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Periphery Matters

A Cultural Biography of Peking Opera in Hong Kong

Chan Pui Lun

Cover designed by Lydia Lam

Image: Tang Yuen-ha performing in the 2015 Chinese Opera Festival in Hong Kong.

Courtesy: Leisure and Cultural Services Department, HKSAR Government

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Periphery Matters

A Cultural Biography of Peking Opera in Hong Kong

Proefschrift

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgement.....	ix
Author's Note.....	x
List of Tables and Figures.....	xiii

Chapter One /

Introduction.....	1
1.1 Building a house	1
1.2 The blueprint.....	4
1.2.1. Cultural Biography	4
1.2.2. Social Network Analysis	5
1.3 Why this house?.....	7
1.4 A review.....	8
1.4.1. Peking Opera around the world	8
1.4.2. Primary sources	9
1.5 Building tools.....	9
1.5.1. Conversing.....	10
1.5.2. Observing (and participating).....	11
1.5.3. Reading.....	11
1.6 The interior	12

Chapter Two /

Early Scenes of Peking Opera in Hong Kong

Mei Lanfang.....	15
2.1 The quest for “national drama” in the late 1910s	16
2.1.1 National Identity = National Culture: nationalism and the May Fourth Movement.....	16
2.1.2 National Culture = National Drama: The social function of drama	18
2.1.3 National Drama = Peking Opera: Qi Rushan's nationalization of Peking Opera	21
2.2 Peking Opera = Mei Lanfang: performing “national essence” on stage	24
2.2.1 On Mei Lanfang.....	24
2.2.2 Mei's Peking Opera innovations in the 1910s.....	25
2.3 The first encounter: Mei's 1922 tour to Hong Kong	28
2.3.1 Mei Lanfang on stage: a fabulous impersonator of femininity.....	30
2.3.2 Mei Lanfang off stage: a modern man, a Chinese elite person	31
2.4 Conclusion	34
2.5 Epilogue: Mei Lanfang after 1922.....	35

Chapter Three /**The First Wave of Peking-Cantonese Opera Interaction**

Chen Feinong	37
3.1 A brief history of Cantonese Opera	38
3.1.1 The same roots: <i>pihuang</i> singing mode as foundation	39
3.1.2 Different paths: the localization of Cantonese Opera.....	40
3.2 Chen Feinong and his early career.....	42
3.2.1 Early years (1899-1920/21)	43
3.2.2 In Singapore (1920/21-23).....	43
3.2.3 Correcting dates in Chen's life history in the early 1920s.....	44
3.3 Inter-genre interaction in the 1920s and 1930s.....	45
3.3.1 Defining and framing the interaction.....	45
3.3.2 A pioneer	46
3.3.3 Interaction as a chain reaction	47
3.3.4 Canonizing adoption.....	49
3.3.5 Impact on Cantonese Opera.....	50
3.4 Conclusion	52
3.5 Chen Feinong in later years	53

Chapter Four /**Mid-Twentieth Century: Local Training Schools and the Movie Industry**

Jackie Chan	55
4.1 Mainland performers in Hong Kong – 1940s and 1950s.....	56
4.1.1 Mei Lanfang.....	57
4.1.2 Ma Lianliang, Zhang Junqiu, and Yu Zhenfei.....	57
4.1.3 A site of nostalgia	60
4.2 Peking Opera training schools in Hong Kong from the 1950s to the 1970s	63
4.2.1 The recruitment system of Peking Opera from the 1790s to 1950s	63
4.2.2 Jackie Chan's childhood.....	65
4.2.3 Life in a training school.....	65
4.3 Peking Opera training schools and Hong Kong martial arts movies.....	74
4.3.1 The rise of martial arts movies from the 1960s	74
4.3.2 From Peking Opera performers to movie actors.....	75
4.3.3 The significance of Peking Opera training schools in Hong Kong	76
4.4 Peking Opera in Martial Arts movies in the 1960s.....	78
4.4.1 King Hu and his Cinema Opera.....	78
4.4.2 Zhang Che: same source, different interpretation.....	82
4.5 Conclusion	82

Chapter Five /**Peking Opera and Cultural Politics: from the 1840s to the Present**

Liang Hanyong.....	85
5.1 A look back: from the 1840s to the 1970s.....	86
5.1.1 Collaborative coloniality	86
5.1.2 The new City Hall and the 1967 riot	89
5.2 The 1980s: Rebirth	92
5.2.1 A descriptive cultural policy.....	92
5.2.2 The rebirth of Peking Opera in Hong Kong	93
5.3 Peking Opera and politics after 1997: a case study of Liang Hanyong and the YCOC	95
5.3.1 Cultural policy after 1997.....	95
5.3.2 Liang Hanyong and the YCOC.....	96
5.3.3 Peking Opera under the post-1997 policy	97
5.4 Performances by Chinese mainland troupes.....	107
5.5 Post-1997 Hong Kong's national yet local identity.....	108
5.6 Conclusion	111

Chapter Six /**Local Innovation in the Twenty-First Century**

Tang Yuen-ha.....	113
6.1 Tang Yuen-ha and the Jingkun Theatre.....	114
6.2 The national vision among local performers	115
6.2.1 Peking Opera on the mainland after the Cultural Revolution.....	116
6.2.2 From Notre Dame de Paris to The Great Belfry.....	117
6.3 In search of a “Hong Kong way”	120
6.3.1 Return to traditional plays	121
6.3.2 The innovative guided demonstration	122
6.3.3 Motivation behind the local invention.....	127
6.4 Guided demonstration on the Chinese mainland: the periphery impacting the core. 128	
6.4.1 Mainland-Hong Kong collaboration in the making of guided demonstrations ..	128
6.4.2 Appropriating guided demonstration on the Chinese mainland	130
6.5 Teaching activities of Jingkun Theatre.....	134
6.6 Conclusion	134

Chapter Seven /**Repackaging Cantonese Opera?**

Yeung Ming	137
7.1 Current influence of Peking Opera on Cantonese Opera.....	137
7.1.1 Continuities.....	138
7.1.2 A new role of Peking Opera performers in Cantonese Opera productions	140
7.2 Yeung Ming and his “repackaged” Cantonese Opera	142
7.2.1 A brief biography.....	142
7.2.2 Repackaging Cantonese Opera	144
7.2.3 Some reflection on “repackaged” Cantonese Opera.....	149
7.3 Canonizing Peking Opera at HKAPA	150
7.3.1 Peking Opera in the School’s programmes	150
7.3.2 The big picture	152
7.4 Conclusion	152

Chapter Eight /**Conclusion.....155**

8.1 A house of curiosities	155
8.2 A refugee shelter.....	156
8.3 A laboratory of performing arts.....	158
8.4 Peking Opera in Taiwan and Singapore: a comparison.....	159
8.4.1 Peking Opera in Taiwan	160
8.4.2 Peking Opera in Singapore	165
8.4.3 So what is special about Hong Kong?	168
8.5 What next?	169

Bibliography.....	170
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Samenvatting.....	184
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Curriculum Vitae.....	187
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Author's Note

The misleading Peking “Opera”

Peking Opera and all genres of traditional Chinese theatre (*xiqu* 戲曲) at large, which is often referred to as “Chinese Opera”, are in many ways different from the Western genre of opera. Firstly, the musical features of the two art forms are different. While western opera uses composed music, traditional Chinese theatre bases its music on fixed tunes and the tone-matrix system. Fixed tunes (*qupai* 曲牌) are pre-existing tunes that are preserved and orally transmitted, and are known to people by their titles. To be used in a play, tunes are put together, like a “medley” in the western sense, to form a larger unit of musical entity. This way to organize music is called *lianzhui* 聯綴, or the “medley” form.¹ The tone-matrix (*banqiang* 板腔) system, on the other hand, operates in a play by tempo-variations of singing mode(s). A singing mode (*shengqiang* 聲腔) can be understood as a specific set of structural rules that govern the melodic formation of musical lines. These rules of melodic contour are highly dependent on linguistic features of the performing language (dialect) and, thus, singing modes are highly region-specific. According to Bell Yung and Chan Sau-yan, there are five factors to determine a singing mode: “the text’s verse structure, the metrical pattern and syllable placement, the line-ending notes, the mode and the instrumental accompaniment.”² While many genres organize their music with a mix of these two forms, they are not invariably balanced. For example, Kunqu Opera operates mostly in the “medley” form of fixed tunes, while Peking Opera basically sticks to the tone-matrix system.³

Secondly, while western opera performers are categorized according to their vocal range, categorization of performers in traditional Chinese theatre operates in a role type (*hangdang* 行當) system. Formed together with the emergence of *zaju* 雜劇 in the Song dynasty (960-1279), the system contained five role types, namely *moni* 末泥, *yinxi* 引戲, *fujing* 副淨, *fumo* 副末 and *zhuanghu* 裝狐, which indicate performers’ tasks in a play. For example, *moni* was the leading male; *yinxi* was responsible for starting the play with songs and dances; and *fumo* was to make jokes during the play.⁴ After centuries during which roles were added and removed, the role type system adopted by the majority of traditional Chinese theatrical genres in the present contains four main role types. They include male role (*sheng* 生), female role (*dan* 旦), painted face role (*jing* 淨)⁵ and clown role (*chou* 丑), categorizing performers according to the gender and the attributes of the characters of their specialization. Within these four main role types, there are sub-types to further categorize performers according to the age-range of the characters and technical requirements for the performers.

¹ Yung 1989: 7.

² Yung 1989: 69-71; Chan 1991: 11.

³ Yung 1989: 7.

⁴ Liao 2014: 32, 62.

⁵ Performers in the painted face role specialize in portraying characters with distinctive moral qualities, be they good or bad, as well as characters with a mythical nature or immortality. The role type is named after the conventional practice of elaborate face painting among performers of this type.

For example, under the male role there are junior male role (*xiaosheng* 小生), senior male role (*laosheng* 老生) and martial male role (*wusheng* 武生). Names and numbers of sub-roles under the four main role types may be different across genres due to their diversified paths of development.

Thirdly, traditional Chinese theatre is highly stylized, and this is reflected in its stage setting and performance. In terms of stage setting, the use of backdrops and props is minimized. On the traditional stage one would only find a modestly decorated backdrop of a piece of cloth, a plain-coloured rug, as well as a wooden table and two wooden chairs set in the middle. Such setting is called “one table, two chairs” (*yizhuo liangyi* 一桌兩椅). Small variations to the traditional setting would be made according to the story contexts. For example, if it is to depict a scene in the royal palace or a wedding chamber, respective kinds of decorated silk cloths would be used to cover the table and chairs. In turn, the indicative function of location and context of a scene is taken up by the performers through their verbal deliveries and formulaic actions. For example, performers present a horse ride by a loop run around the stage with a decorated horsewhip in their hand;⁶ or performers would have a specific set of actions – for example, they mimic door opening and threshold crossing to indicate that they are entering or exiting a room.

In addition to the aforesaid artistic differences between traditional Chinese theatre and western opera, another reason for my hesitation toward the use of “opera” is that the term “Chinese Opera” can also mean something else altogether. Due to cultural globalization, a development of western opera in China in recent decades is observed. Be the productions produced *in* China, *by* Chinese composers, or *with* culturally Chinese elements, I believe that “Chinese Opera” is the best, if not the only, term for describing these practices of western opera in China.

Indeed a debate has existed for long on a suitable English term for *xiqu*, which covers a wide range of traditional Chinese art forms. I have encountered terms like “Chinese Opera”, “Chinese Theatre Arts”, “Chinese (Musical) Drama”, or its Romanization from the Hanyu Pinyin system, *xiqu*, in scholarship by others. I prefer to use “traditional Chinese theatre” in this research project, for the above-mentioned reasons. As for my seemingly contradicting choices of terms such as “Peking Opera”, “Cantonese Opera” and “Kunqu Opera”, I use them because they are the most established terms for the respective genres in English-language scholarship. Also, precise but wordy alternatives such as “traditional Chinese theatre in Peking (Beijing) style” would hamper readability, especially in view of their numerous appearances in the dissertation.

On Romanization and conventions

In general, I transliterate Chinese names and terms following the official Hanyu Pinyin system of the People’s Republic of China, as it is the dominant Romanization system used in Chinese studies. For names of individuals and places, unless I am aware of an established

⁶ Up to the sixteenth century, bamboo horses were used on stage.

name in other Romanization systems – for example, the Cantonese Romanization system used by the Hong Kong government – I spell them in Hanyu Pinyin. Names of individuals are in Chinese order (surname, given name), unless an English language publication uses a specific spelling (e.g. King Hu) or if a name is a mix of English and Chinese (e.g. Jackie Chan). A name will be followed by corresponding Chinese characters at its first appearance.

For the sake of readability, a different convention goes with other names and play titles. A name at its first appearance will be in English first, whether it is the official name, a received translation or my own translation. If the appearance of the name is not for reference purpose, it will be followed by Chinese characters. Any subsequent references are in English only. A similar convention goes with play titles, which will be in the order of English, transliteration in Hanyu Pinyin and Chinese characters. Titles of complete plays and scenes that are conventionally performed as independent plays are in italics, while titles of scenes or excerpts from complete plays are put between quotation marks. As for other phrases and terms in Chinese, unless otherwise stated, I will first give an English translation, followed by the Chinese Romanization and Chinese characters.

One exception of such convention is for titles of Chinese-language publications. I will first give the Chinese Romanization and Chinese characters, followed by an English translation, so as to identify its source language. All translations of Chinese texts are mine unless otherwise stated.

Life years of significant individuals in my narrative will be cited, but in those cases where individuals have objected to their life years being cited, I have respected their preferences.

List of Tables and Figures

Figure 1.1.	The network model for my discussion.	7
Figure 2.1.	Advertisement for Mei Lanfang's 1922 Hong Kong tour.	33
Figure 2.2.	The stage of the Tai Ping Theatre	34
Figure 3.1.	The transmission paths of Han Drama to north and south.	40
Figure 4.1.	Jackie Chan and Yuan Hong performing <i>Cuiping Mountain</i>	71
Figure 4.2.	Students from the China Drama Academy performing <i>A Truce Between the Ba and Luo Families</i>	72
Figure 4.3.	Students from the China Drama Academy participating in the movie <i>The Princess and the Seven Little Heroes</i> .	73
Table 5.1.	Replication of the score table used in the point system of City Hall's venue booking.	91
Table 5.2.	ADC's funding to local Peking Opera troupes/projects from the financial years of 1994/95 to 2014/15.	97
Figure 5.1.	Liang Hanyong tutoring secondary school students in a foundational skills class.	99
Figure 5.2.	Poster of the YCOC's graduation performance.	100
Figure 5.3.	Before a YCOC community performance.	106
Figure 5.4.	The daughter of Liang Hanyong performing in a community performance.	106
Figure 6.1.	A scene from <i>The Great Belfry</i> .	119
Figure 6.2.	The rotating stage used in <i>The Great Belfry</i> .	120
Figure 6.3.	The civil clown role performing in a guided demonstration.	125
Figure 6.4.	A comprehensive excerpt from "Autumn River".	126
Figure 6.5.	A comprehensive excerpt from <i>Crossroads</i> .	126
Figure 6.6.	The "Chinese Peking Opera with Explanation" performance.	133
Figure 6.7.	SPOT's ensemble performing Peking Opera music in the performance.	133
Figure 7.1.	Yeung Ming rehearsing a "repackaged" Cantonese Opera play.	147
Figure 7.2.	The two performers adopting Yeung's version of the action in their performance.	148

Chapter One / Introduction

1.1 Building a house

In her discussion about the structure of stylish academic writing, Helen Sword borrows essayist Annie Dillard's metaphor to describe writing as an "architectural endeavor".⁷ Certainly this building metaphor is also applicable to conducting research projects, and I am sure that I am not the first to see it this way. Although not innovative, it is a powerful metaphor. Doing a research project is much like building a house.

I am going to build a house in an interesting place: a place where things meet that had appeared unlikely to encounter each other; a place where things interact that had appeared unlikely to do so. Borrowing from Daphne Lei (2006), I am going to build a house in a "contact zone."

Peking Opera, or *jingju* 京劇, is one of the over three hundred genres in traditional theater (*xiqu* 戲曲) now existing in China. It first emerged in the late eighteenth century as a hybrid form, which absorbed elements from several other regional genres. It then developed into a sophisticated, independent genre in Beijing (with *Peking* remaining part of the conventional transcription). Until the end of Qing dynasty, its popularity remained in northeastern cities such as Beijing and Tainjin, but it also established itself in late nineteenth-century Shanghai. The genre became widely known in the Republican period (1912-1949), when the nation-building agenda of the Chinese Republican Government from the 1910s onward facilitated its exposure abroad, and the efforts of some dedicated intellectuals and practitioners gave it the status of a national art form. Since then it has often been viewed internationally as representative of traditional Chinese culture. Nevertheless, despite its national status, "hot spots" of Peking Opera within the Chinese mainland are still located mostly in the northern part of the nation, with Shanghai and Hubei province as roughly the southernmost area of major popularity.

Hong Kong, a coastal city located in Guangdong Province in southeastern China, became a British colony after the First Opium War (1839-1842). In 1997 the city's sovereignty was transferred back to what had by then become the People's Republic of China (PRC, founded 1949), and Hong Kong became a so-called Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). Its geographical location and colonial history gave the city a wide cultural spectrum, which researchers have often framed into an "East, West, Local" discourse. Within this trinity, the "east" refers mainly to the Lingnan 嶺南 culture, which is a regional culture that covers the modern Chinese provinces of Guangdong, Guangxi, and Hainan. It also refers to culture originating in the coastal areas of Guangdong and Fujian provinces. The "west", in turn, refers to cultural imports by the British colonizers, which were popularized through means such as official promotion and inclusion in the public school curriculum. Thirdly, there is the "local", defined by Wu Junxiong and Zhang Zhiwei as "products or lifestyles which are

⁷ Sword 2012: 122.

spread widely in the community and well appreciated by the general public,”⁸ and more or less identifiable as belonging to Hong Kong “itself.” Examples include local movie productions and Canto-pop.

The cultural connection with China is manifest, among many other features, in the existence of certain traditional Chinese theatrical genres in Hong Kong. According to Chan Sau-yan and Barbara Ward, three popular genres exist in Hong Kong. First there is Cantonese Opera, which is a regional genre in Guangdong, Hong Kong, and other Cantonese-speaking communities. It is noteworthy that Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong and on the Chinese mainland developed diversely, especially since 1949, in terms of artistic style and, more notably, performing practice. For example, while Hong Kong practitioners still use *gongchi* 工尺 musical notation⁹ widely in addition to the numbered musical notation (a.k.a. Ziffersystem), the former has been largely abandoned by mainland practitioners.¹⁰ Also, Cantonese Opera performances in the PRC are strongly scripted in terms of both text and music, while a far greater degree of improvisation by performers and musicians is seen in Hong Kong. The second popular genre in Hong Kong is Teochew, or Chaozhou, Opera. This is a genre in the Teochew dialect that is popular in the Chaoshan 潮汕 region of eastern Guangdong. Third is Hoklo 福佬 Drama, which is performed in both the mid-land dialect¹¹ and Hoklo, which is a dialect spoken by people in eastern Guangdong and southern Fujian (with the Haifeng 海豐 and Lufeng 陸豐 counties as cores). The popularity of these two genres in Hong Kong can be traced in large part to migration from these regions to Hong Kong, and they are mostly performed in a ritual context.¹²

Generally speaking, cultural forms in Hong Kong, wherever they stand within the cultural spectrum, are allowed to pursue their own courses. This is because of the British colonial philosophy that consciously avoided political interference in the culture of the colonized. In the 1970s a cultural policy was first developed by the colonial government, which continued through the SAR period until the present day. However, the policy was never prescriptive in nature, nor did it ever prohibit the practice of any cultural form. Despite this, the authorities strategically promoted public access to certain forms. For example, the colonial government in the twentieth century promoted European art forms through school education and administrative measures, while the SAR government after 1997 stimulated the public reception of traditional Chinese art forms.

On the other hand, a stronger political intervention on cultural forms was seen on the Chinese mainland, especially since the establishment of PRC in 1949. For example, Peking Opera was subjected to Drama Reform in the 1950s. This was a movement led by the PRC government to control the form and ideology of the genre through prescriptive policies, so

⁸ Wu and Zhang 2002: xvii.

⁹ In short, *gongche* musical notation is a notation system that uses Chinese characters to indicate the scale degrees of notes. For a more detailed description of the system, see Yung 1989: 14-15.

¹⁰ Chen 2010: 125.

¹¹ “Mid-land” (*zhongzhou* 中州) refers to the central region of ancient China, which covers the modern Chinese province of Henan.

¹² Chan 1996: 28-34; Ward 1985: 161-187.

that it would serve the political agenda of the regime.¹³ Then from 1965 to 1978, traditional plays of the genre were banned because of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). During that period only a handful of Revolutionary Opera plays, or “model operas” (*yangban xi* 樣板戲), were allowed to be performed. Even since its privatization and marketization in the late 1970s, the development of Peking Opera in contemporary China is still strongly shaped by the prescriptive cultural policies of the PRC government.

Having outlined the apparent irrelevance of the northern Peking Opera and the southern city of Hong Kong, I ask: what happened when Peking Opera travelled to Hong Kong? What happened when what had been positioned as a national theatrical genre appeared in the periphery – in the geographical, cultural, and political sense – of the nation it represents? Who were involved in this process, how did the result relate to local genres and to local cultural production at large, and how did it evolve over time? I attempt to answer these questions by writing a cultural biography of Peking Opera in Hong Kong. It investigates how various social agents have identified Peking Opera, contributed to multiple valuation regimes of Peking Opera, and shaped the development of Peking Opera in Hong Kong since the early twentieth century.

