the performance was carried out in the major Shanghai newspaper *Xinmin Wanbao* (New People's Evening News). Noted author Deng Youmei harshly condemned the performance for needlessly dredging up bitter memories. For Deng and many like him, the Cultural Revolution had been a decade of misery that was better forgotten.

Liu Changyu responded in the press, arguing from her own experience that yangbanxi had high artistic merit and was still welcomed by audiences. She claimed she was often called on by audience members to sing yangbanxi arias as encores after the performance of a traditional Beijing opera. Liu's pro-yangbanxi stance was met with increased criticism, including ad hominem attacks, and it appears that no other yangbanxi performer was willing to stand up in her defense. The debate ended with an overwhelmingly negative consensus echoing the sentiment of Deng Youmei. For example, Ba Jin, one of the most celebrated writers of the twentieth century, famously

said, “I tremble whenever I hear the yangbanxi.”<sup>587</sup> Many intellectuals like Ba Jin, who had been persecuted during the Cultural Revolution, took a similar position, seeing yangbanxi as a painful reminder of a personal tragedy and resentful of anything that reminded them of that time. Many maintained that it was impossible for the yangbanxi to have artistic merit since they were first and foremost vehicles for political propaganda.<sup>588</sup> Thus, early discussion of the artistic merits of yangbanxi was stifled not by government censorship but rather by social pressure from a vocal minority.<sup>589</sup>

Criticism of yangbanxi over the next decade continued and generally took one of three forms. The first line of criticism was political, in which critics argued the works represented an attempt by the Gang of Four to indoctrinate the nation to their ultra-leftist views and thereby wrest control of the Communist Party. The second line of criticism was social, in which commentators maintained that the promotion of yangbanxi to the exclusion of all other art forms had inflicted “spiritual trauma” upon the Chinese people. The third line of criticism was artistic, in which the yangbanxi were considered to have no aesthetic merits whatsoever; Yu’s principle of the Three Prominences in particular was singled out as “artistic fallacy.” It took another decade for the vitriol to be purged

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<sup>587</sup> See Ba Jin, “Yangbanxi,” *Suixianglu Wutiji* [Random thoughts] (Shanghai: Shanghai sanlian chulian, 1987).

<sup>588</sup> See Feng Yingzi, “Shi dong fei liu hua yangban” [Regarding yangbanxi: Yes to Deng (Youmei) and No to Liu (Changyu)], *Tuanjie Bao* (United Daily), April 26, 1986.

<sup>589</sup> Two decades later, when I began interviewing yangbanxi performers, they all expressed their admiration for Liu Changyu’s courage to speak up on their behalf. At the same time, they also admitted their reluctance to express their opinions for fear of criticism from the nation’s most influential writers. One person vividly put it, “We perform on the stage and the writers perform in the press. We cannot win on their battlefield. What matters is that we were still able to perform yangbanxi after that, no matter what the writers said.” The consensus among those I interviewed was that the writers controlled the discourse on mainstream culture during the Liu-Deng debate. For them, Liu, who represented the majority of the performers, was disproportionately attacked and silenced during the debate. Liu made a public announcement in 1990, perhaps in a fit of histrionics, that she was leaving the Beijing opera stage for a secluded life in a Buddhist temple.

from the system before an even-handed consideration of the products of the Cultural Revolution could take place.<sup>590</sup>

### The Scholarly Debate

With the turn of the twenty-first century, the government eased restrictions on the topic of the Cultural Revolution, and scholarly attitudes started shifting as well. Researchers reexamined the yangbanxi within the greater context of twentieth-century art. A new school is now forming that contends the yangbanxi were of high artistic quality and reflected the aesthetic sense of that time period. For example, Zhang Guangtian claims that yangbanxi stimulated the arrival of the climax of a cultural renaissance through a comprehensive critique of the nation's cultural heritage, and therefore its artistic achievement is worthy and positive.<sup>591</sup> Zhang Hong's critique of yangbanxi is likewise favorable, calling it "socialist modernism" because its "aesthetics is reflected in the basic spirit of the modernist aesthetic."<sup>592</sup> Wang Zhengya, former vice president of the Central Conservatory, highly praised the yangbanxi composed by Yu Huiyong as "the best operas ever produced" and asserted that they represent a "continuing development from the 1919 New Literature Movement and the Yan'an

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<sup>590</sup> Dai Jiafang's 1994 book on Yu Huiyong can be seen as a test case. Dai had been careful to give his book a title readily interpretable as a negative evaluation of his subject matter; furthermore, he had cast the book as a novel, not a biography. Censors allowed the book to go to press, but they had a change of heart and blocked distribution of the book just one month after it was published. Interview with Dai Jiafang in Beijing in October 2010.