In addition to a review of Peking Opera’s development in Hong Kong, I also aim to investigate how this development addresses long-standing questions surrounding “Hong Kong identity”. This is no simple matter. As Ackbar Abbas says, “The difficulty with the local, therefore, is in locating [local culture], and this is particularly tricky in a place like Hong Kong with its significant proportion of refugees, migrants, and transients, all of whom could claim local status.”¹⁴ The relative social stability of the city under colonial governance (the Japanese occupation in the 1940s notwithstanding) may also have kept these questions from taking centre stage until the mid 1980s, when the prospect of the 1997 sovereignty handover from the British to the mainland-Chinese authorities began to loom large. Since then, an “identity crisis” has occurred in Hong Kong society, which has led to scholarly discussions of the heterogeneous cultural manifestations of “Hong Kong identity”. These discussions have regained momentum in recent years, when politically inflected voices emerged that call for an attention to local identity.

The search for local identity as embodied in cultural forms such as cinema and popular music has resulted in rich scholarship. For example, Stephen Teo writes extensively about martial arts movies and action movies in Hong Kong, examining in particular how they articulate locality via filming techniques and cinematic languages. Scholars like Wong Chi-wah and Chu Yiu-wai have produced a series of books that discuss the “local-ness” in Canto-pop lyrics. But relatively little work has been devoted to studying local identity as this manifests itself in the realm of traditional art forms, such as Chinese theatre.

To be sure, it is not the case that traditional Chinese theatre in Hong Kong has not received scholarly attention. There is a range of works that focus on the field (mostly on Cantonese Opera) from artistic, cultural and social perspectives. However, the study of

¹³ For more details about the Drama Reform, see Fu 2007: 149-195 and Guan 2012: 83-88.

¹⁴ Abbas 1997: 12.

identity remains marginal in these works. As traditional Chinese theatre is still an important component of the Hong Kong cultural spectrum, this leaves an incomplete picture of identity-building in the cultural realm. Therefore, I aim to help remedy this issue by investigating how “Hong Kong identity” is invented, interpreted, maintained, and challenged by practices of Peking Opera in Hong Kong across time.

1.2 The blueprint

To return to the house-building metaphor, in terms of theory my blueprint is derived from Cultural Biography and Social Network Analysis.

1.2.1. Cultural Biography

As my dissertation title suggests, this project is very much inspired by Igor Kopytoff’s idea of Cultural Biography. First suggested in 1986 as a contribution to Arjun Appadurai’s study of material as commodity, the core of this idea lies in the exploration of a continual, and possibly repetitive, process of commoditization, decommoditization and recommoditization of an object, defined by Kopytoff as the (re)acquisition and (re)configuration of the object’s social identity and value.¹⁵ As Gosden and Marshall put it, “[objects] often have the capability of accumulating histories, so that the present significance of an object derives from the persons and events to which it is connected.”¹⁶ In other words, the meanings of an object are constructed by its social interactions with people, events, and probably other objects. These meanings are accumulated and transformed over time, throughout the object’s “life”. Also, one has to study an object in a multi-faceted manner, which includes its physical attributes, production, consumption and exchange, in order to understand it more thoroughly.

The Cultural Biography approach has been growing in popularity in historical studies of objects. In an extensive literature review, Gosden and Marshall (1999) show that objects can be studied by a biographical approach in various manners. My review of relevant scholarship also shows that a wide range of objects have been studied with this approach, from a war memorial in Katanning, West Australia (Stephens 2012) to the terracotta statues from the temple at Ayia Irini on the Greek island of Kea (Gorogianni 2011); and from a World War I German 150mm gun (Pearson 2013) to the city of Chacabuco in northern Chile (Vilches 2011). In addition, Cultural Biography is also applied as an anthropological approach. For example, David Griffith (2013) uses this approach to investigate the fishing industry in Puerto Rico. By looking at the Cultural Biography of fish in that region from various perspectives – “as a biological organism, as a species targeted and processed by fishers, as a commodity, as a food, as a gift, and so forth”¹⁷ – he outlines an ethnography of his topic.

Tellingly, the above list may give the impression that the Cultural Biography approach can only deal with discrete, physical objects, and raise doubts regarding its applicability to intangible performing arts. Indeed, even the closest art-related example Kopytoff has given in his foundational essay in 1986 is an objectified art work – a painting of Pierre-Auguste

¹⁵ Kopytoff 1986: 64-91.

¹⁶ Gosden & Marshall 1999: 170.

¹⁷ Griffith 2013: 19.

Renoir.¹⁸ However, I submit that this does not preclude the Cultural Biography approach from being a useful perspective in looking at Peking Opera in Hong Kong – or, for that matter, at other intangible objects. Firstly, I employ this approach in a manner that emphasizes its focus on the dynamic of value transformations embodied in an art form. Secondly, I propose that art forms can also be seen as composite objects, as entities. Borrowing Kopytoff's terminology in defining the four angles of construction of a Cultural Biography, I view the components that together constitute an art form – music, actions, scripts, etc. – as technical facts, which people and events in a society can connect to, and interact with. It is produced by, for instance, playwrights, performers, composers and artists. It is consumed by spectators and, in some cases, political authorities, to serve their respective agendas. Last but not least, it can move, or be moved: not only between physical spaces, but also between cultural spaces. For example, in my case, Peking Opera moves from the Chinese mainland to Hong Kong, and then back to the mainland. It also moves between different genres within the family of traditional Chinese theatre, and further between theatre and other art forms.

With reference to W.H.R. Rivers, Kopytoff also suggests an important cultural inquiry that a biographical approach can profitably achieve: to reveal cultural-specific knowledge about an object through comparison with its “ideal”, or expected, biography. In the aforesaid Renoir example, Kopytoff articulates his argument by putting together scenarios of a Renoir painting ending up in different countries (hence, different cultures) in parallel with its “ideal” life of being in France all the time.¹⁹ This comparative capacity of Cultural Biography in revealing heterogeneous cultural values is intriguing, and potentially relevant to my research. By exploring how Peking Opera has been culturally redefined and put to use in Hong Kong, against the backdrop of a mainstream – if not an “ideal” – discourse of the genre on the Chinese mainland, the unique cultural responses of Hong Kong to Peking Opera are highlighted. This further consolidates my inquiry into the theatrical articulation of Hong Kong identity.

Under the main arc of Cultural Biography of Peking Opera in Hong Kong, there is a second level at which I consider the life stories of selected individuals, each of which I use as a “lens” to take a closer look at particular periods and/or aspects of Peking Opera in Hong Kong. This is similar to the way in which, for example, Janet Hoskins' *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People's Lives* (1998) shows how a person's biography can be constructed through accumulated meanings in one object or several objects. In other words, the biography of an object, or of several, can build up the biography of an individual. Conversely, I intend to look at how people's life stories can tell the story of a thing – in this case, of particular genres within a rich art form.

1.2.2. Social Network Analysis

In addition to Cultural Biography, I also adopt a network approach. The rationale lies in the fact that the social outcome of an individual – the causation of one's behavior – cannot be sufficiently explained by particular attributes that are inherently contained within her/him.

¹⁸ Kopytoff 1986: 67.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Rather, it is better understood by her/his network position in a particular social structure. Furthermore, that network position is not static, but is affected by other actors. In this sense, the abilities of the network model – “its capacity to illuminate entire social structures and to comprehend particular elements with the structure”²⁰ – make it a “more realistic model of causation”.²¹ Moreover, I have to consider a plurality of interactions in my study: various technical facts interact with various people and various events, in various different ways, at various moments in the subject’s “life.” For the sake of a better narrative – a better way to tell a story – I believe a network approach is the most suitable way to manage this plurality.

In practice, I formulate the main issue of discussion in each of the six subsequent chapters as if they are independent networks. In each network, I suggest that various social actors influence the “lens” individual’s valuation of Peking Opera in Hong Kong in the course of her/his life. In other words, “what she/he thinks Peking Opera in Hong Kong is?” The valuation results in her/his particular social outcome, by which I mean their stance toward, or practice of, Peking Opera. In some cases, that outcome further impacts other social actors. In the words of Marin and Wellman on the applications of network approach, I look at “network causes” and “network effects” of the phenomena in question across time.²² These six networks are then arranged in a chronological order, and in this way the main Cultural Biography of Peking Opera in Hong Kong is formed. Some social actors will appear in more than one network, and actors on the two ends of the model may overlap as well. See Figure 1.1 for a visualization of my network model.

Here, I return to Kopytoff and apply the four angles suggested by his Cultural Biography to identify different social actors within these networks. Firstly, I look at *production*, meaning practitioners of Peking Opera in various periods and settings. Secondly, I look at *consumption*. I identify and study different audience groups of various ethnic, social and cultural backgrounds. Thirdly, I examine *technical facts*, such as scripts, music, and performing venues. In other words, I also look at material actors when considering the networks. Fourthly, I look at *exchange* on two levels. On a local level, this means interactions between Peking Opera and other traditional Chinese theatrical genres and art forms in Hong Kong, such as Cantonese Opera and martial arts movies. On a national level, it means interactions between Peking Opera in Hong Kong and Peking Opera on the Chinese mainland.

Nevertheless, I must make a disclaimer at this point, namely that this dissertation is not a pure network analysis project. In other words, I do not intend to generate network graphs displaying ties of, for example, kinship, friendship, professional and financial relations, etc, between actors. Rather, I take the network approach as a perspective, a point of departure, to think about my research topic, summed up thus: “It takes as its starting point the premise that social life is created primarily and most importantly by relations and the patterns they form.”²³

²⁰ Knoke & Kuklinski 1982: 10.

²¹ Marin & Wellman 2011: 13.

²² *ibid.* 17-19.

²³ *ibid.* 22.

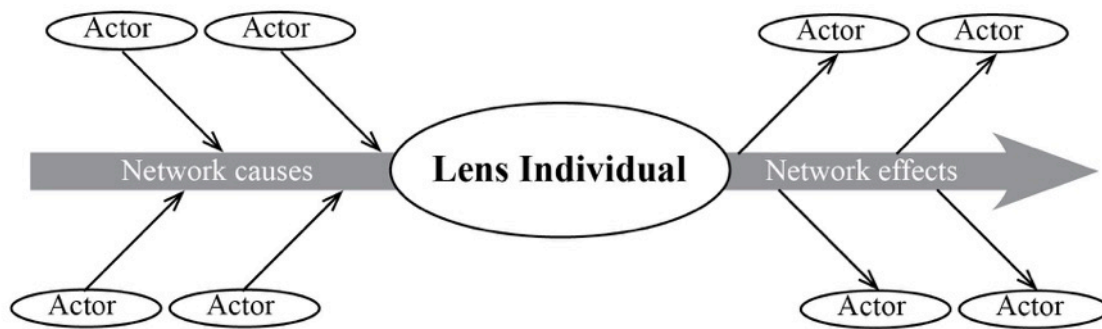


Figure 1.1. The network model I adopt for my discussion.

1.3 Why this house?

Peking Opera has never been a local favorite in Hong Kong. Academically speaking, it is also a far less popular topic compared to the absolute dominance of Cantonese Opera studies in Hong Kong. In other words, it is a relatively untouched piece of the story of the Hong Kong cultural scene. So why bother writing about a less popular topic? Frankly I do not know why this topic is relatively untouched. However, there is no reason to doubt that it will offer important insights into the understanding of Hong Kong's cultural field. In fact, the story of Peking Opera in Hong Kong is salient not only in itself, but also because it helps us to have a more complete understanding toward some better-received genres and art forms in the city. Examples include Cantonese Opera and martial arts movies, which I discuss in later chapters. In addition, after the significant political change in 1997, Peking Opera was ascribed an extra layer of meaning, in which it became a tool of cultural homogenization for the new regime, and also a negotiation space of cultural politics between the “local” Hong Kong and the “national” PRC. By filling in this scholarly gap with this project, I hope to contribute to addressing these phenomena that happened, and are still happening, in Hong Kong.

Moreover, my work moves beyond mainstream discourse on the relationship between performing arts in Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland. Comparative studies on performing arts in Hong Kong focus on one-sided transculturation, fixing the gaze on the mainland influence on local art forms, but neglecting what I call a “reverse impact” of the local on the national. Thus, this project will contribute by creating new perspectives on Hong Kong as an actor in the network of Chinese cultural transmission. This perspective is not limited to Peking Opera, but can also apply to other art forms. As such, it will refine our understanding of the position of Hong Kong in a greater cultural-Chinese frame of reference, and indeed transregional and global cultural networks.

In terms of theoretical implications, my research introduces a new dimension to the Cultural Biography approach. Treating Peking Opera as a composite entity and studying its ascription of social meanings from various angles, I hope to stimulate discussion on the applicability of the Cultural Biography approach to other intangible performing arts. At the same time, my approach introduces new tools to the field of Peking Opera studies, moving away from primarily or exclusively performer-oriented paradigms.

1.4 A review

Peking Opera happens around the world, thanks to touring performers as well as migrating Chinese communities. It also happens across disciplines, as its numerous dimensions – historical, cultural, social, political, and of course performative – have attracted the attention of scholars in different fields.

1.4.1. Peking Opera around the world

Inevitably the majority of scholarly and critical literature is devoted to Peking Opera on the Chinese mainland as its cultural core. While a massive body of scholarship, both in Chinese and in other languages, writes about the general history and performance of the genre, some works provide insightful, cross-disciplinary discussions on Peking Opera. For example, the numerous socio-historical works by Colin Mackerras cover a large period from the 1840s to 1990s; Andrea Goldman (2012) goes back further, focusing on the cultural-political environment of Beijing between 1770 and 1900 and its relationship with Peking Opera; Joshua Goldstein also writes extensively about the history of Peking Opera from the late Qing to the early Republican period. His argument (1999 and 2003) about the national status of Peking Opera as an invented cultural symbol serves as a cornerstone of this project.

Meanwhile, some works focus on contemporary accounts of Peking Opera on the mainland. For example, Elizabeth Wichmann, who is also an experienced performer and producer, starts from a study of the aural dimension of Peking Opera (1991) and gradually shifts her focus to the study of its innovative authority. She extensively touches on topics such as the creative process and the changing roles of directors in the genre. Li Ruru, whose mother is the renowned female role performer Li Yuru 李玉茹, also works on the issue of how Peking Opera on the Chinese mainland has negotiated changing political and social contexts from the 1920s to the 2000s (2010). In recent years, some mainland scholars have advocated the establishment of the academic field of Peking Opera Studies as a multidisciplinary field that pays attention to subjects such as history, theatre theories, literature, performance studies, education, and music. Fu Jin, as a devoted advocator of this movement, writes extensively on the aforementioned subjects.

Taiwan is another place with a rich culture of Peking Opera, especially after 1949 when the Chinese Nationalist Party moved to the island. Among academic devotees to this subject, Wang Anqi is undoubtedly the central figure, with her extensive works from historical, gender, and political perspectives. Nancy Guy (2005) has also contributed a detailed investigation on the close relationship between Peking Opera and politics in Taiwan. Moreover, Peking Opera in overseas Chinese communities is getting more attention after the turn of the twenty-first century, with exemplary literature like Goldstein's discussion (1999) about Mei Lanfang's tour to the U.S. in 1930, Ashley Thorpe's works (2011 and 2016) on traditional Chinese theatre in various diaspora and intercultural settings in the UK, and similar analyses across the Pacific by Daphne Lei (2006 and 2011).

Furthermore, I consult scholarship on other traditional Chinese theatrical genres in order to have a more holistic understanding of theatre, from different perspectives. For example, I draw on Wilt Idema's work on traditional Chinese theatre from a literary viewpoint. I also

draw on ethnomusicological studies on Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong by Bell Yung, Chan Sau-yan and Ng Wing-chung, and that on Shanghai Opera (*Huju* 滬劇) by Jonathan Stock, which provide theoretical and comparative insights on studying traditional Chinese theatre in Hong Kong.

1.4.2. Primary sources

In addition to a review of secondary literature, I also work extensively with a wide variety of primary sources in order to gather raw materials for my own contribution. Firstly, as a starting point, I consult Chinese-language literature that is at once “primary” material and commentarial in nature. This includes works by Qi Rushan on the theorization of Peking Opera, as well as the numerous commentaries and historical accounts on Peking Opera by Ouyang Yuqian.

Secondly, I look at life stories of three of my six lens individuals, namely Mei Lanfang, Chen Feinong and Jackie Chan, through their autobiographies, memoirs and interview scripts by previous interlocutors. I have also done extensive research in local newspapers from the first half of the twentieth century, and used many articles that report or discuss local Peking Opera events in the past. Since it was once a common practice for local theatres to advertise their daily programmes in newspapers, I have collected these advertisements, which provide valuable information about the day-to-day operation of local Peking Opera troupes. For example, I have compiled a list of programmes for the daily performance by the China Drama Academy in a local theatre, which proved to be extremely informative. In addition to local newspapers, I have also studied *Dacheng Zazhi* 大成雜誌 (The Great Achievement Magazine, 1973-1995), which is an especially valuable source. Probably due to the keen interest in Peking Opera of its chief editor, Shen Jicheng, the magazine contains many articles, written by Shen and others, that discuss in depth the history of Peking Opera in Hong Kong and on the Chinese mainland. I have also thoroughly examined *Xiqu Pinwei* 戲曲品味 (Opera Review, first published in 2000), a journal magazine dedicated to traditional Chinese theatre in Hong Kong.

Thirdly, I analyse government documents produced by official cultural institutions in Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland. Examples of these institutions include the Hong Kong Arts Development Council, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department of the HKSAR Government, and the PRC Ministry of Culture. These official documents provide records of cultural policies toward traditional Chinese theatre over time, and financial data that testify to, or against, relevant cultural policy statements.

1.5 Building tools

While these [ethnographic] methods are used on their own as well, what marks their ethnographic application is that they are used to study a people in a naturally occurring setting or “field”, in which the researcher participates directly, and in which there is an intent to explore the meanings

of this setting and its behaviour and activities from the inside.²⁴

As John Brewer argues, the rationale behind a researcher's choice of method(s) in a research project lies in her/his assumptions about the nature of our society (ontological) and knowledge (epistemological). This creates a philosophical framework, and from there, a methodology, that justifies such assumptions. This framework at the same time certifies certain means – methods – to approach, collect, and process valid knowledge. In other words, our choice of method(s) is governed by our commitment to a certain methodological framework. It is from this argument that Brewer discusses the methodological base of ethnography: it comes from the humanistic model of social research, which acknowledges the existence of a real “world” (that Brewer refers as “naturalism”) and believes that a good way to study this “world” is to get closer to it.²⁵ To put it bluntly, researchers who stand on the ethnographic side share a “motto”: go inside, and tell what is actually going on.

Both my personal views and my disciplinary affiliation, since I position this research project as inclined toward the anthropological, oblige me to stand on this side. I am particularly fond of Sierk Ybema et al.'s characterization of ethnographic methods as “the combined field research ‘tools’ of observing, conversing, and the close reading of documentary sources”,²⁶ for it essentially captures the significance of the human senses in perceiving our worlds when doing ethnography.

My toolbox, which includes interviews, participant observation and archival research, is in line with the above characterization. My acquaintance with the topic began in 2008, when I wrote my Master's dissertation about it. Since then I have been looking at it from close up. For the current project, in addition to expanding in scope and depth in multiple ways in terms of conceptualizations and questions as well as material, I have done additional fieldwork in Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland in 2014 and 2015, respectively.

1.5.1. Conversing

Interviewing is not just a defining method in ethnography, but especially significant for my work, as it is structured in a biographical fashion. It is clearly a legitimate and effective type of data collection tool for my discussion of several of my lens subjects, who are still active Peking Opera performers in present-day Hong Kong. In addition, oral accounts by insiders continue to be regarded as an abundant and powerful source of information. Although this may risk the problem of insiders' bias and a lack of reliability in their stories, this is overcome by complementing these oral accounts with other sources.

I have interviewed Liang Hanyong, Tang Yuen-ha and Yeung Ming, in order to add what was known about them already, toward constructing their life stories. I have also interviewed several other figures in the field whose experience is relevant to my discussion of Peking Opera in Hong Kong in the past and in the present, in order to collect complementary data. I have further connected with a number of other people, not only as

²⁴ Brewer 2000: 27.

²⁵ *ibid.* 28-38.

²⁶ Ybema 2009: 6.

informants but also as friends. I have maintained constant face-to-face and email conversations with them. In this way I have been able to keep myself updated about the current state of the field.

1.5.2. Observing (and participating)

But here is a problem: informants may tell one what they do, but one cannot always check this. I was indeed warned, on several occasions by my contacts within Hong Kong Peking Opera circles, about the habit of giving canned answers or even incorrect information to outsiders in the field of traditional Chinese theatre, both in Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland. Clearly I needed to try to see beyond the surface. Here the conventional rationale of participant observation comes into play – be there and watch. I have attended Peking Opera performances by both local and mainland troupes. I have also observed classes organized by the Hong Kong Youth of Chinese Opera College and the Jingkun Theatre, two active local troupes in present-day Hong Kong. Moreover, I have followed Yeung Ming for his Peking Opera-related activities, which include lectures in Hong Kong and Shenzhen, as well as rehearsals for one of his rearranged versions of Cantonese Opera plays.

However, the challenge of transforming myself from an outside researcher to a recognised group member still remained when I was just starting to study my target groups. From their perspective, it was still *us* and *him*. I noticed that I needed to participate more in order to be accepted by those groups, toward a good relationship with my informants and more valid information. Therefore, I participated in the abovementioned classes later in my fieldwork, learned the art and performed in graduation performances. I have also assisted in the staging of the Jingkun Theatre's guided demonstrations, as well as in organizing Yeung Ming's lectures. These experiences of practically contributing to the target groups indeed deepened my insight into their organization. To a certain degree, this echoes Brian Moeran's discussion of his experience transforming from a "participant observer" to an "observant participant" during his fieldwork in a Japanese advertising agency. His contribution during an unexpected situation in the agency's business changed his status in the field and the insiders' perception of him, which in turn granted him an invitation card to what Erving Goffman (1990) refers to as "backstage".²⁷ As Moeran believes, going backstage should be the ethnographer's ideal.

1.5.3. Reading

According to Maria Tamboukou, scholarship about the relationship between archival research (whether on quantitative or qualitative data) and biographical projects is expanding in recent years.²⁸ Indeed, archives are always treasures for researchers of biographical works to look for "documents of life".²⁹ For my own biographical endeavour, I have retrieved documents that record the life of Peking Opera in Hong Kong through several local archives.

One major source of such documents is the Chinese Opera Information Centre at the

²⁷ Moeran 2009: 146-149.

²⁸ Tamboukou 2014: 617.

²⁹ Plummer 2001.

Chinese University of Hong Kong. Various kinds of information were obtained there, including historical scripts of Peking Opera and Cantonese Opera plays, and first-hand sources on Peking Opera events such as leaflets and programme booklets. At the Hong Kong government's Public Records Office, I gained access to internal documents, such as minutes and non-public reports from former and current governmental bodies for cultural administration. Thus I have collected data about the government's policies toward traditional Chinese theatre across time.

1.6 The interior

This introductory chapter is followed by six core chapters and a concluding chapter. As noted, the core chapters are built around the lives of six lens individuals who are significant to the development of Peking Opera in Hong Kong in various periods. Each chapter revolves around one individual, and issues related to my main objective are brought up for discussion through analysis of crucial events in their life stories. Needless to say, I have not allowed the larger narrative to be unduly limited by whatever happened, and did not happen, in these individual lives. Rather, they serve as productive entry points into particular periods and aspects of Peking Opera in Hong Kong.

Chapters two to four form the first part of the core content, on Peking Opera in pre-1997 Hong Kong. Echoing Kopytoff, we shall see in these chapters the birth and the life of Peking Opera throughout the twentieth century in the former British Colony. Chapter two features Mei Lanfang 梅蘭芳 (1894-1961), arguably the face of Peking Opera during the twentieth century, from his family background to his triumphant career in the 1920s. In particular, I focus on his contribution to the nationalist vision that emerged around Peking Opera. Together with the intellectual Qi Rushan, Mei brought enormous changes to the artistic conventions of the genre, and it gained in social status in China because of this. I will show how Mei contributed with his innovation of Ancient Costume plays, and how he was constructed as a Chinese national icon because of both his on-stage and off-stage images during his 1922 Hong Kong tour.

Chapter three concerns Chen Feinong 陳非儂 (1899-1984), a renowned Cantonese Opera performer in the early twentieth century. He is one of the pioneers to bring artistic devices of Peking Opera into Cantonese Opera, for example body movements, martial arts moves, and music. I first consider the notion of what I call the adoption of Peking Opera devices, by discussing artistic similarities between Peking Opera and Cantonese Opera with reference to their closely connected origins. Secondly, I will map a network of this first wave of adoptions: who was involved? What was being adopted? And what impact did this have on the development of Cantonese Opera in the first half of the twentieth century? I suggest that both Cantonese Opera performers and immigrant intellectuals from the Chinese mainland had agency in facilitating this adoption.

The period from the late 1940s to 1960s was one in which Peking Opera began to take root in Hong Kong, and truly became part of the life of Hong Kong locals. Chapter four begins with a discussion of several mainland Peking Opera performers who were based in Hong Kong at various points in the 1940s and 1950s. I also discuss how local society

received the genre when it became a regularly available cultural form in the city. I then turn to local Peking Opera training schools that flourished in the 1950s and 1960s, with a particular focus on the early life of Jackie Chan, the internationally renowned movie actor. The story of his training in the China Drama Academy, an active Peking Opera training school at the time in question, tells us in detail how the school operated, and shows the significance of Peking Opera training schools to local students and society at large.

I also discuss the growing obstacles to being a professional Peking Opera performer in Hong Kong in this period, and the phenomenon of training school graduates entering the movie industry, with their Peking Opera skills contributing to revolutionizing the industry. On the interaction between Peking Opera and martial arts movies in Hong Kong, King Hu and Zhang Che also made significant contributions by actively drawing on Peking Opera elements in their movie productions in the 1960s. I discuss the context that inspired them to turn their gaze to Peking Opera, their evaluation of the feasibility of presenting Peking Opera in cinematic language, and the actual, multi-faceted adaptations of Peking Opera elements in their movies.

Chapters five to seven form the second part of the core content, and concern Peking Opera in post-1997 Hong Kong. I take 1997 as a watershed not only because of the significance of the sovereignty handover, but also because this is when the newly formed HKSAR Government began to strategically promote Peking Opera as a means to reinforce a Chinese national identity among Hong Kong citizens. Within this political context, I intend to present the life stories of three Peking Opera performers active in the present and, more importantly, the different paths they have travelled while practicing this traditional Chinese theatrical genre in Hong Kong.

Chapter five begins by taking a look back at the dynamics generated by various actors in the Hong Kong political arena from the turn of the twentieth century until today. Starting from the early colonial era in the 1840s, I demonstrate how these constantly changing dynamics have shaped cultural developments in Hong Kong, with special attention to Peking Opera. I then continue my narrative from the 1980s, when a revival of the genre occurred. This was signalled by the establishment of new Peking Opera troupes supported by the government, especially after the 1997 handover. I use the life story of Liang Hanyong 梁漢勇 (born 1960) and his troupe, the Hong Kong Youth of Chinese Opera College, as a case study to demonstrate how the Hong Kong government has supported Peking Opera through various institutional bodies, and how local troupes have benefited from this.

In chapter six, I look at how Tang Yuen-ha 鄧宛霞, a local-born performer, has worked toward a “Hong Kong way” to facilitate the local reception of Peking Opera with her invention of guided demonstrations (*daoshang* 導賞): an unconventional, interactive mode of stage performance. Through her career with the Jingkun Theatre, a local troupe she established in the 1980s, I discuss her long quest in localizing Peking Opera. In particular, I focus on her ideological negotiation between national and local discourses of the genre, which eventually led her down an unconventional artistic path. I also present the local innovation of guided demonstration as significant on a national level, in which a production from Hong

Kong has had a reverse impact on presentational trends in Peking Opera on the Chinese mainland – while the latter is considered the home of the genre. I discuss how some mainland practitioners became acquainted with the idea of guided demonstration, and how this idea influenced them in revisiting ways in which they tried to facilitate the reception of Peking Opera by young people in the twenty-first century, and led to changes in their presentational conventions.

Aside from its own development in present-day Hong Kong, Peking Opera's interaction with local Cantonese Opera has never stopped. In chapter seven I first present a current account of this inter-genre interaction. I have found that the interaction is still ongoing today and that it is multi-faceted. For example, some artistic devices from Peking Opera are actively canonized in formal training programs of Cantonese Opera. Also, Peking Opera performers are frequently involved in directing Cantonese Opera productions. It is in this context that I discuss Yeung Ming's 楊明 (born 1941) "repackaging approach" of the practice of Peking Opera. As an experienced Peking Opera performer who received his professional training on the mainland, Yeung has been rearranging Cantonese Opera plays with the extensive use of Peking Opera devices. In particular, his perception of the latter as artistically superior led him to pay special attention to stylistic modifications, for example the formularization of particular on-stage movements and actions. I will use a case study to illustrate the process, motivation, feasibility, and limitations of this "repackaging approach". I argue that what Yeung does is to preserve and continue Peking Opera disguised as Cantonese Opera. Meanwhile, Peking Opera also entered into the institutional training system of Cantonese Opera. The presence of Peking Opera performers as faculty members in the leading Cantonese Opera training institute, the School of Chinese Opera at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, not only legitimizes the borrowing from the "national drama", but also causes a contestation of the artistic boundary between the "national" and "local" genres.

I finish with a concluding chapter that includes a comparison of Peking Opera in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore, as well as some forward-looking thoughts on the main topic.

Chapter Two /

Early Scenes of Peking Opera in Hong Kong

Mei Lanfang

Peking Opera was not well received by Hong Kong audiences until star performer Mei Lanfang 梅蘭芳 (1894-1961) made his first Hong Kong performance tour in 1922. There are two reasons for this: Firstly, Hong Kong was far away from the two traditional cores of Peking Opera, Beijing and Shanghai. Secondly, the local cultural scene was very much dominated by the local genre of Cantonese Opera and European art forms at the time, due to the colonial status of the city. According to Mei Shaowu, the eldest son of Mei Lanfang, the 1922 tour was indeed an experiment for Mei, to examine the reaction of audiences in the south to this “traditional theatrical genre from the north.”³⁰ Moreover, I argue that this historical tour also contributed to nation-building in an era when the Republic of China (ROC, established 1911) needed to build up its national identity.

Here the keyword is “nationalization”. In the present context, I use this term not in its conventional sense, but specifically to refer to the process that transformed Peking Opera’s status from a regional theatrical genre to a representative icon of the modern nation of China – both as Cultural China (*wenhua zhongguo* 文化中國) and as a political entity, meaning the Republic of China (ROC) from 1911 and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) from 1949. Nationalization in this sense is significant to the study of Peking Opera as a whole, as it contextualizes the superiority often ascribed to Peking Opera over other traditional Chinese theatrical genres in the twentieth century. It is also crucial to this research, as the existence of foreign audiences was a prerequisite of the nationalization agenda. It leads to the very beginning, the “birth”, of Peking Opera in Hong Kong. Therefore, I will start this chapter by discussing the rationale and theory of nationalizing Peking Opera, before I go into the story of Mei Lanfang and his tour to Hong Kong.

The notion of nationalization is not new. Joshua Goldstein first suggests the idea when he discusses Mei Lanfang’s first tour to the United States in 1930. He schematizes the idea in the following equation:

$$\text{Chinese National Culture} = \text{National Drama} = \text{Peking Opera} = \text{Mei Lanfang}^{31}$$

He uses this idea to argue that Mei’s tour to the U.S. was a product of a nation-building campaign by the ROC government. The whole itinerary of this tour – both the performances and social activities – was aimed at the ultimate goal of making Mei a “national star”. I note here that such a campaign had already taken place in Mei’s tour to Hong Kong in 1922; and I would like to take the idea one step back, adding that “Chinese National Identity = Chinese National Culture”, so as to present a more complete logical flow from the emergence of the

³⁰ Mei 2006: 14.

³¹ Goldstein 1999: 382.

nationalization ideology to the iconization of Mei. Two questions arise: Why and for whom did the nationalization ideology emerge in the Republican era? Did Peking Opera constitute a suitable vehicle for this ideology, and if so, why? In the following sections we will see how intellectuals and Peking Opera performers contributed to the process of nationalizing Peking Opera.

Mei Lanfang being the central figure of this chapter, I will examine his life story from his family background to his triumphant career in the 1920s. My choice does not follow the discourse that dominates Chinese-language scholarship, which focuses almost exclusively on the overwhelming artistic excellence demonstrated by Mei. Undoubtedly he was one of the top performers in his era, but from a sociological point of view his importance lies beyond the artistic aspect. His significance to the development of Peking Opera in the early twentieth century also lies in his involvement in the nationalization of Peking Opera. Together with the intellectual Qi Rushan 齊如山 (1875-1962), he brought enormous changes to the artistic conventions of Peking Opera, and the genre gained in social status in China because of this. In this regard, I will show in this chapter how Mei contributed to the nationalization ideology with his innovation of Ancient Costume plays, and how he was constructed as a Chinese national icon through both on-stage and off-stage images during his 1922 Hong Kong tour.

2.1 The quest for “national drama” in the late 1910s

Nowadays Peking Opera is widely viewed as representative of Chinese theatrical culture. Foreigners who travel in China will often end up at a Peking Opera performance if they ask for some tips for enjoying traditional Chinese culture. Such alleged superiority of Peking Opera over its more than three hundred family members can even be seen on the international level. In 2010 Peking Opera was added to UNESCO’s Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. And in the corresponding nomination document, a statement claiming Peking Opera’s significance as ICH reads: “Peking Opera is the most widespread and influential among over 300 opera forms in China. Hence it is also called the ‘National opera’.”³² Conventional discourse traces Peking Opera’s superior status back to the final decades of the nineteenth century, when the genre received exclusive imperial patronage from the Qing dynasty, especially from empress Cixi due to her personal liking for Peking Opera. However, scholarship has neglected a decisive moment in the May Fourth period in late 1910s to early 1920s, when Peking Opera was given the designation of “national drama” (*guoju* 國劇).

2.1.1 National Identity = National Culture: nationalism and the May Fourth Movement

The May Fourth discourse of the second and third decade of the twentieth century had its roots in the mid-nineteenth century. It was an era when Qing China was suffering from foreign incursions. A succession of military defeats led to capitulations and the infamous

³² United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2010. “Nomination File number 00418 for Inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2010” in Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, fifth session. Nairobi, Kenya.

“unequal treaties” favoring the imperial powers. For instance the defeats in the First Opium War (1839-1842) and the Second Opium War (1856-1860) concluded respectively with the Treaty of Nanking (Nanjing), the Treaty of Tientsin (Tianjin) and the Convention of Peking (Beijing). These treaties ceded Chinese territories to Russia, France, and the UK. The First Sino-Japanese war (1894-95) concluded with the Treaty of Shimonoseki, in which Japan was awarded Chinese land and an indemnity of 200 millions Kuping taels – about six times the annual Japanese revenue at the time. Moreover, the Xinchou Treaty between the Qing court and Eight-Nation Alliance, a joint force of Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the UK and the US that militarily intervened China in 1900 after the Boxer Rebellion, granted the Alliance rights of garrison in Chinese core territories, which further marked the fragmentation of the nation.

These military failures not only caused material devastation in China, but also resulted in cultural discrimination by the imperial powers. They related the lack of Chinese sovereignty to the inability of Chinese culture to uphold a rational, moral, and modern citizenship.³³ In addition, some scholars also suggest the internal disintegration of ethics within Chinese society as a reason for China’s military impotence. For example John Fitzgerald mentions in his book an age of “chaos” in the early Republic, because of the removal of Confucianism from the educational system and secular rituals.³⁴ In response to this twofold problem, a nationalist ideology began to emerge among Chinese intellectuals. The ideology later developed into the New Culture movement, which urged for a new China with new modes of morale. In Fitzgerald’s words, “as the awakening of the New Culture movement was an awakening from an outmoded ethical system, it entailed an awakening to a new one.”³⁵ The movement spread through new generations in society and reached its height in 1919. In that year, the Republican government failed in its fight for the recognition of China’s rights at the Treaty of Versailles Conference at the end of the First World War. This sparked the events on 4 May, in which students took to the streets to demonstrate in protest against foreign imperialism and voiced various demands towards what they saw as modernization in order to rescue China. The demonstrations and the broad cultural trends whose emergence it marked are commonly known as the May Fourth Movement. The term not only refers to the incident, but also the whole period when society was bubbling with new ideas towards Chinese modernity.

Two paradigms are relevant when we talk about Chinese modernity. These are significant in the development of traditional Chinese theatre in that period, as they led to different products. On the one hand, the classic May Fourth paradigm looks at Chinese modernity in binary terms. It sees the movement as a radical break with, or rejection of, Chinese traditions, and a turn to western culture – despite the original continuing opposition to Western and Japanese imperialism. Some even describe the paradigm as a formalistic one, in which all Western cultural imports were to be embraced and all Chinese traditions were to be

³³ Goldstein 1999: 408.

³⁴ Fitzgerald 1996: 70.

³⁵ *ibid.*

condemned.³⁶ In line with this paradigm, May Fourth radicals upheld Chinese “modern drama,” which was in the form of Western spoken drama. They rejected both traditional theatrical genres and the newly-emerged “hybrid” forms –popular theatrical hybrids, which mostly incorporated contemporary stories, costumes, and spoken dialogues in a Western dramatic style into traditional Chinese plays.³⁷ For example in *Xin Qingnian* 新青年 (New Youth), the flagship May Fourth journal publication between 1915 and 1922, Qian Xuanton 錢玄同 criticized lovers of traditional Chinese theatre as having “the same psychology with the man who insists on acting like a slave and protecting old customs by maintaining a queue, or the despicable husband who refuses to see women as human beings and supports foot binding.”³⁸

On the other hand, especially since the 1980s and 1990s, other scholarship suggests an alternative paradigm, which de-centers the “new” and “western” as the core of Chinese modernity. Chow Kai-wing et. al. in their edited volume *Beyond the May Fourth Paradigm: In Search of Chinese Modernity* (2008) suggest an alternative angle to view May Fourth as “a multifaceted enterprise that transcended the polarity of tradition and the ‘new’.”³⁹ All individuals discussed in this volume tried to achieve the same goal as the “classic” radicals – to achieve Chinese modernity – but in ways that would incorporate Chinese with Western elements, the “old” and “new”. In the cultural scene, for example, Frederick Lau discusses how the musician Zheng Jinwen 鄭覲文 realized his vision of modernizing Chinese music, which mainly emphasized harmony in tune and timbre when playing as an ensemble. He did not abandon the Chinese tradition though. Instead he adopted the Western orchestration to the formation of Chinese music ensemble, and the standardization of western instruments to manufacture Chinese instruments.⁴⁰

2.1.2 National Culture = National Drama: The social function of drama

In line with the evolving May Fourth paradigm as a call for a hybrid culture of east and west, the term “national essence” (*guocui* 國粹) emerged. It referred to a set of cultural phenomena that were yet to be found, or to be constructed, but that could represent a modern nation with integrity.⁴¹ Here I am not suggesting that drama is the only form that was picked and promoted in the national discourse. For instance, there is rich scholarship about how “new literature” (*xinwenxue* 新文學) was advocated in that period. Also according to Goldstein, national drama was not the only object or concept “nationalized” during the time, but also the national flag (*guoqi* 國旗), the national language (*guoyu* 國語) and the national anthem

³⁶ Peng 1994.

³⁷ Examples included Wang Xiaonong’s 汪笑儂 reformed Peking Opera (Li 2010: 43), Spring Willow Society’s (*Chunliu She* 春柳社) “new drama” (*xinju* 新劇) and “Civilized Plays” (*wenmingxi* 文明戲). (Goldstein 2007: 100-101; Liu 2013)

³⁸ Qian 1918; Goldstein 2007: 134-135.

³⁹ Chow et. al. 2008: 4.

⁴⁰ Lau 2008.

⁴¹ Guy 2005: 45-46.

(*guoge* 國歌), for instance.⁴² Nevertheless, the circle of reformists had long seen drama as *the* medium for its power in conveying messages to a massive audience. Take Liang Qichao, a statesman-literatus who was one of the main advocates of the Hundred Days' Reform in 1898, as an example. He fled to Japan after the Reform initiative failed. During his exile, he established a periodical called *Qingyi Bao* 清議報 (The China Discussion), in which he published many articles reflecting his views on Chinese modernity. He asserted that fiction, poetry and drama had a role to play in transforming China, and advocated the reformation of fiction as an essential part in social reformation.⁴³ At the same time, Chen Qubing and Wang Xiaonong established *Ershi Shiji Dawutai* 二十世紀大舞台 (The Great Stage of the Twentieth Century), a magazine fully dedicated to articles about drama reform. In one of his articles, Chen commented on the power of drama to reach every class in the society, including the illiterates:

To our ethnic brothers we express this aim, to mount the stage and personally perform tragedy and joy, to loudly call out, to lay down a path through tears ... Stretching up to every scholar and the multitudes of businessmen; reaching down to women, children, and the illiterate masses.⁴⁴

But the faith of the reformist alone was not enough to transform drama as the model of a national cultural ideal. The attitude of the Republican government towards drama was decisive, as they had the power to control public dissemination of any cultural form. In this regard, I argue that the Republican government was in an ambiguous position valuing the social function of drama. On the one hand, they inherited the authoritarian hostility against traditional Chinese theatre, visible in the form of censorship. This dated back to the last years of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), when the empire was devastated by rebellions, and the authorities prohibited certain plays for their provocative contents – usually content that hinted at rebellion. The situation became worse during the Qing dynasty, as the authorities became more sensitive to plays' contents and more active in prohibiting plays. And through the late eighteenth century to the Republican period, the scale of censorship expanded from political to social sensitivity. For example, banning by the state officials of plays that were claimed to have explicit sexual contents was common.

On the other hand, the Republican government saw drama as a powerful tool in education. In February 1912, a newspaper in Shanghai, *Shen Bao* 申報 (Shanghai News), published an official approval for the establishment of the Shanghai Actors' Association. In this approval, the newly formed Republican government addressed the social function of drama:

[They] have great reputations in the acting world, for years performing new plays which moved, society, affecting everyone and promoting the Republic in the people's hearts...[You must] consolidate the basis for the future of our nation's people...If some in the acting would sing lewd plays, you must find a way to stop it, make them change into those benefiting

⁴² Goldstein 1999: 381.