<sup>591</sup> Zhang Guangtian, "Jiangshan ruhua hongtuzhan—cong jingju geming kan xin zhongguo de wenhua baofu," *Wenyi lilun yu piping* ["The Plan for our Beautiful Country"—Considering the New Chinese Cultural Responsibility from Revolutionary Beijing Opera"], *Art Theory and Criticism*, 2000, vol. 1.

<sup>592</sup> Zhang Hong, "Yangbanxi yanjiu de jige wenti," *Wenyi zhengming*, ["Several questions about yangbanxi research," *Art Forum*] 2008, vol. 5.

period, reflecting the journey of contemporary Chinese music.”<sup>593</sup> Li Song, called yangbanxi “an imperishable masterpiece” in his 2007 summary of recent yangbanxi research.<sup>594</sup>

This reevaluation of the products of the Cultural Revolution is certainly due to shifting demographics in China. Those who had been in the prime of their life and had had their careers disrupted by the events of the Cultural Revolution no doubt harbored bitterness toward that period. But this generation was now retiring, relinquishing the reins of power, not just in academia and in government, but in the broader society as well, to a younger generation. These people, now in middle age, had grown up during the Cultural Revolution, and they looked back on their youth with nostalgia. It is these children of the Cultural Revolution that are the consumers of the “Red Classics”; they are the ones that sing revolutionary ballads and yangbanxi arias in karaoke clubs; they are the loyal fans of the frequent yangbanxi performances.

Yet there is one more group that we need to consider, and that is the rising generation of scholars that were born after the Cultural Revolution. For them, the products of the Cultural Revolution are historical artifacts, remnants of a former China that is so unlike the one they know today. Because they can look on the Cultural Revolution dispassionately, it is this generation that can finally give yangbanxi an objective assessment. The consensus emerging from this group is that yangbanxi are of the highest artistic quality. They praise the music for its beauty and its emotional

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<sup>593</sup> Interview with Wang Zhengya in Beijing in June 2011.

<sup>594</sup> Li Song, “jinshinianlai geming yangbanxi yanjiu shiping,” *Zhongyang xiju xueyuan xuebao*, [Summary of commentary on revolutionary yangbanxi during the last ten years, *Journal of the Central Drama Academy*] 2007, vol. 1, p. 100.

complexity, and they are not bothered by larger-than-life protagonists, who, after all, are not so different from the superheroes of today's movies.

Typical of this younger generation of academics is Beijing University professor of comparative literature (in film criticism) Dai Jinhua, who showed the film version of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* in one of her classes.

I watched *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* with my students in the class. My original plan was to mock it as an example of propaganda from the Cultural Revolution. But the movie wasn't at all what I had expected. When I heard the huge orchestra accompaniment and saw the modern dance and stage art, I was shocked and my preconceived ideas were collapsed one after another. I realized *Tiger* was not what we thought. It is a really modern text.<sup>595</sup>

It is precisely the generation of scholars such as Dai that will be the true arbiter of the artistic merit of yangbanxi, as they are the first generation that can view these works through a lens untainted by their experience of the Cultural Revolution.

What has been largely missing from the academic debate on yangbanxi is its musical dimension. Moreover, many analyses have taken yangbanxi out of the context of the Cultural Revolution and examined them as isolated works of art. For example, Zhu Keyi's 2004 dissertation, while especially praising the poetic and linguistic innovations of *Azalea Mountain*, gives no credit to Yu Huiyong for his role in leading this reform. In addition, she continues the perspective of the writers during the Liu-Deng debate, by praising Mao for his "brilliant art policy" of "leading and perpetuating the transformation of traditional Beijing opera into modern Beijing opera." At the same time, she reduces Jiang Qing to a mad woman of extraordinarily high energy levels and capabilities who

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<sup>595</sup> Dai Jinhua, "Mantan wenhua yanjiu zhong de xiandaixing wenti," [Regarding questions of modernization in the research of culture.] *Zhongshan* 1996, vol. 5.