⁴³ Liang 2001: 758.

⁴⁴ Chen 1904. English translation by Goldstein (2007: 99)

society.⁴⁵

Another example of the state's support for traditional Chinese theatre came in 1930. In response to the intellectuals' continuing concerns with cultivating the "national essence," in that year the government announced funding for the establishment of a National Opera Music Institute, which included a Beijing branch of the training school called the National Drama Academy (NDA). This training school, according to Goldstein, was a success under state sponsorship and promotion.⁴⁶

In addition, the municipal administration of Guangzhou at that time also reflected the government's ambiguity in valuing social role of drama. In an official publication titled "Guangzhou shi Jiaoyuju Shiliu Nianfen Xingzheng Jingguo Gaifang" 廣州市教育局十六年份行政經過概況 (Educational Bureau of Guangzhou municipal Government: Sixteen Years of Works) in 1927, it states:

Drama is a powerful weapon for social education, but sometimes also goes out of control. So we must keep an eye on it. It is hard to make drama benefit the society, but at least we should prevent it from poisoning society and harming our young people.⁴⁷

In the eyes of the municipal government, drama was something that could be modified for the use of public moral education. This idea was further emphasized in 1929, when the newly established Committee for Drama Improvement (*Xiju Gaijin Weiyuanhui* 戲劇改進委員會) publicized the "Gailiang Xiju de Shida Yuanze" 改良戲劇的十大原則 (Ten Great Principles for Drama Improvement). In the document the Committee seemingly stressed only one point: all plays should be produced as a means of artistic education and be "scientific" (*kexue hua* 科學化), "public" (*minzhong hua* 民眾化) and "revolutionary" (*geming hua* 革命化). In other words, all plays should fit into the ideology of the Nationalist Party.

From the above examples, it is fair to say that the Nationalist government of the Republic of China valued drama mostly for its power to disseminate their political propaganda. Also in the first three decades of the twentieth century the state was far from stable, as it was disrupted by the 1911 revolution and later military conflicts between warlords. Therefore what the Republican Government could do for Chinese theatre in the May Fourth period was far less than what the Nationalist Government did in the 1930s – Mei Lanfang's tours to the U.S. in 1930 and the Soviet Union (1935), as well as Cheng Yanqiu's 程硯秋 European tour in 1931, for example, all received government support. In this context, the government's non-opposing attitude towards traditional Chinese theatre was essentially a "go" signal to the May Fourth intellectuals, for their idea to transform the art form into something more than merely an entertainment. They valued its ability to permeate society regardless of class,

⁴⁵ Art Research Institutes of Beijing and Shanghai 1990: 244. English translation by Goldstein (2007: 108).

⁴⁶ The establishment of NDA also leads to the discussion of the reform of Peking Opera in the Republican era. For details see Goldstein 2007: 231-235.

⁴⁷ Municipal Government of Guangzhou 1927.

gender, and education. It could certainly be a powerful weapon for spreading ideological propaganda of nationalism.

2.1.3 National Drama = Peking Opera: Qi Rushan's nationalization of Peking Opera

But why, then, was Peking Opera widely seen as superior to the other three hundred genres in traditional Chinese theatre? Nancy Guy in her book *Peking Opera and Politics in Taiwan* (2005) provides a possibility:

Four basic assumptions about Peking Opera took shape during the 1910s and 1920s: it was worthy of the foreign gaze; it was the equivalent of the high-art dramatic forms of Western European nations; it was quintessentially Chinese; and, as such, it could serve the function of building diplomatic ties.⁴⁸

The assumption of Peking Opera as a “high-art” theatrical genre is the first issue in doubt. Due to the Qing court patronage, Peking Opera had developed into a refined and highly formulated genre. Support was given, though it came together with a task to perfect the art as it was performed in front of the imperial family. Nevertheless, this is not enough to explain how Peking Opera was championed as “national drama.” An obvious competitor for the position was Kunqu Opera (*kunju* 崑劇). This had also long been recognized as a refined (*ya* 雅) genre since it became a major Chinese theatrical genre in the mid-late sixteenth century. It has been associated with the elite class and intellectuals, privileging it over the popular / secular (*su* 俗) genres at the time – including the ancestors of Peking Opera. Ironically, it was the strong elite association that prevented Kunqu Opera from winning commercial audiences, who were largely ordinary citizens without high education level. As a local theatrical genre in Suzhou, it had been quite popular in the seventeenth century. However, over the years it had become more rarefied, and it suffered greatly during the Taiping rebellion (1850-1864), though it remained popular as an amateur genre. The small support base, which was largely geographically confined to eastern China, hence became the greatest obstacle for Kunqu Opera to win the national title.

Conversely, though named after and developed to its mature form in the capital, Peking Opera is in fact a hybrid form of several regional genres. In her study, Li Ruru suggests six forms that influenced the birth of Peking Opera⁴⁹, arguing that “[Peking Opera] has evolved an exceptional ability to assimilate different styles of dialect, song, music and acting conventions.”⁵⁰ The composite nature of Peking Opera therefore gained itself a great potential for mass popularity across the nation, as most audiences with a range of different local cultures could still find something in Peking Opera that they were familiar with. Hence it also gained itself great potential to be the representative of the “national essence” in the

⁴⁸ Guy 2005: 47-48.

⁴⁹ They include *kunshan* mode (*kunshanqiang* 崑山腔), “gongs and drums” mode (*luogu qiang* 鑼鼓腔), “capital” mode (*jingqiang* 京腔), Anhui tunes (*huidiao* 徽調), Han tunes (*handiao* 漢調) and “plain” mode (*qingqiang* 清腔).

⁵⁰ Li 2010: 20.

realm of traditional Chinese theatre.

Compared to the “high-art” assumption, defining “Chinese-ness” in Peking Opera was yet a more important step for its encoding to a national status. As noted, the discourse of Chinese modernity in the early twentieth century was actually one with a blurred boundary between “traditional” and “modern” (“old” and “new” in other words), “Chinese” and “Western.” In the theatrical track of such discourse, experimental drama flourished. A blend of Chinese and Western theatrical genres, termed Civilized Plays (*wenmingxi* 文明戲),⁵¹ were considered inspirations for the new nationalism. Departing from this, I argue that there is a third way to view intellectuals’ pursuit of Chinese modernity at that time, in which it could be achieved by (re)defining their own, existing culture as on a par with, and comparable to, its Euro-American counterparts. Moreover, it had to be brought into the world, so as to show that Euro-American culture was not universal and to establish a Chinese identity on the international or global stage.

I further argue that Qi Rushan’s effort in theorizing his ideas about traditional Chinese theatre from the late 1910s onward should be understood this way. With a background of German and French studies, Qi paid several visits to Europe exploring Western theatrical genres. His engagement with European culture, mostly in France, had at first shaped his low appraisal of traditional Chinese theatre. Returning to Beijing in 1912, however, he was fascinated by Peking Opera’s popularity. He then began to study it and wrote articles about Peking Opera and comparative theatre.⁵² Apart from that, his collaboration with Mei Lanfang also made him a significant figure of Peking Opera in the twentieth century. Qi’s view towards the genre, which was also applicable to traditional Chinese theatre at large, was similar to the classical May Fourth discourse, in a sense that they both dichotomized “Chinese” and “Western”. However, in Qi’s theory such binarism led to the reaffirmation of Chinese culture instead of its condemnation. He started by differentiating the song-dance characteristic in Peking Opera from the spoken nature in Western theatre. For example, he often defined Peking Opera as a performing art of “story-telling with song and dance.” Derived from this, Qi established an artistic opposition between aestheticism and realism between Chinese and Western theatres. For example when he discussed the choreographed movements in Peking Opera, he wrote:

“Every movement in a performance has to be dance-like in nature. There is a saying that ‘Every sound should be a song, and there should be no movement that is not dance’. Therefore realistic [movements] should not be allowed...”⁵³

In the following quote he brought up the binarism more explicitly:

“[We] should never criticize national drama as if it were the same as viewing [Western] realistic dramas. It is because the good things in realistic drama are not applicable in national

⁵¹ For a detailed discussion of this theatrical genre in the early twentieth century, please see Liu Siyuan 2013.

⁵² Qi 1989: 96-100.

⁵³ Qi 1935: 4.

drama, and vice versa. Why is that? Because spoken drama is realistic in nature, so the more mimetic the better. National drama is originated from a song-dance tradition, which in every sense avoids being realistic. If there is something mimetic, it not only breaks the principles, but also appears to be strange and uncomfortable.”⁵⁴

Setting up his theoretical framework of aestheticism by forbidding any mimetic acts on stage, he continued formulating detailed practicalities for basically every performing aspect of Peking Opera. First is the aestheticism in voice. Qi divided all voice productions into four different registers: pure singing, articulated speeches, dialogues and emotional expressions (such as crying, laughing, anger, sadness, etc.). He emphasized the song-like nature of all registers of voice productions, in which performers have to consider tones and rhymes and synchronization with the music even in dialogues. Expressions were also highly formulated so as to highlight characters' emotions. For example, Qi formulated strict rules on how different role types laugh: determined and solemn for the senior male role, chaste and graceful for the female role, irregular and humorous for the clown role. Although all these laughing styles are disconnected from reality, they reflect a certain nature of life in an articulated form.

Following on the song-dance discourse, Qi focused on the dance-like nature of Peking Opera when he worked on the formularization of movements. He divided all movements into three types: those that reinforce speech, those that express inner emotions, and those that represent actions. He suggested that all movements should be choreographed. That is to say movements in Peking Opera functioned not only to tell stories, but also to signify different role types and specific characters in the performance. In line with this, Qi redefined the function of the Chinese stage as a platform for dance presentations rather than drama. By doing so he affirmed the stylization on stage, as for him all props are aids to the dance performance.

Such formulations of a strict opposition between Western realism and Chinese aestheticism, in Goldstein's words, “provided the theoretical grounds for Qi's promotion of Peking Opera as the model for national drama.”⁵⁵ Here I am not suggesting that the aforementioned performance practices are new inventions, as it would be naive to ignore the fact that Peking Opera performers have been performing in such a way, or had included these elements in their performances, for decades. Instead, I am focusing on Qi's pioneer effort to theorize Peking Opera, and to select a limited number of features as representative of it. His theory and application were his reaction to the grand narrative of the May Fourth ideology. Guy's assumption and my argument draw additional evidence from the fact that Qi raised Peking Opera to an equivalent position with the highly theorized Western theatrical genres, thus enabling meaningful comparison.

Moreover, Qi's ambiguous application of the term “national drama” is noteworthy. On the one hand, he claimed that “national drama” referred to all traditional Chinese theatrical genres:

⁵⁴ Qi 1935a: 21.

⁵⁵ Goldstein 1999: 387.

“What I mean by ‘national drama’ is the drama *in* the nation, but not *of* the nation. It is the term used, for example, in ‘nationals’ or ‘national goods’, but not that in ‘national flag’ or ‘national anthem’...every time when I use the term ‘national drama’, I include [singing modes of] both *kun* 崑, *yi* 弋, *bangzi* 梆子 and *pihuang* 皮黃.”⁵⁶

On the other hand, this claim contradicted his many other writings, in which “national drama” was used exclusively to signify Peking Opera. For example when Zhang Daofan wrote the preface for Qi’s *Guoju Yishu Huikao* 國劇藝術彙考 (The Illustrated Catalogue of the Art of National Drama, 1962), he clarified the use of “national drama” in the book as referring to “drama of Beiping [Beijing]” (*pingju* 平劇)⁵⁷ and “drama of the capital” (*jingxi* 京戲), both the names of Peking Opera in different periods.⁵⁸

In sum, Qi reacted to the call for Chinese modernity by interpreting the binarism of “Chinese” and “Western” in a way that reaffirmed the value of Chinese culture. With his knowledge of theatre studies, he systematically theorized the aestheticism of Peking Opera, which for him can be represented as [a facet of] the national essence. Nevertheless, a well-constructed theory alone might not be able to achieve the goal of contributing to national identity building. A performer who could transform the theory into on-stage performances, a “performer of national essence”, was the key.

2.2 Peking Opera = Mei Lanfang: performing “national essence” on stage

As a world-renowned icon of Peking Opera, Mei Lanfang’s fame not only comes from his artistic mastery, but also from his contribution in consolidating Qi’s theory of aestheticism in Peking Opera and his frequent exposure on overseas stages. In this section I will look at his hugely successful career from the perspective of an icon-making campaign – one that made him both the most widely known Peking Opera performer world-wide and a role model of modern Chinese citizenship.

2.2.1 On Mei Lanfang

Mei was born in a family of Peking Opera performers and musicians. His grandfather, Mei Qiaoling 梅巧齡, was a female role performer and later the boss of the Four Delights Troupe (*Sixi Ban* 四喜班). His father, Mei Zhufen 梅竹芬, was also a renowned female role before his early death. In addition, his uncle, Mei Yutian 梅雨田, was a musician of the Chinese two-stringed fiddle (*huqin* 胡琴) who was famous for his work with Tan Xinpei 譚鑫培, a famous senior male role. With such a family background, Mei Lanfang was inevitably expected to succeed his family’s legacy. However, the story did not start in the way many people would think, that of a gifted kid showing his talent from the moment he started

⁵⁶ Qi 1954: 173.

⁵⁷ *Beiping* 北平 was the official name of Beijing after the capital had been moved to Nanjing in 1927. Here Zhang’s use of the name refers to 1928 when the Nationalist army occupied Beijing and renamed it to *Beiping*.

⁵⁸ Qi 1962: 2.

learning Peking Opera. Instead, according to Mei's grandmother, his acting talent was not even average when he was young:

When he was eight years old, we had hired the older brother of Zhu Suyun 朱素雲, a famous male role performer, to teach [Mei Lanfang]. At the time students always started with plays like *Twice Entering the Palace* (*Er Jingong* 二進宮) and *Wang Chun-e Educating Her Son* (*Sanniang Jiaozi* 三娘教子), whose singing phrases were easy to learn. However, he failed to learn just four simple, classic phrases even after quite a while. Seeing his slow progress, master Zhu thought it was hopeless for him to learn the art well, and said to him “the Master has not fed you with rice!”⁵⁹ and refused to teach him anymore.⁶⁰

After overcoming this unpromising start, Mei was finally accepted by Wu Lingxian 吳菱仙, a former performer from the Four Delights Troupe. But he was only an accompanying student to his brother-in-law's family, because the declining Mei family was hardly able even to hire him a teacher. The family's difficult situation also pressed an early financial responsibility on him, so he had to make his debut – when he was only eleven – in 1904. Three years after his debut, Mei joined the *Xiliancheng* 喜連成 troupe,⁶¹ where he began to develop as a mature performer. But he was not yet a renowned female role until his first tour to Shanghai in 1913.

During the 1910s Peking Opera in Shanghai had already established a rather self-contained operation system. The supply of performers, both quantitatively and qualitatively speaking, was sufficient for the growing needs of local spectators. However, commercial tours of star performers from Beijing were still an attraction, and arranging such tours was a profitable means for the local troupes' shareholders. In 1913, Xu Shaoqing 許少卿 from the First Theatre of Peony and Fragrant Olive (*Dangui Diyi Tai* 丹桂第一臺) invited Mei Lanfang and Wang Fengqing 王鳳卿, a famous male role at the time. It was the first time Mei ever performed outside Beijing, and his performance received high acclaim by Shanghai audiences. As described by Mei, this tour was a crucial moment to him, which greatly influenced his future career. Yet, what happened after the tour is arguably the real “life-changer” – not only for him, but also for Peking Opera.⁶²

2.2.2 Mei's Peking Opera innovations in the 1910s

Mei's first encounter with Qi Rushan was unusual indeed. Soon after his return to Beijing from this Shanghai tour, Mei started receiving anonymous letters critically commenting on his

⁵⁹ This is a phrase used in the Peking Opera circles, meaning that one does not have the talent to learn the art at all.

⁶⁰ Mei & Xu 1987: 10.

⁶¹ I do not have an English translation for the *Xiliancheng* troupe as it was named after the three sons of the founder, Niu Zihou 牛子厚, whose given names are Xigui 喜貴, Liangui 連貴 and Chenggui 成貴. Literally *xi* means happiness, *lian* means connection or succession, and *cheng* means success or achievement (so “Enjoying Continued Success”).

⁶² For the Peking Opera scene in early twentieth century Shanghai and Mei's systematic use of new media, such as newspapers and fan photographs, see Yeh 2003.

performances. He reacted to these suggestions positively, and followed many of them in his later performances. This humble act by a top performer interested the anonymous letter-writer so much that he continued to write Mei personal comments. Finally after hundreds of mail exchanges, Mei arranged to meet this anonymous person, whose name was Qi Rushan. Soon after, they started on a partnership that would last from 1913 to 1933, which was the most productive and innovative period of Mei's career. During their partnership, two new types of plays stood out, namely the Modern Costume plays (*shizhuang xi* 時裝戲) and the Ancient Costume plays (*guzhuang xi* 古裝戲).

These two innovations were arguably a reflection of the negotiation of Chinese modernity at that time, that between the mainstream discourse and Qi's interpretation. On the one hand, the Modern Costume plays followed the ideology presented by hybrid dramas. Towards the end of his 1913 Shanghai tour, Mei paid several visits to local performances and for the first time encountered what he called the "new dramas" (*xinxi* 新戲) – which indeed was Civilized Plays (see section 2.1.3) – that presented modern stories in the style of Peking Opera. He was inspired and began his production of Modern Costume plays after returning to Beijing.⁶³ Similar to the hybrid dramas, many technical aspects were modernized in Modern Costume plays. Firstly, as the name suggested, performers wore modern costumes. More frequent changing was also seen, such as a realistic depiction of characters' status through plot development. Secondly, stories were taken from contemporary events. For example, the first Modern Costume play, *Waves on the Sea of Sin* (*Niehai Bolan* 孽海波瀾), was based on a local story in Beijing about a trial of a procurer. Thirdly, performing conventions were greatly renewed. Traditional formulaic movements were abandoned, and replaced by everyday gestures. Singing passages and acrobatics were also reduced and partly replaced by more realistic presentations. Through the Modern Costume plays, Mei somewhat echoed the mainstream May Fourth ideology to convey messages of modernity by means of Peking Opera. This obviously opposed Qi's perspective on Peking Opera, though Qi actually helped writing several play scripts of this kind.

On the other hand, Qi continued to work on his theory of Peking Opera. By combining aestheticism with the notion of femininity, Qi managed to bring his theory into practice through the creation of Ancient Costume plays. But before I discuss the plays, an explanation of the traditionality of femininity in Chinese theatre must be in place, so as to justify the coherent traditionalist logic in Qi's theorization of Peking Opera.

Gender has long been an important part of the visual dimensions of traditional Chinese theatre. As Li Siu-leung states in *Cross-Dressing in Chinese Opera* (2003), "The history of Chinese [Opera] can, among many possible characterizations, be instructively described as a series of narrative fragments of 'gender trouble'."⁶⁴ While Li's description of gender issues as "trouble" is somewhat rhetorical in nature, scholars have in fact frequently observed "trouble" in the history of traditional Chinese theatre, starting from the time of the emergence of the fundamental concept of "drama", meaning the portrayal of male and female characters

⁶³ Mei & Xu 1987: 186-187.

⁶⁴ Li 2003: 1.

by male and female performers respectively. The histories of male and female cross-dressing also date back to Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.-24 C.E.) and the eighth century respectively.⁶⁵ Other historic episodes about sexuality in Chinese theatre since then include the abundant presence of female performers in the Yuan dynasty; the ban on female performers on public stages, and on mixing male and female performers on the same stage, in the Ming and Qing dynasties; as well as the rise of female impersonators, such as Mei Lanfang, from the late imperial period to mid-twentieth century. A closer look at these episodes always leads to one overarching observation, namely that femininity is often the oppressed in the gender relations. As Li and other gender theorists on traditional Chinese theatre argue, femininity has often been put in a subordinate position in a dominant male narrative of traditional Chinese theatre, from both the literal and performative perspectives, within a larger framework of Confucian, patriarchal Chinese society.⁶⁶ Therefore, from a gender point of view, upholding femininity as the strategy to elevate a theatrical genre also shows Qi's and Mei's progressive resistance to traditional gender values – which, in its turn, contradicts Qi's traditionalist view toward modernization.

Going back to the Ancient Costume plays, the notions of aestheticism and traditional Chinese femininity were materialized through Mei's visual images on stage. Every single artistic device was aimed at enhancing the femininity of the character as well as the actor. Firstly, stories were taken from Chinese folktales, historical stories and literature, in which the main characters were depicted as moral and pure feminine figures. For example, *Chang E Escapes to the Moon* (*Chang E Benyue* 嫦娥奔月) depicts the immortal fairy Chang E, and *Daiyu Buries Fallen Petals* (*Daiyu Zanghua* 黛玉葬花) depicts the tender but fragile Lin Daiyu from the Chinese novel *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou Meng* 紅樓夢). Secondly, according to the commentary of Mei himself, costumes and hairstyles were inspired by ancient paintings. Every little detail was designed to amplify the femininity of the performer's physicality and to enhance femininity when the performer was performing movements and dance sequences. For example, Mei recalled a thorough design process for his costume in *Chang E*, in which even the color of a small piece of accessory was carefully chosen to highlight the beauty of Chang E.⁶⁷ Thirdly, performing conventions remained mostly traditional, despite the greatly prolonged dancing sequences that maximized the visual impact of femininity in the plays. In Goldstein's view, Ancient Costume plays created inception to "the mythic idealizations of feminine purity and beauty."⁶⁸

It is noteworthy that Mei's success lay not only in his ability to cross gender boundaries, but also his ability to shed the negative sexual image associated with cross-dressing in traditional Chinese theatre. His awareness of these matters is clear in Mei's discussion of his performance in *The Favorite Concubine Becomes Intoxicated* (*Guifei Zuijiu* 貴妃醉酒):

⁶⁵ Ibid. 32-33; Tseng 1976: 41.