“shamelessly stole the great art products” of yangbanxi from their creators, using them as a tool to change the Party and grasp power for herself, thus “severely damaging Chinese art and literature” in order to realize her ambition of “becoming the queen of China.”<sup>596</sup> Liu Yunyan, in her 2006 dissertation on female arias in yangbanxi, carefully limited her research to technical aspects, but she did pay tribute to Yu Huiyong for his innovation in his yangbanxi composition while ignoring Jiang Qing and the broader political background.<sup>597</sup> Likewise, musicologist Liu Zhengwei, in his 2004 book, *Twentieth Century Theater Music*, highly praises yangbanxi music even though he gives no credit to Jiang Qing or Yu Huiyong.<sup>598</sup> Evidently this taboo still holds, as Dai Jiafang’s 2011 manuscript on yangbanxi, in which he discusses the role of Jiang and Yu, was blocked from publication.<sup>599</sup>

### **Yangbanxi and Beijing Opera Today**

The influence of yangbanxi is still evident today. New Beijing opera, following the yangbanxi model of assembling the nation’s greatest talent, retains its prominent position among Chinese performing arts. In December 2008, the National Center for the

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<sup>596</sup> Zhu Keyi, *yuyanxue shiye zhong de yangbanxi* [Yangbanxi from a linguistics perspective] (Henan: Henan University Press, 2004), p. 350-56.

<sup>597</sup> Liu Yunyan, *Xiandai jingju yangbanxi danjue changqiang yinyue jianjiu* [Analysis of dan aria music in modern Beijing opera] (Beijing: Central Conservatory of Music Press, 2006). In spite of its limitation, Liu’s conclusion on the study of the traditional and yangbanxi female aria was very positive, stating that yangbanxi arias swept away many rules and formulas of traditional Beijing opera, but “No matter how it changes, it still remains the essence of the Beijing opera.” p. 272.

<sup>598</sup> Liu Zhengwei, *20 shiji xixu yinyuede duoshijiao yanjiu* [Multiple perspectives on twentieth century theater music] (Beijing: Central Conservatory of Music Press, 2004). According to Liu, both the quality and quantity of theater production during the Cultural Revolution was unprecedented.

<sup>599</sup> Interview with Dai Jiafang in Beijing in July 2011.

Performing Arts produced the new grand epic Beijing opera *Chi Bi* (Red Cliff). Like yangbanxi, *Red Cliff* was a national project from the start, bringing together top artists from around the country.<sup>600</sup> Cai Fuchao, current vice minister of propaganda, served as the librettist, a clear indication of collaboration between politics and art. Furthermore, the work was launched in parallel productions—classical, youth, and children’s versions—again, signifying the endeavor of developing a new Beijing opera and setting a new standard for the future presentation.<sup>601</sup>

Citing Yu’s enduring influence on these new productions, Wang Yongjie, conductor of *Red Cliff* stated:

The perfection of Yu’s music and balance of its orchestration is still our model, which remains the biggest gap between yangbanxi and the newly produced Beijing operas since his time. Whether the theme is modern or historical, musically these new works all remain *laoqiang laodiao* (old sound and old tone) to me, without the comparable freshness and individuality of yangbanxi.<sup>602</sup>

Yang Nailin, one of the composers of *Red Cliff* and composition professor at the Central Conservatory of Music, confirmed that the orchestration also followed Yu’s

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<sup>600</sup> It was a collaboration among six Beijing opera companies, including the China Beijing Opera Company, the National Beijing Opera Company, the Tianjing Beijing Opera Company, the Shanghai Beijing Opera Company, and the Shanxi Beijing Opera Company, and about a dozen other performing companies and institutions, such as the Beijing Ballet School and the Beijing Guolian Symphony Orchestra. It employed the best performing artists from the nation and China’s top composers and directors, including Zhang Jugang, the deputy chief director of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games Opening and Closing Ceremonies, and Wang Yongjie, former conductor of *On the Docks*. Its production cost was RMB 40,000,000 (USD 6,000,000).

<sup>601</sup> The classical version used seasoned performing artists; the youth version used young performers in their 20s and 30s, and a children’s version used children under 14.

<sup>602</sup> Interview with Wang Yongjie in Shanghai in February 2011.

system, but with the size of the orchestra doubled.<sup>603</sup> Dai Jiafang, another professor at the Central Conservatory of Music, remarked that doubling the size of the orchestra did not lead to a better effect and was a mistake: “They did not know that Yu Huiyong’s system came after many experiments on how to create a well-balanced sound. Yu had the resources to double or triple the size of the orchestra but found a smaller orchestra to be more effective.”<sup>604</sup>

New productions of Beijing opera, like yangbanxi, continue to play a political and social engineering role in China today. In June 2009, a new Beijing opera film *Lianli Yu Chenglong* (Honest Officer Yu Chenglong), premiered in Shanghai. The main character, Yu Chenglong, is selfless in his fight against corruption and devoted to his public duty, clearly designed as a role model for current Communist party officials during a time when the Chinese government is facing widespread corruption among its leaders. And even though the opera is set in the Qing dynasty, the message it conveys is relevant to contemporary Chinese society.<sup>605</sup>

Furthermore, the influence of yangbanxi has permeated other fields of musical and performing arts. Many of the fifth-generation composers, such as Chen Yi, informed me that they learned compositional techniques and skills from Yu Huiyong, who composed yangbanxi during their formative years.<sup>606</sup> Nancy Rao has noted, “from the decades around the beginning of the twenty-first century, contemporary Chinese

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<sup>603</sup> Interview with Yang Nailin in Beijing in June 2011.

<sup>604</sup> Interview with Dai Jiafang in Beijing in October 2010.

<sup>605</sup> Interview with Shang Changrong, who played the lead role Yu Chenglong, in Shanghai in July 2011. Interview with Zheng Dasheng, film director, in Shanghai in July 2008.

<sup>606</sup> I interviewed Chen Yi as well as about two-dozen composers, including Zhou, Ye Xiaogang, and Wen Deqing. All of them voiced similar opinions to Chen Yi. Interview with Chen Yi in Beijing in August 2010. Interview with Zhou Long in Beijing in November 2010. Interview with Ye Xiaogang in Shanghai in July 2011. Interview with Wen Deqing in Beijing in March 2011.

composers' music has exhibited a great debt to the expressive power of music gestures from Beijing opera."<sup>607</sup> In a similar vein, scholar Jonathan Stock has observed that, following the tradition of yangbanxi, many regional Chinese opera ensembles now include Western instruments or have experimented with their inclusion.<sup>608</sup> Additionally, Jiang Jiehong argues that "the influence of the Chinese Cultural Revolution is complex and exists at various levels" and that "it is the foundation of the development of contemporary art in China and a crucial source of identity for Chinese art in the global art world today."<sup>609</sup> Huang Zuoling, a veteran stage and film director whose works include the yangbanxi ballet *The White-Haired Girl*, in his later stage directing works asked actors to borrow techniques from Beijing opera's stage performances.<sup>610</sup> While these scholars have different perspectives, they all agree that the impact of yangbanxi cannot be ignored.

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<sup>607</sup> Rao's article traces several significant musical gestures in Chen Yi and Chen Qigang's works. The majority of Chinese contemporary composers, such as Tan Dun and Zhou Long (who are active in the United States), and many more in Mainland China exhibit such trends in their compositions. Although Rao does not directly credit their experiences to yangbanxi during the Cultural Revolution, given that it was the only form of Beijing opera that was performed during these composers' formative years, it is not unreasonable to make this connection. Nancy Rao, "The Tradition of Luogu Dianzi (Percussion Classics) and Its Signification in Contemporary Music," *Contemporary Music Review* 26, 5/6 (October/December), p. 511-527.

<sup>608</sup> Jonathan Stock, *Huju: Traditional Opera in Modern Shanghai* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 6.

<sup>609</sup> Jiang Jiehong, *Burden or Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), p. 2.