⁶⁶ Li 2003.

⁶⁷ Mei & Xu 1987: 282-283.

⁶⁸ Goldstein 1999: 394.

“The portrayal of drunken Concubine Yang was overdone by some performers, who made it pornographic. It should be a great dance scene that reflects the internal emotion of a woman who is suppressed by court politics, but their acting made it ‘yellow’ [pornographic].”⁶⁹

This statement on the traditional performance practice of male impersonators should also be understood in relation to the long history of their involvement in male prostitution. From the Ming and Qing dynasties to the early Republican era, the male dominance of both performing and spectating circles was closely associated with the practice of homosexuality.⁷⁰ On the other hand, the theater seems to have attracted homosexuals in east and west alike. Thus Peking Opera performers had long been pejoratively classified as a “mean profession” (*jianye* 賤業). It was only in the early Republican era that performers gained a better social status, although they were still not considered as “regular” people.⁷¹ Association with immorality would have been devastating to the iconization of Mei. Therefore, his awareness of the need – and, perhaps, his professional desire – to avoid pornographic imagination by spectators, at the same time as maximizing his feminine images on stage, was crucial to his career. Meanwhile, this is also significant to the genre at large. By “purifying” performers’ image on stage, the status of the theatre was raised to that of an art and, by the same token, that of performers was raised from participants in a “mean profession” to artists. On the practical side, the purification of Peking Opera performers also involved hiding the intimate aspects of the relationships of Mei, who was the face of the genre, and his long-time patrons.

In sum, Mei’s effort in presenting a splendid and pure femininity on stage, which was freed from all associations with homosexuality, was essential to the legitimacy of Qi’s theory of Peking Opera, as Mei’s cross-dressing embodied Qi’s theory of aestheticism, which was to abolish all aspects suggesting realism. Such portrayal of complete womanhood on-stage by a man was logically parallel to the perfection of aestheticism that distinguished traditional Chinese theatre from its Western counterpart. In other words, Mei and Qi redefined cross-dressing in Peking Opera as a virtuous artistic expression in Chinese culture. As delicately summarized by Goldstein, “on the stage, the ideally virtuous and beautiful woman was, necessarily, a man.”⁷² This echoes Guy’s abovementioned assumptions about Peking Opera, for it was “both supremely Chinese and consummately exportable.” Indeed, the recorded product of Peking Opera should not only be “supremely Chinese” but also “consummately exportable,” if Peking Opera was at the end a solution to the cultural discrimination by the Western world. But then arose the next question for Mei and Qi about Peking Opera’s exportation: Where should we test the product?

2.3 The first encounter: Mei’s 1922 tour to Hong Kong

Mei Lanfang’s well-established on-stage identity as the “performer of national essence,” with

⁶⁹ Mei & Xu 1987: 230.

⁷⁰ See Duchesne 1994, Wu 2004 and Goldman 2012 for more about sexuality in the theatre circle in late imperial China.

⁷¹ Goldstein 1999: 400.

⁷² Goldstein 2007: 251.

his innovation of Ancient Costume plays, should be encouraging to the grand plan of iconizing him. However, according to Qi, he and Mei in fact initially hesitated about promoting Peking Opera outside the Chinese mainland. According to Qi, neither western missionaries nor foreign officials working in China at that time had written about traditional Chinese theatre. They simply did not go to teahouses, which were the major venues of Peking Opera performances at the time, because going there was considered a low-class act due to what they saw as the venues' poor conditions and spectators' rude behavior. Since their writings were the main source for the West to learn about China, it is not surprising that Westerners had almost no knowledge about Peking Opera. Thus, Mei and his team were unsure about how foreign audiences would respond to the genre.⁷³ Nevertheless, he was given some encouragement from his several performances before foreign spectators. In 1915 Mei performed before Paul Reinsch, the then American ambassador, in Beijing, and his performance was acclaimed. In 1919 Mei was invited to tour Japan. The tour had an enormous impact on local communities as well as Japanese theatrical circles. Box office results were great for all of his performances at the Imperial Theatre in Tokyo. Many Kabuki performers were also attracted by Mei's fabulous skills, so much so that some even tried to adapt Mei's dance movements into their own Kabuki performances. These experiences of success likely convinced Qi and Mei that Peking Opera could be appreciated outside China and might also be a useful means of cultural diplomacy.⁷⁴

On top of that, the frequent performances before diplomatic personnel in Beijing during those years also started to gain Mei a reputation among Western cultural circles. According to A.C. Scott, the Americans had already planned to arrange for Mei to tour the United States, which finally happened in 1930. But before that it was the British and the Chinese community in Hong Kong who had made some arrangements. They proposed to invite Mei for a tour and for him to perform before Edward VIII, the then Prince of Wales and future King of England, during his tour of the "Far East" in 1922.⁷⁵ However, the original plan did not work out in the end. After all arrangements had been made, a massive strike of Chinese seamen, which later on spread to other groups of workers, broke out in January 1922. Signs that the strike might last indefinitely (although it ended in March) left the Hong Kong organizer no choice but to cancel the tour. The entertainment for Prince Edward was replaced by a famous local Cantonese Opera troupe, which performed before him in April.⁷⁶

Nevertheless, and fortunately, the story did not end there. After the cancellation of the original plan, some local theatre lovers in the business community were still motivated in bringing Mei to Hong Kong. With the prominent support of General Tang Yiu-kwong 鄧瑤光 and of John Grose (the former a retired Commissioner of Police in Guangdong province, and the latter a European who had received most of his education in Hong Kong), a group of members from the Chamber of Commerce formed the United Music Society (*Tongle Hui* 同

⁷³ Qi 1962: 132-134.

⁷⁴ *ibid.* 138.

⁷⁵ Scott 1959: 91.

⁷⁶ *ibid.* 92.

樂會). On behalf of the society, they offered another invitation to Mei, and the Society's members agreed to contribute financially.

As Mei Shaowu recalled, Mei accepted the invitation immediately, because he hoped to make this tour an opportunity to examine the degree to which audiences in southern China would accept the “traditional northern Peking Opera”.⁷⁷ Here I argue that the notion of “traditional northern” is questionable, if we still remember the long efforts by May Fourth ideologists – particularly Qi Rushan – in nationalizing Peking Opera. Also, the cultural distance between Beijing and Hong Kong at that time was far beyond a “north-south” relationship within a single country:

“Although physically a part of China, Hong Kong was a foreign country in every sense of the word to a northerner like Mei. His own countrymen there were Cantonese who spoke a different language and lived in ways that marked them apart.”⁷⁸

In addition to the differences in language and living style, I should also stress the cultural difference between these two places, where the theatrical spectrum of Hong Kong at that time was composed by those demographically bounded genres (e.g. Cantonese Opera and Chaozhou Opera) and “imported” cultures of Western opera and spoken dramas due to its colonial background. Therefore, I argue that this tour was also an attempt for Mei and his team to try out the “national drama” agenda, and to build up Mei's iconic status, in a place with relatively large foreign presence.

2.3.1 Mei Lanfang on stage: a fabulous impersonator of femininity

On 15 October 1922, Mei arrived in Hong Kong with his newly formed Society for Continuing Chinese Culture (*Chenghua She* 承華社) to prepare for his performances. His first Hong Kong appearance was a big event. Promotional materials, highlighting not only his artistic mastery but also his international reputation, were advertised in *Huazi Ribao* 華字日報 (The Chinese Mail), one of the major local newspapers at that time, a week before the tour:

“Feng Hejian 馮河澗 once hosted foreign ambassadors in his house for a performance by Mei. The ambassadors were impressed by Mei's performance and all wished him to perform in their own countries so as to share the enjoyment with their people. Later an American businessman in Beijing offered Mei 300,000 U.S. dollars for a tour to New York, but Mei declined with the excuse of long overseas travel. Since then Mei's reputation has grown within and outside China.”⁷⁹

Mei himself was also impressed by the impact he had made. For example upon his arrival, he wrote a letter to a friend in Shanghai:

⁷⁷ Mei 2006: 14.

⁷⁸ Scott 1959: 94.

⁷⁹ Chinese Mail, 9 October 1922.

When I sailed into the harbor [of Hong Kong], more than a hundred men and women from the upper echelons escorted me with boats. There were also uncountable numbers of people waiting on the pier...The United Music Society had sold the tickets in advance at the price of ten dollars, and had received an extremely enthusiastic response. Reports were also made of ticket “scalpers” selling tickets for double their original value.⁸⁰

The brisk sale of tickets, although some of it was through scalping activities, was indeed proof of Mei’s popularity. Also, the original ten-day engagement was extended to about a month from 20 October to 22 November, due to the feverish responses of the community.⁸¹

As discussed in the previous section, one crucial prerequisite to the iconization of Mei was his effort in presenting splendid and pure femininity on stage. In this tour, Mei and his team tried to achieve this by a carefully designed daily performing programme. During the tour of almost a month, he performed mainly Ancient Costume plays. He even re-staged a few of them that feature dance sequences over verbal deliveries, such as *The Heavenly Fairy Scattering Flowers* (*Tiannü Sanhua* 天女散花) and *Chang E Escapes to the Moon*, to maximize the impact of femininity shown in Peking Opera to spectators.

This strategy seemed to be successful if we look at the media coverage. Two columns were run in the Chinese Mail dedicated to Mei’s tour, namely “Taiping Juchang Ji” 太平劇場記 (News from the Tai Ping Theatre)⁸² and “Mei Xun” 梅訊 (Mei’s News), and praises of his “beauty” became the constant subject of these columns. *Daguang Bao* 大光報 (The Great Light Post) also joined in the compliments, praising “Mei’s beauty as comparable to a fairy, and his voice as sweet and adorable as warbler.”⁸³ In short, Mei’s mastery as a female role was fully displayed on Hong Kong stage, through his fabulous impersonation skills.

2.3.2 Mei Lanfang off stage: a modern man, a Chinese elite person

The month-long tour drew people’s attention to Mei’s on-stage beauty. Moreover, his off-stage image as a modern, moral man was equally important for the iconization campaign. At this point the media again made a great contribution in shaping Mei’s off-stage image. As noted, the beauty of Mei on stage had been recognized by local critics. At the same time Mei was depicted by every means in other media descriptions as a highly moral male person. This was indeed a conscious image management by Mei’s team, to shield him from the long-standing, negative perception of Peking Opera performers. As a matter of fact, the perception of traditional Chinese theatre performers in the south was no better, as Cantonese Opera performers were also seen as a “mean profession” and were often condemned as

⁸⁰ Mei 2006: 15-16.

⁸¹ See Chinese Mail, 20 November 1922. Performances on the last two days were “benefit plays” (*yiwu xi* 義務戲). Mei agreed to perform free of charge, in order to raise funds for victims of a typhoon disaster in the Chaozhou area in Guangdong. (*Chinese Mail*, 24 October 1922)

⁸² Tai Ping Theatre (*Taiping Xiyuan* 太平戲院) was a modern theatre fitted out for traditional Chinese theatre performances. Most of Mei’s performances during this tour were staged in this theatre.

⁸³ Mei 2006: 26.

low-caste people. Some were also found to be in the network of local gangs. A glance of such negative associations can be seen in a letter which was published in local press in the same October that Mei was about to arrive. Here Mei was also mentioned, and was portrayed somewhat differently from his “low-caste” colleagues:

“A gratifying point is that the warm reception [for Mei] shows a tendency, although slight, to give a performer his due. The attitude of southern Chinese towards performers is entirely mistaken and inconsistent and should be reformed. Performers are prone to be regarded as the scum of society and not in their true light as the benefactors of mankind ... in the attitude towards the stage, Canton [Guangzhou] should follow Peking [Beijing]...as we see, [Mei’s] behavior is dignified and correct. Moreover he has made it explicit that it will be inconvenient for him to attend entertainments given in his honor in brothels in West Point, a statement the utterance of which by a Chinese, presupposes some moral courage.”⁸⁴

I would say that this letter clearly had as its aim to emphasize Mei’s morality as a modern Chinese citizen by setting off his awareness against negative associations of performers’ images.

In addition, Mei’s heterosexual masculinity was also cautiously emphasized when he was engaged in social interaction. For example, in a pre-tour promotion in the *Chinese Mail*, a picture of Mei was published. Instead of a more logical choice of Mei in his female impersonator outlook, a picture of a young man in a cozy black tux was published.⁸⁵ Heterosexual maleness was also stressed in reporting Mei’s social activities, in contrast with his feminine image in performance reviews. It suggests an intention of Mei’s management team to shape public reception of Mei, through mass media, as a fashionable, modern man of high moral standards. Such reframing of Mei’s identity, from a low-class Peking Opera performer to a virtuous artist and moral man, was decisive in recoding Peking Opera as a “national high art,” and also Mei himself as a member of the “social elite” working in this art.

Moreover to be a “social elite”, the diplomatic obligations of Mei with the British Colonial government during the tour further elevated him to a cultural ambassador representing the nation of China. Such diplomatic arrangements were first initiated by the British Minister to China, Beilby Francis Alston, who sent a letter to Sir Reginald Edward Stubbs, the Hong Kong Governor at the time. In the letter, Alston asked Stubbs for an arrangement of convenience for Mei for the reason that “he had been doing well in enhancing the relationship between China and the United Kingdom.”⁸⁶ Accordingly, the Colonial government gave Mei a VIP-standard reception during his stay. Upon arrival, he was taken to pay his respects at Government House and received by the Governor. He had a police escort wherever he went. Various groups from the social upper class, including the British American Tobacco Company, gave banquets in his honor.⁸⁷ He was also granted privileges for his performances by the government. For example, the performance time was extended an extra

⁸⁴ Scott 1959: 93.

⁸⁵ *Chinese Mail*, 16 October 1922.

⁸⁶ Mei 2006: 14.

⁸⁷ *Chinese Mail*, 16 and 25 October 1922; Scott 1959: 96.

thirty minutes beyond midnight, the statutory stop time for local theatrical performances. Also Mei's performances were the first in Hong Kong for which permission was granted for the Tai Ping Theatre to sell standing tickets.⁸⁸ Moreover, Mei was received by Stubbs in a formal meeting on 17 October, and the presence of the Governor in two of Mei's performances was recorded.⁸⁹

Arrided! *Arrided!!*

MEI LAN FANG

The World Renowned Chinese Artist

With his troupe of Pekinese actors
will perform at the

Tai Ping Theatre,
WEST POINT.

GRAND OPENING NIGHT

Friday, 20th October, 1922,
7.30 P. M.

BOOK NOW AT

Tai Ping Theatre

壬戌年 八月二十五日

港香同樂會謹啓

(身) (化) (仙) (天)

梅蘭芳



像行裝化方蘭梅

劇界大王梅蘭芳。學同著名文武藝員。現已由滬來港。依期開演。此次文武名角。計有一百三十餘員。老生如郭仲衡、沈華軒、張春彥、武旦如朱桂芳、花旦如姚玉英、諸如香、小生如姜妙香、小武如朱湘泉等。均京滬班最著名。早已膾炙人口。郭仲衡則有古大臣風度。為譚天後起之第一人。沈張則善演鬧劇。能令觀者神往古人。武旦一角。最難其選。十年前九陣風最負盛名。惜韶華易老。今非昔比。現以朱桂芳為後起之秀。京滬武角信無出其右者。姚玉英為梅郎首徒。與諸如香俱屬一時翹楚。姜妙香風雅翩翩。每與梅郎拍演。觀者嘆為雙絕。朱湘泉為桂芳兄弟。聲靈兼而有之。不愧難兄難弟。餘角則各擅所長。恕未詳畧。本會此次組織。首重社會習慣。每慮南北方言。或有誤會。故逐場所擇劇本。除梅郎當劇外。心上真用戲。及打武戲。以便觀者易於領會。各員武藝絕倫。矯捷善變。不獨令觀者怡情悅目。尤足喚起國人尚武精神。劇之移人。信哉。若論其主體。固屬出類拔萃。論其劇本。信亦出色當行。粵諺有云。牡丹雖好。仍要葉扶持。誠是也。今本會所售優等座券。計將滿額。而購者尚紛至沓來。深慮見遺。有辜雅意。(特在太平戲院於廿五日再將院內散廂貴妃床特等位椅位提前發售)以供取求。盛會不常。佳期難再。敬告諸君。勿失交臂。

Figure 2.1. Advertisement for Mei Lanfang's 1922 Hong Kong tour. From the leftmost column: general information about the première on 20 October; an introduction of Mei and other performers of the troupe; and a portrait of Mei in his ancient costume outlook.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Mei 2006: 24-25.

⁸⁹ ibid. 16-17.

⁹⁰ Mei Lanfang Memorial Museum 2001: 24.

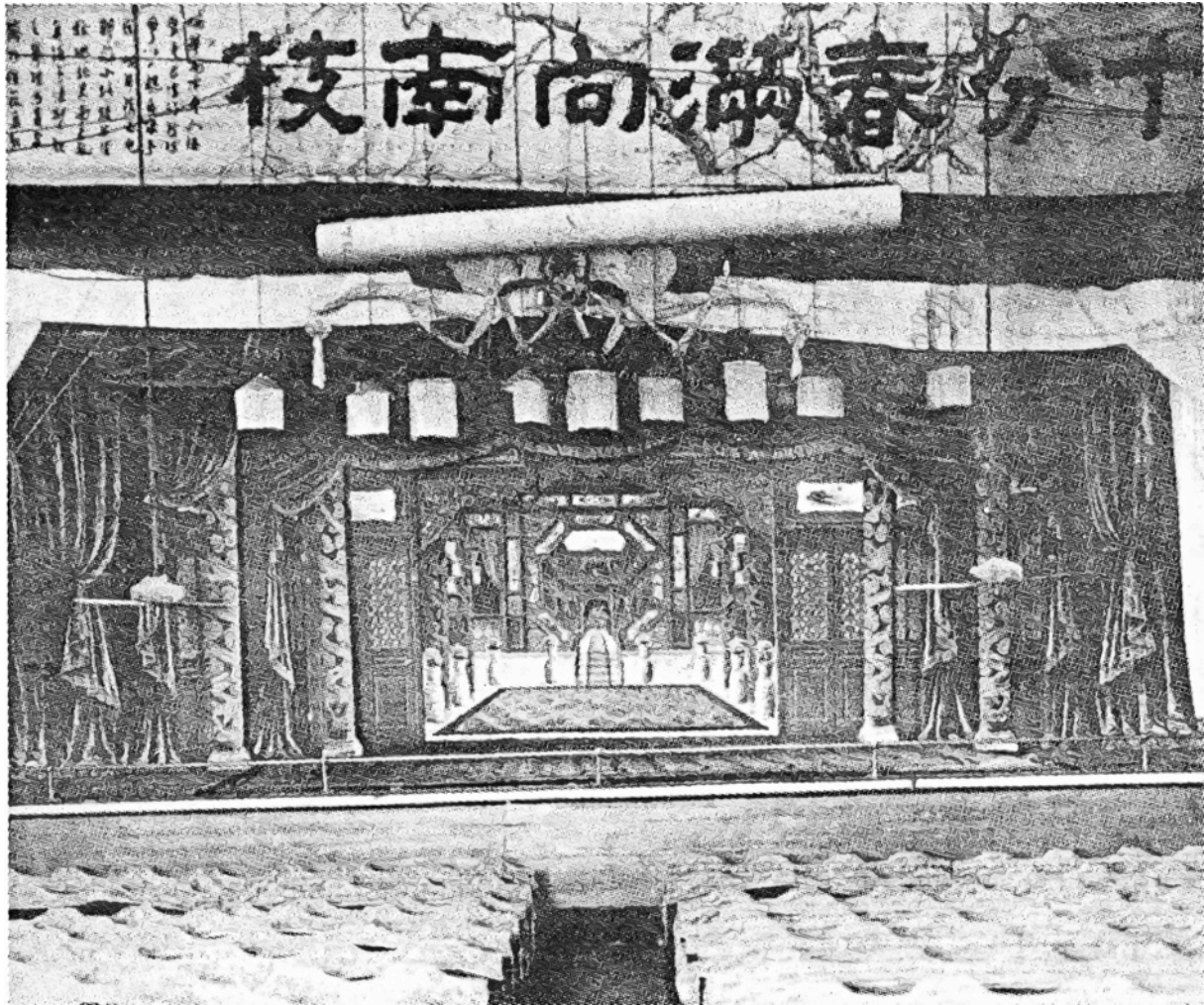


Figure 2.2. The stage of Tai Ping Theatre.⁹¹

2.4 Conclusion

From the formal receptions by the British Colonial Government in Mei's 1922 Hong Kong Tour to worldwide recognition nowadays as a Chinese cultural icon, the story of nationalizing Peking Opera and iconizing Mei Lanfang seems to have a triumphant ending. But let's not forget the "equation" at the beginning of this chapter: it is not a simple "National Identity = Mei Lanfang." On the contrary, the whole narrative involves (re)definition, theorization and reformulation of Peking Opera at every step. This begins from the imperialism of the Western powers in the late nineteenth century. Chinese intellectuals responded to this with the May Fourth ideology of iconoclastic, cultural modernity that ironically upheld western values as the ideal. In the realm of theatre, which was particularly valued as one of the most suitable media for mass dissemination of nationalist ideology among a broader spectrum of various cultural forms, genres that were based on western models obviously gained momentum. But at the same time theorists of traditional theatre, particularly Qi Rushan, went on a rather different and radical way that valued the traditional as a road to modernization. Subsequently,

⁹¹ *ibid.* 28.

Peking Opera was singled out within more than three hundreds genres of traditional theatre, because of its refined and hybrid attributes that fit well into the “high art” and “popularity” criterion for what was promoted as “national drama.” Qi further refined the genre, filtered out the homosexual practice associated with it, and repackaged it with a new set of values, namely “aestheticism” and “femininity”, so that it was artistically on a par with Western theatrical forms. Then Mei Lanfang was tailor-made as the master of such definitions – a performer of “national essence.”

Mei was ready, and so was the whole package of nationalized Peking Opera. It was time to test it out. Mei played his role well not only as a Peking Opera performer, but also as a model of the morally sound and modernized Chinese citizen. Also Mei did not do this singlehandedly: this was a collective construction of a performer’s iconic status, which included efforts by intellectuals and the media, and indirect support by the Nationalist government. For Mei himself, he could focus on what he was good at – performing, both on stage and off stage.

Mei’s 1922 Hong Kong tour also left a unique track in the history of Peking Opera outside the Chinese mainland, displaying a dynamics of exoticism on the one hand, and familiarity on the other. Due to the cultural difference between Beijing and Hong Kong, the northern genre of Peking Opera generated a degree of exoticism among local spectators. At the same time, Peking Opera was not completely alien to the majority of local Chinese audiences, especially as their familiar local genre of Cantonese opera was in many aspects similar to Peking Opera. The said dynamic of exoticism and familiarity created an interesting, distant-yet-close relation between Peking Opera and local society. As such, it marks an epilogue to this story: Peking Opera has since become part and parcel of Hong Kong’s cultural spectrum.

In later chapters, I will also show how this dynamic was interpreted and manipulated, in the form of varied Peking Opera products, by different social agents as a means to negotiate their interests.

2.5 Epilogue: Mei Lanfang after 1922

After this historical 1922 tour, Mei performed in Hong Kong again in 1928, 1931 and 1938. After his performance obligations in 1938, he did not return to his base in Shanghai (which had been occupied by the Japanese for several months by then) but stayed in Hong Kong. He returned to Shanghai in 1942, when Hong Kong fell also to the Japanese. He lived in Shanghai for seven years, and moved to Beijing in 1949. He remained based in Beijing until his death in 1961.

Since the beginning of his career in 1913 Mei basically did not stop performing at all, except in late 1937 in Shanghai and in late 1941 in Hong Kong, as he refused the requests by the Japanese to give performances. He travelled frequently within China, and undertook many performing tours outside the country. In addition to Hong Kong, he brought Peking Opera to Japan (1919, 1924, 1956), the United States (1930), and Europe (1935, the Soviet Union). All of these tours received high acclaim from foreign spectators, including professional dramatists. According to Colin Mackerras, this frequent international exposure “enhanced his

international prestige, making him the most popular and famous actor of Peking Opera not merely in China itself but all over the world.”⁹² Moreover, the international recognition of Peking Opera, especially by specialists in theatre, also enhanced its widely perceived superior status over other regional genres in China. No other traditional Chinese theatrical genres could compare to Peking Opera in terms of national and international reputation, except, perhaps, for Cantonese Opera, which drew on many overseas Cantonese communities all over the world.

This is a salient point for various groups of people. For the Chinese nationalists, it was their dream come true in terms of international recognition. For the Peking Opera circles, it was the achievement of their goal of creating a “national drama.” And for performers of other regional genres, it was a new source of inspiration. In Bourdieu’s well-known terminology, Peking Opera became a source for regional genres to acquire cultural capital, at a time when they needed this to survive in their respective worlds. In the next chapter, I will give an example of such dynamics between Peking Opera and regional genres. We shall see how, and why, Cantonese Opera adopted artistic devices from Peking Opera in Hong Kong in the 1920s and 1930s.

⁹² Mackerras 1975: 60.

Chapter Three / The First Wave of Peking-Cantonese Opera Interaction Chen Feinong

In the previous chapter we have seen how Peking Opera was introduced to Hong Kong spectators through Mei Lanfang's historical visit in 1922. The campaign of selling "national drama" had proven to be a success, as Qi Rushan's reformulation of aestheticism, visualized in prolonged dance sequences and choreographed martial art moves, had fascinated local theatre-goers. Moreover, it was also a salient moment in the history of Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong, as the local cultural space Cantonese Opera had dominated for centuries was for the first time shared with the "national" genre. As a result, in the following decade, interaction between the two genres emerged, in which producers of Cantonese Opera – including performers, scriptwriters and troupe owners – started drawing on artistic devices from Peking Opera. This is an interesting period from the perspective of this study, as the existence of Peking Opera in Hong Kong was maintained not only by travelling performers from the mainland, but also by another traditional Chinese theatrical genre, albeit in a fragmented manner. In this chapter, I will outline this process, identify Peking Opera devices that made their way into Cantonese Opera, and discuss the meaning of this interaction from various perspectives.⁹³ I submit that the market forces created by audience preference for Peking Opera were among the main reasons for Cantonese Opera performers to draw on Peking Opera. On the other hand, we should not overlook the artistic agency of the producers of Cantonese Opera, for they had their own evaluations of both genres, and made their own artistic choices.

In regard to Cantonese Opera producers' evaluations of Peking Opera, I refer again to the idea that I suggested at the end of chapter two, of a dynamic of exoticism and familiarity that was created among local spectators. This dynamic not only shaped spectators' taste at that time, but also made Cantonese Opera drawing on Peking Opera feasible and practical. In this regard, it is clear that a detailed explanation is needed of what in Peking Opera was different from, and similar to, Cantonese Opera. Having discussed "newness" and innovation in Peking Opera – i.e., Qi's aestheticism – in chapter two, I will start the present chapter with a discussion of similarities shared between the two genres by reviewing the early history of Cantonese Opera. This will show that they had the same theatrical roots, but developed along different paths. Such dynamics of similarity and difference, in terms of singing and performing styles, paved the way for Cantonese Opera drawing on selected devices of Peking Opera in the 1920s and 1930s.

⁹³ Here I am aware of the question in regard to the existence of an impact in another way, in which Peking Opera drew on anything from Cantonese Opera. To an extent, this is one of my major arguments in this project to question the unidirectional influence of Peking Opera on its periphery. However, as there is no evidence supporting the existence of this reverse impact so far, I have decided not to pursue this issue any further..

Nevertheless, I do not intend to suggest that this process can be reduced to a simple, unidirectional influence of the “national drama” on a regional genre. The matter is far more complicated, and involves considerations of agency and to what extent the elements in question would become an organic part of Cantonese Opera after they had been adopted. Therefore, I suggest viewing the process as a spectrum accommodating three scenarios: borrowing, adaptation and integration.

The discussion will be presented through the life story of Chen Feinong 陳非儂 (1899-1984), who was a renowned Cantonese Opera performer and a pioneer in this wave of inter-genre interaction. Through his story we will see how he and some of his colleagues got acquainted with Peking Opera, how they were inspired by it, and how they drew on devices from the “national drama” in their own work. Then I will reflect on this meaning of the process, first from my own point of view as a theatre researcher, then in an attempt to empathize with Cantonese Opera performers – or in other words, to gauge and understand their motivation to borrow from Peking Opera. In addition to Chen’s story, I will also look at the issue from several other perspectives, so that a more holistic view of the picture is provided.

3.1 A brief history of Cantonese Opera

As Cantonese Opera scholar Li Jian suggests, “The formation of traditional Chinese theatre took place mainly from folk song and folk dance.”⁹⁴ Long being an important trading hub in China, the Guangdong area was also the center of cultural exchange at that time. Song and dance activities from different regions across the country were found in the area as early as in the Tang dynasty (618-907).⁹⁵ These song and dance activities then gradually developed into various traditional Chinese theatrical genres that were performed in the area, including Cantonese Opera.

There are several narratives about the origins of Cantonese Opera. The commonly agreed one traces its origin back to the time of emperor Yongzheng 雍正 (reigned 1722-1735) of the Qing dynasty. At the time a performer of northern drama from Hubei named Zhang Wu 張五 fled from Beijing to Foshan, in Guangdong. He stayed in this then very prosperous city, introduced the *yiyang* 弋陽 singing mode that had originated from Jiangxi province in the fourteenth century and became a popular mode for performers in northern China in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), and helped establish drama troupes.⁹⁶ Apart from this narrative, there are others, including one that dates the origins of Cantonese Opera to around 1820, which is almost a century later than the common narrative.⁹⁷

Cantonese Opera is not the only genre developed and performed in the Guangdong area. Leung Pui-kam in his *Yueju Yanjiu Tonglun* 粵劇研究通論 (An Introduction to Cantonese Opera Studies, 1982) suggests that there were fourteen theatrical genres in the area that can be

⁹⁴ Li 2010: 2.

⁹⁵ Zhongguo Xiqu Zhi 1993: 4.

⁹⁶ Ruan 2008: 7; Li 2010: 24.

⁹⁷ Chan 1999: 16.

regarded as local and still survive, while *Zhongguo Xiqu Zhi: Guangdong Juan* 中國戲曲志：廣東卷 (Anthology of Chinese Opera: Guangdong, 1993) claims that there are seventeen local theatrical genres (interestingly, including Peking Opera). On the one hand, many of the surviving genres are similar in that they experienced external influences by singing modes or genres from outside Guangdong. For example, the introduction of the *yingang* mode influenced not only Cantonese Opera, but also quite a number of other genres in the area.⁹⁸ On the other hand, there are two distinctive differences between Cantonese Opera and the other genres in Guangdong nowadays. Firstly, Cantonese Opera is the only genre that uses Cantonese as its performing language. Secondly, it employs *pihuang* 皮黃 as the major singing mode. I will elaborate on both points in the following sections.

3.1.1 The same roots: *pihuang* singing mode as foundation

Pihuang is a hybrid singing mode, merging *bangzi* 梆子⁹⁹ and *erhuang* 二黃. According to *Zhongguo Jingju Shi* 中國京劇史 (A History of Peking Opera in China, 1990), both *bangzi* and *erhuang* were introduced and became popular in Beijing at the end of the eighteenth century. While the *qinqiang* 秦腔 performer Wei Changsheng 魏長生 facilitated the popularity of *bangzi*, *erhuang* was introduced by Anhui Opera (*huiju* 徽劇) troupes when they visited Beijing for the first time.¹⁰⁰ Later, around 1828-1832, several Han Drama (*hanxi* 漢戲) troupes, whose major singing mode was the hybrid *pihuang*, also made their first visits to Beijing. Those Anhui troupes that stayed in the city integrated the visiting genre into their performances, and the mixed product gradually developed into what we call Peking Opera today. Along the same lines, *pihuang* also became the foundation of the singing system in Peking Opera

Interestingly, similar traces of *bangzi*, *erhuang* and *pihuang* are also found in the history of Cantonese Opera. Firstly, *erhuang* was also introduced to the Guangdong area by Anhui Opera troupes. The exact date is unknown, but from the considerable number of Anhui Opera troupe names carved on the two steles, “Waijiang Liyuan Huiguan Beiji” 外江梨園會館碑記 (Memorial of the Outer-river Troupes Guild, erected in 1780) and “Liyuan Huiguan Shanghui Beiji” 梨園會館上會碑記 (Members of the Outer-river Troupes Guild, erected in 1791), it appears that Anhui Opera troupes, and *erhuang*, were already part of the theatrical scene in the region in the late eighteenth century.¹⁰¹ In 1821, *bangzi* was also introduced to Guangdong, and it gradually became the major singing mode of local Cantonese Opera troupes. A quote from the poet Yang Moujian 楊懋建 best summarizes the co-existence of *erhuang* and *bangzi* in Guangdong at the time:

The theatrical scene in Guangzhou [a city in Guangdong province] is divided into two: outer-river troupes and local troupes ... probably outer-river troupes are more similar to the Anhui Opera

⁹⁸ *Zhongguo Xiqu Zhi* 1993: 6-7.

⁹⁹ The same singing mode is termed *xipi* 西皮 in Peking Opera.

¹⁰⁰ Art Research Institutes of Beijing and Shanghai 1990: 39-44.

¹⁰¹ Ouyang 1990: 61-62.

troupes, and local troupes are more similar to the *Xiqin* 西秦 [a.k.a. *bangzi*] troupes.”¹⁰²

Secondly, similar to the northward movement of Han Drama to Beijing, the hybrid mode of *pihuang* also went south to Guangdong through regional genres in the Han Drama family, probably around 1851. Before that, although both *erhuang* and *bangzi* existed in the same area, local troupes never mixed them in performances. Either they sang in *bangzi* for the whole repertoire, or they sometimes adopted repertoires from Anhui Opera troupes and sang the entire repertoire in *erhuang*. But when Xiang Drama (*xiangxi* 湘戲) from Hunan province – a member of the Han Drama family, hence also in *pihuang* – came south to Guangdong in around 1851, local troupes began to abandon *bangzi* and to sing in *pihuang* (a.k.a. *banghuang* 梆黃 in Cantonese Opera). Since then, *pihuang* has become the major singing mode of Cantonese Opera. Despite the changes in singing mode, however, the performing language of the mid-land dialect remained unchanged at this point.¹⁰³

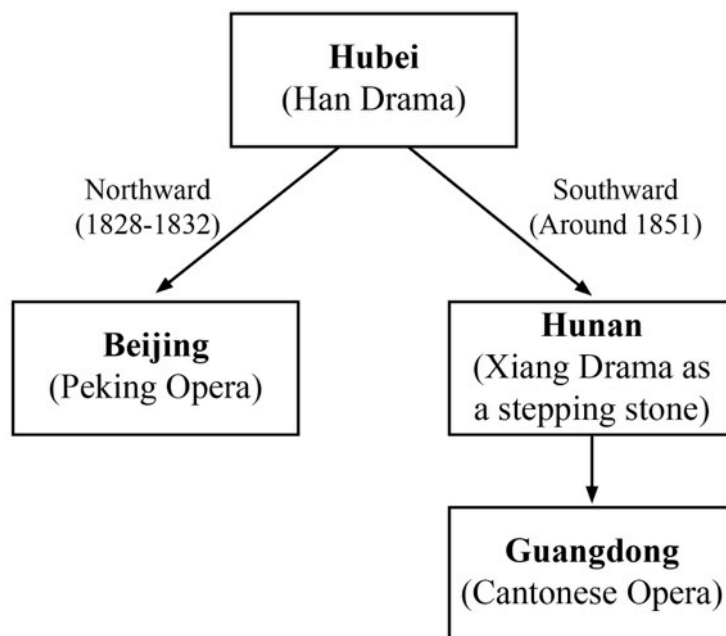


Figure 3.1. The transmission paths of Han Drama (i.e. *pihuang*) to north and south of China.

3.1.2 Different paths: the localization of Cantonese Opera

As noted, Cantonese Opera at the time was in many ways similar to Han and Xiang Drama – for example in the *pihuang* singing mode and the performing language of the mid-land dialect. In addition, the major repertoire in Cantonese Opera was also similar to those of the latter two genres. Mai Xiaoxia in his *Guangong Xiju Shilüe* 廣東戲劇史略 (History of Cantonese Dramas, 1958) lists the eighteen most common plays performed at the time, collectively known as the Eighteen Grand Plays (*Dapaichang Shiba Ben* 大排場十八本). Li Jian argues

¹⁰² Yang 1886: 3.

¹⁰³ Ouyang 1990: 60.

that many of these plays are based on their original Han Drama version.¹⁰⁴ This is confirmed by Ouyang Yuqian, who also suggests that “early plays and scripts (of Cantonese Opera) were the same as, or at least very similar to, that of Han Drama, Xiang Drama and Peking Opera.”¹⁰⁵

It is not uncommon for traditional Chinese theatrical genres to interact with others – in fact this is what I am focusing on in the present chapter. And in the case of Cantonese Opera-Xiang Drama interaction, there were social reasons for Cantonese Opera performers to keep performing like this. In 1854, a local performer Li Wenmao 李文茂, taking his cue from the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), started a revolt in Foshan. In response to the uprising, the Qing authority banned all Cantonese Opera performances. The ban was loosened after the failure of the Taiping Rebellion, but was only fully lifted in 1875. In this regard, the “disguised” Cantonese Opera, in the form of Xiang Drama in terms of performing language and style, can be understood as a safety measure of local troupes – a way for them to survive under the eyes of local officials – during that period. However, this also means that local troupes were losing support from local audiences, who identified with Cantonese language and culture.

In order to reverse this disadvantage, Cantonese Opera started to localize soon after the ban was lifted. The most direct way of localization was to use Cantonese as the major performing language. According to Ouyang, Cantonese was first used around the 1870s in some spoken passages of plays. The scale of linguistic localization gradually expanded, to the point where Cantonese was replacing mid-land dialect even in sung passages. Later, in the first decade of the twentieth century, the drama reform movement, and hence the spoken-drama-like Civilized Plays, spread through all of China. In the north, the movement and the new form of Chinese theatre inspired Peking Opera performers like Mei Lanfang. In the south, the Civilized Plays also made an impact on Cantonese Opera from their first introduction in 1908 – mainly in terms of the use of the Cantonese vernacular. However, unlike its counterpart in the north that survived for a while, in the Guangdong area the Civilized Plays were soon incorporated by Cantonese Opera. For example, some troupes that were originally dedicated to Civilized Plays soon started singing *pihuang* in their productions and gradually turned their focus to Cantonese Opera.¹⁰⁶

As discussed in the author’s note at the beginning of this study, the melodic contours in the tone-matrix singing system are highly dependent on the tones of the performing language. In this sense, the localization of music in Cantonese Opera seems to be a logical next step, as the *pihuang* mode was no longer fully compatible due to linguistic change from the mid-land dialect to Cantonese. Therefore, local vocal music genres were employed, such as the narrative singing genres of “southern sound” (*nanyin* 南音) and “dragon boat” (*longzhou* 龍舟), as well as folksongs.¹⁰⁷ Meanwhile the *pihuang* mode itself was also adapted in order to fit into singing in Cantonese. Firstly, in order to cater to the frequent use of particles in

¹⁰⁴ Li 2010: 111.

¹⁰⁵ Ouyang 1990: 68.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.* 72-73.

¹⁰⁷ Yu 1999: 264-265.

spoken and sung Cantonese, the “slow-tempo passages” (*manban* 慢板) in *pihuang* were made to be much slower than in other genres using the same singing mode (for example, Peking Opera), allowing performers to add extra text in between full words when singing. Secondly, as the pronunciation of Cantonese tends to be lower in pitch than the mid-land dialect, a vocalization named “flat throat” (*pinghou* 平喉) was created by down-tuning the original tonal key of *pihuang*.¹⁰⁸

In addition to performing language and music, the role type system of Cantonese Opera was also localized. The original “ten role types system” (*shida hangdang* 十大行當), which was adopted from Han Drama, was abandoned and replaced by the invention of the “six pillars system” (*liuzhu zhi* 六柱制). This change was a response to the changing performing context in the early twentieth century. From rural stages to modern theatres, from being mostly a rural ritual to mostly urban entertainment, the nation-wide social process of urbanization resulted in commercialization and celebrityization of traditional Chinese theatre, and Cantonese Opera was no exception. Under this social trend, troupe managers focused on maximizing profit. To achieve this they had to cut the number of members in the troupe, and to maximize the celebrity effect to spectators. In this sense the old “ten role types system” presented a barrier for two reasons. Firstly, this system emphasized the specialization of the ten role types. In other words, there were rigid boundaries between role types, and cross-role performing was discouraged. This means that for any troupe that wanted to fully develop its performing variety, the number of members would have to be considerable in order to fill all role types. Secondly, the system also emphasized the equal importance of each role type or, to some extent, each performer in the troupe. For example, performance would have to be more or less equally distributed among leading performers – in this case ten, and sometimes even more. These two characteristics of the “ten role types system” were certainly unfavorable to the urbanized performing context at the time. The “six pillars system” reduced the necessary role types in a troupe to six, and allowed cross-role performing. This allowed troupes to lower the number of key members, and favored performers who could show off their all-round skill across different role types to the audience.

3.2 Chen Feinong and his early career

Indeed, the localization of Cantonese Opera contributed greatly in shaping the genre we know nowadays. In addition, Cantonese Opera performers had never isolated themselves from other traditional Chinese theatrical genres and Western cultural imports. The development of Cantonese Opera did not end in the early twentieth century. Instead, it went on to draw on Western music, for example the uses of violin and saxophone, and on Peking Opera. In the following section, I will look at the multi-aspect impact of Peking Opera on Cantonese Opera, through the life story of Chen Feinong, a renowned Cantonese Opera performer from the first half of the twentieth century. Transcribed by Yu Muyun and Shen Jicheng, Chen’s own account of his life was first published in sections in the local *Dacheng Zazhi* 大成雜誌 (The

¹⁰⁸ Ouyang 1990: 83-84.

Great Achievement Magazine) from 1979 to 1981. It was then re-edited as a book by Ng Wing-chung and Chan Chak-lui in 2007.¹⁰⁹ This is a valuable source not only to reconstruct the history of Cantonese Opera, but also to examine the early encounter between Cantonese Opera and Peking Opera.