<sup>610</sup> For details about the use of Beijing opera techniques in stage drama, see Huang Zuolin, "Fusing of Revolutionary Realism with Revolutionary Romanticism," *The Drama Review*, 1994, vol. 38: 2, p. 22-23. Huang is a veteran stage and film director, founder and honorary artistic director of Shanghai People's Art Theater. Zheng Dasheng, Huang's grandson, who directed the first film of Beijing opera made after the end of the Cultural Revolution, acknowledged that there is a lot to learn from yangbanxi and traditional Beijing opera. Interview with Zheng Dasheng in Shanghai in July 2008.

## The Rise of the Fifth Generation

Yu's compositions and theory have certainly had a significant impact on a wide range of musical professionals, both of his generation and those that followed. All of the musicians and composers I interviewed credit Yu Huiyong for the influence he had—either directly or indirectly—on the formation of their career.<sup>611</sup> Among the fifty or so composers and performers I interviewed, there was a marked consensus that yangbanxi represents the peak of artistic achievement during the Cultural Revolution and continues to influence the performing arts in China to this day.<sup>612</sup> In particular, these artists all admire Yu for anchoring his yangbanxi compositions in China's social, economic, and political realities, while at the same time incorporating non-Chinese musical and theatrical elements.

Yu's contemporary Wang Zhengya, composer and former vice president of the Central Conservatory of Music, summed up Yu's achievement:

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<sup>611</sup> Shanghai pianist Ye Xiaogang developed a piano-accompanied concert version of *Ode to Dragon River*, another of the yangbanxi composed by Yu Huiyong, in imitation of the highly successful piano-accompanied concert version of *The Red Lantern*. Both the original and the piano versions of this opera are counted among the yangbanxi; these piano versions were more accessible to certain Chinese audiences, particularly those who preferred Western music, during the Cultural Revolution. Ye Xiaogang is the vice president of Central Conservatory of Music. Interview with Ye Xiaogang in Shanghai in July 2011.

<sup>612</sup> In interviews, many of Yu's contemporaries expressed their admiration for his ability to capture the essence and power of Beijing opera, especially during a period when opera themes were restricted and musical expression was limited. Many primary Beijing opera composers worked with Yu Huiyong, such as Gong Guotai, composer for the Shanghai Beijing Opera Company, Yang Nailin, composer and professor at the Central Conservatory, and Zhang Jianmin, composer for the China Beijing Opera Company. All told me clearly that their music for new Beijing opera works created after 1977 still followed the yangbanxi model. Ye Xiaogang, Vice President of the Central Conservatory of Music, affirmed the influence on later generations of composers, himself among them. Interview with Gong Guotai in Beijing February 2011. Interview with Yang Nailin in Beijing June 2011. Interview with Zhang Jianmin in Beijing in July 2011. Interview with Ye Xiaogang in Shanghai in July 2011.

Yu Huiyong was truly a master in leading Beijing opera reform, which was indeed necessary. His best-known compositions, *On the Docks*, *Tiger Mountain*, *Ode to Dragon River*, and *Azalea Mountain*, are staples of the Beijing opera repertoire and have not been surpassed since 1976 by any measure. However, Yu constantly surpassed himself and further pushed the boundaries of what could be expressed, challenging his audiences to alter their expectations of theatrical arts as well. Among these operas, the most innovative was *On the Docks*, as it was the first among the early yangbanxi to clearly differentiate itself from traditional Beijing opera. Yet the most successful was *Azalea Mountain*, which absorbed more Western elements and created new formulas to replace the stereotyped Beijing opera formulas. His greatest genius lay in his writing of arias, which are so beautiful, moving, and fresh, while being embedded with recurring motifs. It is well known that Yu taught Yang Chunxia (who played Ke Xiang) to sing each aria. The orchestra achieved equivalent results. It no longer used any stereotyped preludes or connectives, all replaced by themes and recurring motifs, or newly composed music. It is indeed the best opera ever produced, and it is very attractive. It is still my favorite opera.<sup>613</sup>

Many of the fifth-generation composers (referring to those who were born after 1950 and began their careers after the Cultural Revolution) that I interviewed, such as Chen Yi, Zhou Long, and Ye Xiaogang, stated that *On the Docks* was their favorite model opera. Chen said:

To those of us trained in the Western music tradition, traditional Beijing opera sounded very unpleasing to the ear at the beginning. It is just as difficult as asking a Chinese Beijing opera or folk song singer to hear harmonic layers in a piano composition. Yu's composition really reached the pinnacle of resolving the differences between Eastern and Western musical practices. For example, some instrumental passages in his works required the violin to use jinghu bowing, which is totally opposite from the up-and-down bowing technique of violin. You can hear a trace of Western chromatic treatment and structure. But overall Yu's music was ruled by Chinese melodic procedures. For example, you can hear his instrumental music in a way imitating the formula of the theatrical aria. What I love most is Yu's *On the Docks* and his overture for Act V of *Taking Tiger Mountain*. I can hear all the counterpoint in the orchestra and how each voice was moving and which instrument was playing the bass note. I can tell what parts were written by Yu Huiyong in yangbanxi

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<sup>613</sup> Interview with Wang Zhengya in Beijing in June 2011.

music. This was a crucial time for forming my compositional music language.<sup>614</sup>

Indeed, Yu Huiyong's ideas and innovations in yangbanxi inspired musicians' creative fervor throughout China, spurring them to act directly upon the public demand, for example, creating a Uighur version of *The Red Lantern* and developing a piano-accompanied concert version of *Ode to Dragon River*.<sup>615</sup>

Yu not only left his mark on the current generation of Chinese musicians and composers, he influenced the musical experience of amateurs and non-musicians as well. Although his name is rarely mentioned, his music is familiar to all Chinese, from the businessman belting out a yangbanxi aria in a karaoke club to the young violinist practicing the "Kill the Tiger and Ascend the Mountain" sonata from *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*. Based on the impact Yu Huiyong has had upon his own society, many fifth-generation composers have argued that he needs to be ranked along with such distinguished composers as Beethoven and Tchaikovsky.<sup>616</sup>

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<sup>614</sup> Zhou Long and Ye Xiaogang expressed similar opinions based on their own experience. Zhou Long, originally from Beijing, now lives in the United States as a composer and composition professor. Ye Xiaogang, originally from Shanghai, now lives in Beijing as a composer and is vice president of the Central Conservatory of Music. Chen Yi, originally from Guangzhou, now lives in the United States as a composer and composition professor. All three of them grew up in families that were more Westernized and learned Western instruments such as piano and violin when they were young. They also had first-hand experience performing yangbanxi. For example, Chen Yi was the concertmaster for the Guangzhou City Beijing Opera Company for eight years, which produced all of the yangbanxi works except for *The White Tiger Regiment*. All three entered Central Conservatory in 1978 when it reopened to the public. Interview with Chen Yi in Beijing in August 2010. Interview with Zhou Long in Beijing in November 2010. Interview with Ye Xiaogang in Shanghai in July 2011.

<sup>615</sup> Standing as a formidable bulwark against such endeavor was a small number of conservative composers that refused to write anything for fear of criticism. At that time, all art workers were treated as government employees and received a regular salary regardless of their artistic output.

<sup>616</sup> Chinese-born composer and conductor Xie Tan stated that he considered Yu Huiyong to be one of the greatest musicians in the world and greater than Beethoven in terms of the influence of his theory and the popularity of his music. Interview with Xie Tan in San Francisco in May 2008.

## **Future Directions**

This research project has been a journey of nearly a decade. During that time, I have interviewed scores of people who were involved in the creation of the yangbanxi as well as artists of the current generation whose work has been influenced by the yangbanxi. I have also uncovered a wealth of primary documents concerning the life and work of Yu Huiyong, and yet newly discovered documents are not infrequently brought to my attention. The contents of these primary sources extend beyond the scope of this dissertation, and I have often struggled with the decision of what to include, or exclude, from the current work. I am also aware that my thinking has been influenced by many people whose ideas I was not able to cite in this text. In spite of the limitations of this dissertation, it is my hope that it will contribute some small part to raising awareness about the cultural importance of yangbanxi and the instrumental role played by Jiang Qing and Yu Huiyong in the creation of an iconic Chinese art form.