3.2.1 Early years (1899-1920/21)

Born in 1899, Chen received his primary and secondary education in Guangzhou, where he started performing spoken drama at school and in an amateur drama society named the Civil Music Society (*Minyue She* 民樂社). This was a period when new ideas and art forms were flushing in, manifesting itself in the multi-faceted localization of Cantonese Opera, as well as the rise of the Civilized Plays, and their quick incorporation by Cantonese Opera. As a theatre lover, Chen was exposed to all of these, and was particularly influenced by the Sky Shadow Troupe (*Youtianying* 優天影). At that time, the troupe performed both in Guangzhou and Hong Kong, and was known as the most famous troupe to perform Civilized Plays.¹¹⁰

Graduating from secondary school in 1915, Chen came to Hong Kong working in a company owned by his uncle, while he continued his amateur drama performing in local drama societies. The first troupe he joined was the Arrayed Fantasia (*Linlang Huanjing* 琳琅幻境), which was also famous for performing Civilized Plays. Later he joined the re-established Sky Shadow Troupe. Upon its re-establishment in 1912, the troupe did not totally abandon the repertoire and performing style of the Civilized Plays. Also, though many plays were adapted to a Cantonese operatic style, they were presented in a modified form, as only the dialogues and arias were delivered and no acting took place. In other words, those were not literally “plays”, as they were performed without acting components. A comparable in Western theatre may be public readings of play scripts, though no singing is involved in this case. This indeed gave Chen an advantage to hide his weakness, as he was then an experienced performer of spoken drama with some experience in Cantonese operatic singing in a female role, but had never received formal training in Cantonese Opera acting. He gradually gained a reputation, in the circles of spoken drama and those of Cantonese Opera, by performing this kind of hybrid “readings”. Finally in 1920-1921, he was invited by Li Yanqiu 李雁秋 (a.k.a. Jing Yuanheng 靚元亨), a Singapore-based Cantonese Opera performer who owned the Eternal Life Troupe (*Yongshounian* 永壽年), to join his troupe. He accepted the invitation and began his professional career in Cantonese Opera.

3.2.2 In Singapore (1920/21-23)

As noted, Chen had no Cantonese Opera background apart from some singing in the Sky Shadow Troupe. This made his first few months in the Eternal Life Troupe a tough time. He

¹⁰⁹ When using this data, I am fully aware of the reliability issue. Indeed, it is a common question with the use of one’s oral history. In this case, as Chen’s own account about his life is mostly in coherence with that from other sources (with only one to two exceptions, in which I will discuss in the following paragraphs), I submit that it is reliable for an academic discussion.

¹¹⁰ The Sky Shadow Troupe was banned from performing in 1908 by the Qing authorities.

was quickly stripped of his main role after a cold response by the audience to his first performance of *Li Shishi* 李師師. He was told to start learning from the basics, and was assigned to perform only in some minor shows. His chance came after a while, when he was assigned to perform the role of Xue Rengui's wife in *Xue Rengui Returning to the Kiln* (*Rengui Huiyao* 仁貴回窯) in a daytime show.¹¹¹ He performed well, regaining his reputation and earning a three-year discipleship with Li Yanqiu. He began an intensive training on the genre, including singing, acting, and martial arts. He also started adapting plays that he had performed in the *Youtianying* troupe to Cantonese Opera. After a year or so of training and performing, he became the leading female role of the Eternal Life Troupe. In 1923, the Happiness of the Pear Garden Troupe (*Liyuanle* 梨園樂) from Hong Kong offered Chen the position of leading female role. At that moment the performing season of the Eternal Life Troupe also came to an end, and Li Yanqiu decided not to continue and disbanded the troupe.¹¹² Therefore, Chen accepted the offer and continued his career in Hong Kong.

3.2.3 Correcting dates in Chen's life history in the early 1920s

In the previous sections I have suggested that Chen went to Singapore in 1920-1921, and then returned to Hong Kong in 1923. This is a new narrative about this particular part of Chen's life story, which is different from Ng Wing-chung's version in his edition of Chen's oral history. Ng suggests that Chen left for Singapore in 1920 and returned in 1924. I believe this contradicts Chen's own words:

After the formation of the Republic of China, Huang Luyi 黃魯逸 re-established the Sky Shadow Troupe. Because it happened in the year of *jiazi* 甲子, the troupe was renamed Sky Shadow of *Jiazi* (*Jiazi Youtianying* 甲子優天影). I also joined the troupe.¹¹³

Jiazi is part of a designation used to number years in the Chinese calendar. There are altogether sixty designations in the system, so each designation will repeat after sixty years. So if we convert *jiazi* to the Western calendar and compare the possibilities with the fact that the re-establishment happened in the early twentieth century, it can be determined that the year Chen was talking about is 1924. This then generates a contradiction with Ng's version, in which it is impossible for Chen to join the re-established Sky Shadow Troupe (as this should have happened before he left Hong Kong) and return to Hong Kong after his experiences in Singapore in the same year.

To make a more convincing alternative proposal to this part of history, I have checked it against the situations of other Cantonese Opera performers who were also involved in those events. For example, I have examined materials about Huang Luyi and the history of the Sky

¹¹¹ Cantonese Opera troupes at the time performed several shows per day, including a matinee, an evening show, and sometimes a midnight show.

¹¹² As was customary at the time, Cantonese Opera performers were bonded to the troupe by contracts, which were usually signed at the beginning of each performing season. When a season ended and the troupe owner decided not to continue, the troupe would disband and the whole crew became free agents.

¹¹³ Chen 2007: 16-17.

Shadow Troupe; I have also looked into the life histories of two other Cantonese Opera performers, namely Ma Shiceng 馬師曾 (1900-1964) and Xue Juexian 薛覺先 (1904-1956), who worked with Chen in the Eternal Life and the Happiness of Pear Garden respectively. Several clues are also found in the literature review. Firstly, according to the *Zhongguo Xiqu Zhi: Guangdong Juan*, the Sky Shadow Troupe was re-established twice, first in 1912 – which is consistent with the previous quote from Chen, as the Republic was formed at the beginning of this year – and again in 1924.¹¹⁴ Secondly, Ma Shiceng went back to Hong Kong in 1923, and Chen mentioned that he went back to Hong Kong at the same time with Ma.¹¹⁵ Thirdly, several sources discussing Xue’s career suggest that he joined the Happiness of Pear Garden in the end of 1923.¹¹⁶ Based on this evidence, I submit that Chen actually left Hong Kong in 1920-1921, and returned probably at the end of 1923. As for the contradiction, I suggest that it is a mistake by Chen recalling the name of troupe he joined. He would have joined the Sky Shadow Troupe during its first re-establishment – in fact this is also consistent with the previous citation, stating that he joined the troupe after the founding of the Republic.

3.3 Inter-genre interaction in the 1920s and 1930s

3.3.1 Defining and framing the interaction

In regard to the phenomenon of Cantonese Opera’s adoption of certain elements from Peking Opera that is examined in this chapter, Chen Feinong’s return to Hong Kong in 1923 was significant, as he engaged heavily with Peking Opera from that date, and began to use some artistic devices from Peking Opera for his own Cantonese Opera productions. However, we must first be aware that the issue of adoption is much more complicated than a simple process in which Cantonese Opera drew on Peking Opera bit by bit. In fact, interactions between cultural forms are hardly ever “pure,” and the boundaries are blurred and permeable. For example in this case, it involves the consideration of agency and questions of how and to what extent the artistic devices in question were adopted. Therefore, to avoid oversimplification, I suggest viewing the adoption in the form of a spectrum. The spectrum visualizes the degree to which the artistic devices in question became organic parts of Cantonese Opera. Three central terms are set up, indicating three reference points along the spectrum, in order to give the readers a clearer idea of how those devices were adopted. On one end of the spectrum we have *borrowing*, in which the devices were kept in their original, unchanged form, and were still regarded as foreign devices (i.e. really belonging to the “foreign” form of Peking Opera) after being put into Cantonese Opera. Along the spectrum we also find various degrees of *adaptation*, in which the devices were modified for the use of Cantonese Opera. And on the other end lies *integration*, in which the devices were contained, through a period of time, as parts of Cantonese Opera at large. To a certain extent, those devices became indistinguishable from their “new host.” Needless to say, the said three notions constitute a sliding scale, and

¹¹⁴ Editorial Board of *ZXZGJ*: 395, 502.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.* 525.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.* 530.

are not separated by absolute boundaries and cut-off points.

My use of these central terms all denotes external influence. This is especially significant in the historical context in which the two genres share the same theatrical root and are in many senses similar in the early stages, so one may ask: if they share common practices in the early periods, is it really the case that the artistic devices in question were “adopted” by Cantonese Opera in the early twentieth century – in this case, from Peking Opera – and were they not in fact an artistic development of Cantonese Opera itself?

I will approach the question from a conceptual perspective, arguing that what Chen and other Cantonese Opera performers claimed to have taken from Peking Opera are actually the re-formulated devices set out by Qi Rushan in the early Republican period described in chapter two. In other words, the artistic devices in question were traditional, and while they may have been similar to those in the early form of Cantonese Opera technically, conceptually they are completely new. Also, let’s not forget that Cantonese Opera in Chen’s time was already highly localized, and had steered away from its previous form that was more like its northern counterparts. This further justifies my treatment of the adoption of elements from Peking Opera to Cantonese Opera as an external influence of one on the other.

3.3.2 A pioneer

Meanwhile, I would say that for his re-employment in 1923 in Hong Kong to work in the Happiness of Pear Garden Troupe, Chen’s stay in Singapore was vital to his career. Not only did he grow into a promising performer there, he also started engaging with Peking Opera. The experiences of exploration soon made him one of the pioneers who facilitated the first wave of artistic adoption from the 1920s. For example, as Chen recalled in his autobiography, in Singapore he once watched a Peking Opera performance of *The Heavenly Fairy Scattering Petals* – one of the Ancient Costume plays created by Mei Lanfang and Qi Rushan – by Nü Shisan Dan 女十三旦. He was fascinated by the silk-sleeves dance sequence, and asked her if she could teach him. Nü Shisan Dan accepted his request and, more than the dance sequence, taught him also the moves-set of the two-headed spears fighting in the play *The Pass of Nihong* (*Nihong Guan* 霓虹關). This experience encouraged Chen to continue learning from Peking Opera. After returning to Hong Kong, he wrote a new play, *The Fate of Revenge* (*Chouyuan* 仇緣), which borrowed the original silk-sleeves dance sequence from *The Heavenly Fairy Scattering Petals*. Moreover he spent years integrating the dance sequence into his own arsenal of performing skills, and eventually made it one of his signature routines.¹¹⁷

The spears fighting moves also greatly inspired Chen to explore the more stylized and choreographed martial arts moves in Peking Opera. In the field of Cantonese Opera, this martial arts style is called *beipai wuda* 北派武打 (hereafter *beipai*), literally “martial arts fighting of the northern style”.¹¹⁸ His first attempt to put *beipai* in his performance was when

¹¹⁷ Chen 2007: 6, 23.

¹¹⁸ It is named so as to differentiate from the conventional martial arts style in Cantonese Opera, which is called the “southern style” (*nanpai* 南派).

he worked together with Ma Shiceng in Singapore. Chen taught Ma the spears fighting moves that he had learnt from Nü Shisan Dan, and they borrowed the full moves-set in the play *A Strange Couple* (*Guguai Gongpo* 古怪公婆). Then during a short stay in Guangzhou before his return to Hong Kong, Chen hired Yan Lanqiu 閻嵐秋, a Peking Opera performer of the martial female role from Beijing, to teach him *beipai*. Subsequently, Chen actively borrowed *beipai* moves for his productions of both re-arrangements of existing repertoire and new plays. Ma Shiceng, Chen's "fight partner," also utilized the moves and indeed the full Peking Opera scene from which the moves originated. When Ma worked in the Fortune Life Troupe (*Renshounian* 人壽年) in 1923, he borrowed the spear-fight scene from *The Pass of Nihong* and put it into his old production of *A Strange Couple*, resulting in a re-arrangement called *The Perfect Martial Match* (*Bingou Jiarong* 兵偶佳戎). The latter later became one of the most famous plays produced by Ma.¹¹⁹

3.3.3 Interaction as a chain reaction

A vision of Chen Feinong as facilitating the phenomenon of adoption certainly deserves a spot in the history of Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong. Moreover, the act of direct borrowing of Peking Opera scenes into existing Cantonese Opera repertoire, like Ma's re-arrangement of *The Perfect Martial Match*, also shows a glimpse of how adoption operated as a chain reaction. The first three decades of the twentieth century are seen as the golden age of Cantonese Opera. Before that time, troupes used to perform in teahouses, and at ritual celebrations in rural areas in the Guangdong area and Hong Kong. During the 1920s and 1930s, however, troupes started to move their performing bases to permanent, commercial theatres in urban areas. Chan Sau-yan calls this new performing context of Cantonese Opera "theatre performances" (*xiyuan xi* 戲院戲). According to Chan, insiders from the Cantonese Opera community clearly distinguish between theatre performances and ritual performances. As he and other Cantonese Opera scholars point out, one characteristic of theatre performances is the dramatic increase of speed at which playwrights and performers produced new plays and re-arrangements, in order to cater to the fast-changing taste of local spectators.¹²⁰ Under such circumstances, what is easier for a performer than to present to spectators the *beipai* moves or dance sequence he/she had learnt by directly borrowing the original Peking Opera scene for an existing Cantonese Opera play? Certainly the two genres may not be completely compatible with each other. However, given the similarity between them it was still not impossible to mix the two in the same play. Besides, the language problem here can be avoided as those martial arts or dance scenes are non-verbal.

This kind of chain reaction, in which the adoption of one device would facilitate that of another since the latter is an essential accompaniment of the former, became a regular phenomenon among Cantonese Opera performers. Xue Juexian, for example, was yet another activist in the adoption wave. He first became acquainted with *beipai* when he worked together with Chen Feinong in the Happiness of Pear Garden, when Chen taught him the

¹¹⁹ Chen 2007:5.

¹²⁰ Chan 1991: 3; Yung 2007.

spear-fight moves. Xue quickly borrowed the moves for his new play *A Hero's Tragic Tale* (*Yingxiong Leishi* 英雄淚史). Later, when he worked in his own Voice of Xue Juexian Troupe (*Juexiansheng* 覺先聲) in 1937, he hired Yuan Xiaotian 袁小田, a Peking Opera performer of the martial male role, and three other performers from Shanghai. They were given two main tasks. Firstly, they taught Xue and his troupe members *beipai* moves. Secondly, they performed the borrowed moves and scenes in Xue's productions.¹²¹

Apart from borrowing particular moves or scenes, some Cantonese Opera performers would adapt the entire play into Cantonese Opera, mainly in the way of changing the performance language from mid-land dialect to Cantonese. Zhu Zhiping 朱植平, for example, studied with the Peking Opera performer Wang Hongshou 黃鴻壽 (a.k.a. Sanma Zi 三麻子) in Beijing. When Zhu returned to Hong Kong he started adapting the series of plays he had learnt from Wang, all of which feature the character Guan Yu, to his own Cantonese Opera productions.¹²² Other documented adaptations include *The Sky-booming Thunder* (*Hongtian Lei* 轟天雷), *Women Generals of the Yang Family* (*Yangmen Nüjiang* 楊門女將), *Blocking the Horse* (*Dang Ma* 擋馬) and *Chang E Flees to the Moon*.¹²³

The next link in this chain reaction is music. It particularly concerns the percussion section of the ensemble, and concerns the adoption of both instruments and rhythmic patterns from Peking Opera. The rationale here is to be found in the close connection between martial art scenes and percussion music in traditional Chinese theatre, where percussion is the main and sometimes the sole musical accompaniment for those scenes. In other words, it makes perfect sense to also take the percussion music for use in Cantonese Opera if one wants to produce an effective adoption or adaptation of the martial art scenes. In this regard, I would like to refer again to Xue Juexian, who was also the first Cantonese Opera performer to adopt percussion music from Peking Opera in *A Hero's Tragic Tale* as we learn from Chen Feinong:

The percussion music of Peking Opera was first introduced to Cantonese Opera from Shanghai by Xue Juexian. The music first appeared in martial plays [*wuxi* 武戲], and the very first play that the music was used was *A Heros's Tragic Tale*. The play had a scene featuring the spears fight moves. This was well appreciated by the spectators. Later it was also used in civil plays [*wenxi* 文戲].¹²⁴

Moreover, the integration of the acting style by Cantonese Opera performers should also be considered another link in this chain reaction. It is because Peking Opera is a highly formulaic genre, in which all actions (steps, body movements, hand gestures, etc.) in every play are highly standardized and specified. Some moves are also unique to Peking Opera. Therefore any Cantonese Opera performer who wanted to perform the adapted plays was also

¹²¹ Chen 2007: 79, 168.

¹²² Mai 1958: 39.

¹²³ Chen 2007: 31, 161.

¹²⁴ *ibid.* 81.

required to learn and integrate those actions into their own tool box of performing skills. The dance sequence and spear-fight moves that Chen Feinong learned from Nü Shisan Dan provide a clear example. Later, Zhu Zhiping also received high acclaim for his portrayal of the character Guan Yu in his adaptations, once he had integrated what he learned from Wang Hongshou into Cantonese Opera.

3.3.4 Canonizing adoption

As noted, some artistic devices became organic parts of Cantonese Opera, like the actions integrated into a performer's own performing "tool box". Moreover, this process of integration also went to a higher level, in which the devices became part of the artistic canon in Cantonese Opera. One good example, again from Xue Juexian, concerns his measures to standardize the stage practices and costumes of Cantonese Opera.

Similar to Peking Opera, stage practices of Cantonese Opera were very flexible in the first few decades of twentieth century. Stage assistants were allowed to enter the front stage while performers were performing, and even personal servants of performers were allowed to do so to serve their masters, who were in the middle of their performance, during the show. Rules on costumes were also loose, so that in many cases performers wore costumes that were inappropriate to their performance – for example, wearing high-heeled shoes in a play telling an ancient story – just to compete with other performers in terms of looks.¹²⁵ Such "flexibility" later attracted criticism from their counterparts in Peking Opera, whose stage had also undergone "purification" in the 1910s.¹²⁶ One criticism came from national icon Mei Lanfang, who was also active in purifying Peking Opera's stage. In 1928, after seeing a Cantonese Opera performance in Guangzhou, he said, "the female role performers of your province [Guangdong] cannot even dress appropriately. Let's not talk about their performing skills."¹²⁷ Being one of the Cantonese Opera representatives who were present on that occasion, Xue Juexian responded to the criticism constructively. He tried to copy the success of Peking Opera in "stage purification," for instance forbidding any non-performing personnel from entering the front stage during performance, and standardizing performers' costumes and make-up in the style of Peking Opera.¹²⁸ All these measures eventually were widely accepted, and became common practices of the reformed Cantonese Opera.

This kind of canonization also occurred in respect to singing modes. When talking about the singing modes of Cantonese Opera, Chen Feinong tells a story about Kuang Xinhua 鄺新華, a Cantonese Opera performer who traveled frequently to Beijing. During one of his trips to Beijing, Kuang learned the tune *In Love With An Attractive Man* (*liantanlang* 戀檀郎). He

¹²⁵ Ouyang 1990: 81.

¹²⁶ At the time of Qu Rushan's reformulation of Peking Opera, he also reflected on some traditional stage practices of the art form, and came to a conclusion that some practices were harmful to the "nationalization" of Peking Opera. In response to the issue, he together with Mei Lanfang started a movement to "purify the stage" (*jinghua wutai* 淨化舞台).

¹²⁷ Cui & Guo 2009: 21.

¹²⁸ Lai 1993: 43.

then borrowed the tune into the play *Su Wu Herding Goats* (*Su Wu Muyang* 蘇武牧羊).¹²⁹ Later on, the way in which Kuang sang the tune in *Su Wu Herding Goats* was singled out, integrated, and developed as one of the common singing modes in Cantonese Opera, called the *liantan* mode.¹³⁰

3.3.5 Impact on Cantonese Opera

The process of adoption from Peking Opera to Cantonese Opera in the 1920s and 1930s was massive, and I argue that it brought along various kinds of impact on the development of Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong. First of all, the introduction of *beipai* restored the balance of repertoire between martial plays and civil plays. Contrasting with *beipai*, the *nanpai* (see footnote 118) martial plays in Cantonese Opera feature real, more physical martial arts skills. From an insider's perspective, constant engagement with *nanpai* plays would cause serious damage to performers' bodies and voices. Therefore performers at that time mostly focused on civil plays and ignored martial plays, resulting in an imbalanced repertoire.¹³¹ In this sense, the arrival of the more choreographed *beipai* provided a solution to Cantonese Opera performers, allowing for a balance not only between their voices and action skills, but also between spectators' tastes for both kinds of plays. This injected innovation into the local genre, which helped to maintain its attractiveness as an urban entertainment. Indeed, this proved a great success as *beipai* was widely welcomed by spectators, and gradually replaced *nanpai* as the common performing style in martial plays. I will come back to this in chapter seven.

My analysis of how the adoption impacted Cantonese Opera at that time has so far focused on technical aspects. Taking this as our point of departure, we will see how Cantonese Opera performers brought the discussion to both a social and an artistic level. For the social side, I will return to Chen Feinong. He calls the decade from 1926-1936 a "period of change" for Cantonese Opera. As discussed, the genre was experiencing changes in various aspects; in doing so, it was responding to two emerging challenges. First was the external challenge from the rising movie industry. This novel, modern form of entertainment was a new attraction to local society, and quickly took the position of Cantonese Opera as the dominant form of entertainment. Having found themselves losing the battle, Cantonese Opera performers had to inject innovation into the genre in order to win back public's attention.