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## Interviews

<i>Name</i>	<i>Profession</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Date</i>
Chen Gang	Composer, Professor, Shanghai Conservatory of Music	Shanghai	May 2007
Chen Lei	Composer, Shanghai Beijing Opera Company	Shanghai	August 2010
Chen Yi	Composer, Professor, University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music and Dancer	Beijing	August 2010
Chen Yinshi	Professor, Shanghai Conservatory of Music	Shanghai	July 2005 July 2011
Cheng Hui	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	Beijing	June 2011
Dai Jiafang	Professor, Central Conservatory of Music	Beijing	June 2006 October 2010 July 2011
Du Mingxin	Composer, Professor, Central Conservatory of Music	Beijing	June 2011
Fei Yuping	Composer, Professor, National Academy of Chinese Theater Arts	Beijing	July 2011
Fu Jin	Composer, Professor, National Academy of Chinese Theater Arts	Beijing	July 2011
Gong Guotai	Composer, Shanghai Beijing Opera Company	Beijing	July 2008 February 2011
Hai Zheng	Composer, Professor, National Academy of Chinese Theater Arts	Beijing	October 2010
Han Zhong'en	Professor, Shanghai Conservatory of Music	Shanghai	March 2011

Jing Yuehua	Composer and conductor, Shanghai Beijing Opera Company	Shanghai	March 2011
Li Jun	Performing artist, Shanghai Beijing Opera Company	Shanghai	August 2010
Li Zhengzhong	Professor, China Conservatory of Music	Beijing	August 2006
Lian Bo	Composer, Professor, Shanghai Conservatory of Music	Shanghai Shanghai Shanghai Shanghai	July 2005 June 2008 February 2010 February 2011
Liang Maochun	Professor, Central Conservatory of Music	Beijing	July 2006
Lu Zaiyi	Composer, Chair, Shanghai Music Association	Shanghai	May 2006
Luo Wei	Professor, University of Kentucky	Lexington, Kentucky	March 2010
Pan Yinlin	Concertmaster, Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra	Shanghai	May 2010
Qiao Jianzhong	Professor, Shanghai Conservatory of Music	Shanghai	June 2007
Ren Guangping	Performing artist, Shanghai Beijing Opera Company	Shanghai	July 2008
Ren Ke	Wife of Yu Huiying	Beijing	June 2007 July 2010 October 2010 November 2010
Shang Changrong	Performing artist, Shanghai Beijing Opera Company	Shanghai	July 2011
Situ Gang	Composer, Lily Cai Dance Company	San Francisco, California	May 2009
Song Zhanyou	Professor, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences	Shanghai	August 2010



Wang Yaohua	Professor, Fujian Normal University	Lexington, Kentucky	March 2009
Wang Yongjie	Composer, Conductor, Shanghai Film Orchestra	Shanghai	February 2011 March 2011
Wang Zhengya	Professor, Vice President, Central Conservatory of Music	Beijing	June 2011
Wen Deqing	Composer, Professor, Shanghai Conservatory of Music	Beijing	March 2011
Wu Zuchang	Composer, Former President, Central Conservatory of Music	Beijing	October 2010
Wulan Jie	Professor, Minzu University	Beijing	July 2011
Xie Tan	Composer, Conductor, Firebird Youth Chinese Orchestra	San Francisco	May 2008
Xin Jiexian	Nephew of Yu Huiyong	Beijing	October 2010 March 2011
Xu Jianzhong	Performing artist, Shanghai Beijing Opera Company	Shanghai	July 2008
Yang Chunxia	Performing artist, China National Peking Opera Company	Beijing	July 2006 August 2009
Yang Nailin	Composer, Professor, Central Conservatory of Music	Beijing	June 2011
Ye Xiaogang	Composer, Professor, Central Conservatory of Music	Shanghai	July 2011
Yu Jiayi	Daughter of Yu Huiyong	Beijing	February 2011
Yu Zhigang	Professor, Central Conservatory of Music	Beijing	May 2011
Zhang Boyu	Professor, Central Conservatory of Music	Beijing	May 2011
Zhang Jianmin	Composer, China National Peking Opera Company	Beijing	July 2011
Zhang Qian	Professor, Central Conservatory of Music	Beijing	October 2010

Zhang Zhengtao	President, National Art Academy Music Research Institute	Beijing	July 2006
Zheng Dasheng	Film director, Shanghai Film Studio	Shanghai	July 2008
Zhou Long	Composer, Professor, University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music and Dance	Beijing	November 2010
Zhu Chushan	Beijing opera director	Washington, D.C.	November 2008
Wang Xiaohui	Businessman	Beijing	July 2007

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