Secondly, this innovation-oriented strategy generated an internal competition among troupes and performers. One early example was the competition between all-men and all-women troupes from 1919. In this year, the first all-women troupe in Hong Kong was established, and the trend of setting up all-women troupes developed rapidly in the local society.¹³² These troupes had to face the same challenge from the movie industry as the all-men troupes did. And in this fight of innovation, they turned to modern drama forms. They

¹²⁹ Chen did not point out clearly whether Kuang adopted the tune without any changes. Though it is found that the play was sung completely in mid-land dialect, I submit that it was a direct borrowing.

¹³⁰ Chen 2007: 116.

¹³¹ *ibid.* 79.

¹³² Before that, all women-troupes were popular only in Guangdong.

borrowed various stage techniques, including mercury lighting, illustrated backdrops, and the front stage curtain. They also began to use modern technology, for example in decorating their backdrops and props with electric light bulbs. To some extent, this threatened the long-standing domination of the market by all-male troupes. Facing these challenges from both outside and inside, I argue that the adoption, which was facilitated by merely male performers, advanced the male performers' victory in this war of innovation. Chen also makes a similar point when naming, in his autobiography, a few adaptations of plays, including the series of "Guan Yu plays" and *Chang E Flees to the Moon*, as an immediate response to the challenge of all-women troupes.¹³³

The adoption process was also motivated by artistic motives, as some Cantonese Opera performers believed that artistic devices of Peking Opera would be a great enrichment for the development of the local genre. Xue Juexian, for example, had been an advocate of this idea since his first encounter with Peking Opera. In a short article written before a tour to Singapore in 1936, entitled *Nanyou Zhiqu* 南遊旨趣 (My View [on Cantonese Opera] Before Travelling South), he explicitly related his participation in this process as a "revolution" of Cantonese Opera. Even his Peking Opera teacher in the late 1940s, Yu Zhenfei 俞振飛, was convinced that Xue's passion to learn from Peking Opera was motivated by his determination to "enrich Cantonese Opera and, hence, raise its artistic status in society."¹³⁴

One may ask, taking a step back, why Cantonese Opera needed to be improved or enriched in the first place. Apart from the self-reflection of Cantonese Opera's shortcomings by its practitioners, I submit that southbound Chinese nationalism also had a role to play in regard to this perceived inferiority of the genre. The term "southbound Chinese nationalism" refers to the ideology of Chinese cultural nationalism that was brought along with immigrating mainland intellectuals during the migration wave at the end of the 1930s. These southbound intellectuals, mostly influenced by May Fourth ideologies, soon dominated Hong Kong's cultural scene, especially in the field of literature. And they were rather negative toward the local cultural environment. As Law Wing-sang puts it:

In the eyes of the southbound intellectuals, the existence of an anachronistic traditional Chinese culture under the protection of the British authority, together with a local popular culture peripheral to the forward-marching Chinese nationalist culture, made Hong Kong a culturally backward and abhorrent place.¹³⁵

To these intellectuals, the only criterion to determine cultural excellence was the degree to which it presented severance from the past, and Hong Kong was disqualified by them as conservative when compared to the nationalist culture on the mainland. The city was a "cultural desert" in their eyes.¹³⁶

Such criticism of local culture by southbound intellectuals was also seen in the field of

¹³³ *ibid.* 158.

¹³⁴ Yu 1985: 242-243.

¹³⁵ Law 2009: 113.

¹³⁶ *ibid.* 113-115.

traditional theatre. In 1927, Ouyang Yuqian 歐陽予倩 was assigned to lead the Drama Reform Movement in Guangdong. Once he made himself familiar with the current state of the field of Cantonese Opera, he commented:

Not only the singing modes in Cantonese Opera has been changed, but also the practices. The rules of traditional plays are decimated. Actions became more realistic, while being extremely clumsy and chaotic. Choices of costumes are completely up to the performer, who wears what he can grab besides him, which is confusing. The old has been destroyed, but the new has not been built yet. Practitioners are hesitating, and the genre is on the wrong path.¹³⁷

As one may already expect how the story goes, he offered Peking Opera as a means to “rescue the lost.” He employed several measures to impose Peking Opera’s influence on Cantonese Opera. For example, during his leadership in the affiliated training school of the Guangdong Research Institute of Drama between September 1929 and November 1931, he introduced the learning of Peking Opera¹³⁸ to the curriculum, in addition to Cantonese Opera and modern spoken drama.¹³⁹ He also praised those who attempted to draw on Peking Opera:

Wanhua 畹華 [courtesy name of Mei Lanfang] indeed made an impact [on local society] with this tour to Guangdong. Soon enough some already wanted to borrow his plays, such as *The Heavenly Fairy Scattering Flowers* and *Chang E Escapes to the Moon*, and made them the yardstick to improve Cantonese Opera. They even thought about sending Cantonese performers to training schools in Beijing. This great idea can only be come up with by those who are from the birthplace of revolution.¹⁴⁰ Now I know that what the people of revolution want is the very art that is supported by the court!¹⁴¹

3.4 Conclusion

Without the close artistic connection between the two genres, the artistic adoption from Peking Opera to Cantonese Opera in the early twentieth century might not have happened. Along different developmental paths, they ended up in two different communities, in the north and the south, respectively. However, the localization of Cantonese Opera and the wider circulation of a Peking Opera that aspired to the status of “national drama” outside China – in Hong Kong among other places – in the 1920s provided the soil for their encounter in that city.

Over a long period of time, the traditions of Cantonese Opera and Cantonese operatic singing

¹³⁷ Ouyang 1990: 284.

¹³⁸ The author uses the term *pihuang*, which is also a major singing mode in Cantonese Opera, in the source material. However, since the author lists it in line with Cantonese Opera and Kunqu Opera, I believe that she/he uses it as an interchangeable of Peking Opera, which is not an unusual practice among insiders especially from northern China.

¹³⁹ Anonymous 1990: 423.

¹⁴⁰ At that time Guangdong province was seen by mainland Chinese as the birthplace of a series of revolutions that eventually overthrow the Qing court.

¹⁴¹ Ouyang 1990a: 283.

formed a set of styles, concepts, performing practices and behaviors. The aim was to respond to issues encountered across performing venues and environments.¹⁴²

This statement by Chan Sau-yan, which underlays the close relationship between the urbanization of traditional Chinese theatre and the changing social context of a place, not only summarizes the purpose of localization in Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong, but also holds true for the artistic adoption at large. When the performing context of Cantonese Opera shifted from ritual celebrations to commercial shows in the 1920s and 1930s, the identity of spectators also changed. Before that they were only part of the ritual, but then they became customers who paid and expected to be well entertained. Such demands by the spectators also created pressures on the troupes, which needed to constantly produce new and special things in order to keep spectators around and to survive in the entertainment market. Then the next question: “where can we look?” To many prominent figures – like Chen Feinong, Ma Shiceng and Xue Juexian – Peking Opera was a perfect source. The artistic devices that they borrowed, adapted, integrated, and indeed canonized, including *beipai* moves, repertoire, music and costumes, are good examples of their responses to the challenge of Cantonese Opera’s survival in the local society in the first few decades of the twentieth century. At the same time, the adoption was also a response to the constructed inferiority of the local genre, which was a combined effort by Cantonese Opera performers themselves and southbound intellectuals. Especially to the latter, the reformulated Peking Opera was indeed a panacea to the – in their eyes – “backward”, “filthy tasting” Cantonese Opera.

3.5 Chen Feinong in later years

Despite his contribution to the inter-genre interaction in the 1920s, Chen Feinong has never been the most discussed Cantonese Opera figure, neither in academic nor in popular writings, especially when compared to Xue Juexian and Ma Siceng. One reason may be Chen’s absence from the Cantonese Opera scene in Hong Kong during the 1930s, when the genre enjoyed its greatest glory in the city.

As noted above, Chen returned from Singapore to Hong Kong in 1923, and joined the Happiness of Pear Garden Troupe. In the next few years, he worked for two other troupes, The Great Canopy Heaven (*Daluotian* 大羅天) and Happiness in Balanced Heaven (*Juntianle* 鈞天樂).¹⁴³ He stayed in Hong Kong until 1932, when he started performing in Southeast Asia again. He spent the 1930s in Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and Burma. He returned to Hong Kong but left again soon because of the Japanese occupation. He traveled around Guangdong province and performed occasionally for a living. His wandering life in the province ended in the mid 1940s, when he decided to retire from the stage and lived in the countryside somewhere in Guangdong. Years after, however, warfare forced him to move again – this time the civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists. He went

¹⁴² Chan 1999: 63.

¹⁴³ The Happiness in the Balanced Heaven Troupe was renamed New Spring and Autumn (*Xinchunqiu* 新春秋) in the second year of the troupe’s establishment.

back to Hong Kong around the first half of 1949, took up his profession again, and established a Cantonese Opera training school. He lived in Hong Kong until his death in 1984.

Warfare on the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong in the first half of the twentieth century (the two Chinese civil wars from 1927 to 1936 and from 1946 to 1949 respectively, and in between the Second Sino-Japanese war, as part of the Second World War) had an enormous impact on demography. People left warzones along with their skills and cultures and moved to new places. While they might adapt themselves to new local cultures, at the same time, they might insist to retain part of their own culture. In the case of Peking Opera in Hong Kong, this was the scenario during the mid twentieth century, in which many mainland Chinese – including Peking Opera performers and spectators – fled to Hong Kong due to warfare. They tried to continue in the city what they did in the past: to perform and to watch Peking Opera. This resulted, for the first time, in Peking Opera truly taking root in Hong Kong's cultural spectrum. In the next chapter, we shall see how this was facilitated and how it impacted the local society.

Chapter Four /

Mid-Twentieth Century: Local Training Schools and the Movie Industry

Jackie Chan

In the previous two chapters I have discussed two salient moments in the life of Peking Opera in Hong Kong: its birth as brought about by Mei Lanfang in 1922 and its early life, even though this was in an incomplete form through the medium of local Cantonese Opera, in the 1920s and 1930s. It was not until the late 1940s that Peking Opera began to take root into local soil and became part of the local cultural spectrum as an independent, complete theatrical genre. I call this a process of taking root for two reasons. Firstly, performers who were based in Hong Kong began to contribute. In other words, these were not touring performers who stayed for only a short period of time. Secondly, a recruitment system for Peking Opera was established, in the form of training schools and private lessons, which were open to local-born people.

As mentioned at the end of chapter three, Peking Opera taking root in Hong Kong was facilitated by changes in the local demography. In particular, the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) and the Second Chinese Civil War (1946-1950) had led to large-scale emigration from the Chinese mainland to Hong Kong. Migrants included skilled Peking Opera performers. To earn their living, they sought opportunities to perform, to give private lessons, and to establish training schools. Meanwhile, the large numbers of mainland immigrants, to whom Peking Opera was a site of nostalgia, created a demand for the genre. All this led to the emergence of a unique Peking Opera habitat in Hong Kong in the mid-twentieth century.

Here a note on human movement between the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong is in order. The presence of mainland immigrants in Hong Kong is not unique to the war-torn 1930s and 1940s. In fact, people from Guangdong province, which is culturally similar to Hong Kong, and some coastal areas in southeast China (Chaozhou, Fujian etc.) had become core components of Hong Kong's population much earlier. But in this chapter I focus on the influx of mainland immigrants from other provinces who formed the Peking Opera habitat in Hong Kong. The force of warfare driving this influx was reflected in local census reports, which showed a dramatic increase of mainland-Chinese population from other places than Guangdong and the coastal areas, as proportionate to the total population of Hong Kong, from 1937.¹⁴⁴ In local terms, I am focusing on the influx of "outer provinces people" (*waisheng ren* 外省人) during the time in question, meaning people from places on the Chinese mainland that are geographically and culturally different from Hong Kong.

Below, I will first focus on several mainland Peking Opera performers who were based in Hong Kong at some point in the 1940s and 1950s. In addition to their activities in Hong Kong, we shall also see how local society received Peking Opera when it became a regularly available genre of traditional Chinese theatre in the city. Then I will turn to local Peking Opera training schools that flourished from the 1950s to 1970s. This discussion will zoom in

¹⁴⁴ Census Department 1996.

on the life story of Jackie Chan (born 1954), the internationally renowned movie actor. That he is the perfect subject to tell the story may come as a surprise to many, but he started out as a student of the China Drama Academy (*Zhongguo Xiju Xuexiao* 中國戲劇學校), the most famous Peking Opera training school in Hong Kong at the time. I was lucky to secure an opportunity to interview Li Juhua 李菊華, another graduate from the training school, in November 2015. The story of their training, from admission to graduation, tells us in detail how the school operated, and shows the significance of Peking Opera training schools to local students and society at large. Moreover, I have collected and analysed newspaper advertisements of the Lai Chi Kok Amusement Park – the largest amusement park in Hong Kong at the time – which were published daily in the *Xinsheng Wanbao* 新生晚報 (New Life Evening Post) from 1962 to 1969. These advertisements contain detailed information about that day's Peking Opera performance at the Park, including the name of the performing group and full programme. This is valuable information about the Academy's performing activities that compliments insiders' memoirs.

Furthermore, Chan's career change from Peking Opera trainee to movie actor is a good example of the cross-media connection between Peking Opera and the martial arts movie industry in Hong Kong at the time. I will discuss the growing obstacles to being a professional Peking Opera performer in Hong Kong, as well as the phenomenon in which students from training schools entered into the movie industry instead, and in so doing contributing to revolutionizing the industry with their Peking Opera skills.

In the meantime, the active attempts by two martial arts movie directors to adapt Peking Opera elements into their movie productions in the 1960s also manifest such cross-media connection. I will discuss the context that inspired them to turn their gaze to Peking Opera, their evaluation of the feasibility of presenting Peking Opera in cinematic language, and the actual, multi-faceted adaptations of Peking Opera elements in their movies. Here, I stray from the chronological continuity of my narrative by concluding the discussion of local Peking Opera training schools before I turn back to the interaction between Peking Opera and martial arts movies in Hong Kong. I do so in order to maintain an organic story, and I believe that my narrative will make better sense in this way.

4.1 Mainland performers in Hong Kong – 1940s and 1950s

Despite the festive receptions of tour performances and the fact that Cantonese Opera infrastructure contributed to Peking Opera's exposure in Hong Kong society, in the first half of the twentieth century Peking Opera was still a marginal genre of entertainment in Hong Kong (I will elaborate on this below). From the perspective of Peking Opera performers, who felt the practical need to earn their living, Hong Kong was not a good place to be – unless they were good at *beipai* martial arts. However, this period still features some iconic names of the genre. For various reasons, they came to Hong Kong and stayed for extended periods of time.

4.1.1 Mei Lanfang

Mei Lanfang was not only the first documented Peking Opera performer to perform in Hong Kong, but also the first documented Peking Opera performer to reside there. In spring 1938, he received a tour invitation by the Lee Theatre in Hong Kong. At the time, Shanghai, where Mei lived, was occupied by the Japanese. Mei used the invitation to stay behind in Hong Kong after finishing his performance obligations, while his family remained in Shanghai. It was not until the summer of 1941 that his two older sons, Mei Baochen 梅葆琛 and Mei Shaowu 梅紹武, reunited with him in Hong Kong.

According to Mei Shaowu, Mei Lanfang never gave any public performance during his stay in Hong Kong after his contractual obligations as stipulated in the original invitation had been fulfilled.¹⁴⁵ The reason for him not doing so in the first few years was unknown, but for the last few months of his stay, from December 1941 to the summer of 1942, when Hong Kong had also fallen to the Japanese, his rejection of all performance invitations was a sign of patriotism. Kōsuke Wakuta, the head of the Arts Management Unit of the Japanese Military Government in Hong Kong, claimed that he had never requested Mei to perform for the benefit of the government,¹⁴⁶ but Mei Shaowu recalls at least three occasions on which his father received such requests.¹⁴⁷ Trying to stop the Japanese from their constant persuasion, Mei Lanfang grew a moustache. This was a strong message for a female role performer, hinting at a refusal to portray any female character on stage. This story has become a people's favorite when they talk about Mei's patriotism.

4.1.2 Ma Lianliang, Zhang Junqiu, and Yu Zhenfei

After Mei Lanfang departed to Shanghai in 1942, there is long silence, in terms of documentation, about Peking Opera performers residing in Hong Kong, until the end of 1948. In that year, Ma Lianliang 馬連良 (1901-1966), one of the most famous senior male roles at the time, came to Hong Kong. According to Shen Jicheng 沈吉誠, a close friend of Ma and an influential media person in Hong Kong, Ma's residence in Hong Kong made for a sad story.

On 11 November 1948, Ma Lianliang arrived in Hong Kong from Shanghai together with Sun Lanting 孫蘭亭, an organizer of Peking Opera events. With a plan to give several performances in Hong Kong, they approached Shen, who was familiar with the cultural market in Hong Kong, and helped them find opportunities. They found some sponsors and a performing venue, the Entertainment Theatre (*Yule Xiyuan* 娛樂戲院) on Hong Kong island. Trying to match Ma's reputation at the time, Sun had formed a stellar troupe with two other star performers on the list, Zhang Junqiu 張君秋 (1920-1997, a female role from Beijing) and Yu Zhenfei 俞振飛 (1902-1993, a junior male role from Shanghai). Encouraged by people from local cultural circles and Cantonese Opera fellows, Ma and Sun were very optimistic about the event.

¹⁴⁵ Mei 2006: 34-35.

¹⁴⁶ Wakuta 2006: 228.

¹⁴⁷ Mei 2006: 44-45.

On 20 December 1948, the troupe that was named after the three stars finally went on stage. The event was indeed very successful in terms of ticket sales: with patronage by rich “outer provinces” businessmen, the five-day event almost hit straight full houses. Despite the success in ticket sales, however, not much went into the performers’ pockets, as the three organizers of the event – Sun, Shen and another person named Zhang Shankun 張善琨 – had underestimated the cost of the event.

Financially speaking, this first series of performances in Hong Kong was unpleasant to both the organizers and the troupe. Nonetheless, they still decided to prolong the event at two other theatres. Staging the same plays as in the Entertainment Theatre, the troupe first performed at the Ko Shing Theatre (*Gaosheng Xiyuan* 高陞戲院) in the Mid-West district of Hong Kong island for a week from 27 December 1948, and then for another week at the Astor Theatre (*Puqing Xiyuan* 普慶戲院) across the Victoria Harbor in Kowloon. Unfortunately, the event ended with a bad attendance rate, and a huge financial loss. Shen ascribed the failure to several reasons. Firstly, it was the bad location of the theatres. Neither the Mid-West district nor Kowloon were central areas in Hong Kong at the time. Shen believed that this had prevented some people from attending, as they did not want to travel far for a show. Secondly, both theatres usually staged Cantonese Opera. Therefore, mainland Peking Opera lovers who visited Hong Kong especially for the event, and local people who might not frequently watch Cantonese Opera, barely knew these two theatres. This also points to a third reason, namely that the event would mostly have been interesting to “outer provinces people”, who had just had their fill at the Entertainment Theatre and were unlikely to go back to the same plays straightaway.

To sum up, the whole three-week engagement went terribly wrong, and the three stars all ran up large debts, having been the main investors for the performances at Ko Shing and Astor. They had no choice but to stay in Hong Kong until they could settle their debts. The first thing they did was to start making Peking Opera movies. They teamed up with Ouyang Yuqian and Bai Chen 白沈, a movie director, for a movie project of four productions: *A Romantic Emperor* (*Meilong Zhen* 梅龍鎮) featuring Ma and Zhang, *A Fisherman’s Revenge* (*Yufu Hen* 漁夫恨) and *Borrowing the Eastern Wind* (*Jie Dongfeng* 借東風) featuring only Ma, and *Spring in the Jade Chamber* (*Yutang Chun* 玉堂春) featuring Zhang and Yu.¹⁴⁸ Video excerpts of the movies show that the producers adopted a documentary approach, with minimal post-production.¹⁴⁹ Aside from, possibly, a lack of funding, such an approach might stem from the movie producer’s perspective on Peking Opera as a unique art form deserving respect and preservation:

Before the movie production, Ouyang Yuqian¹⁵⁰ knew well that Bai Chen, the movie director,

¹⁴⁸ Ma 2007: 139; Li 2012: 751-752.

¹⁴⁹ Excerpts of *A Romantic Emperor* and *Zhuge Liang Borrowing the Eastern Wind* are available on Youtube (see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_qiZT0SqAk and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yaB4BDJyE0g>. Accessed on 4 December 2014.)

¹⁵⁰ He was the artistic director of the whole movie project.

was an amateur in Peking Opera. So he once asked Bai, “Would you like to introduce Peking Opera, or to improve it?” “Introduce”, Bai answered, “Or perhaps it is more appropriate to say that I would like to preserve the unique artistic format of Peking Opera. I do not deserve to improve it, yet.”¹⁵¹

Despite the “traditional” setting of the movies, as if in a live Peking Opera performance, modern filming techniques were applied. Different view angles and shots were used, together with the use of close up shots and panning across the stage. Ma also recollected that montage-filming technique was applied in *Spring in the Jade Chamber*, in which memories of the main character, Su San, were shown in flashbacks in a scene where she was brought to trial.¹⁵² In short, while all acting components from the performers remained traditional, the visual reality created by the use of backdrops and props still reminded the audience that this was a modern presentation of a traditional Chinese theatrical genre.

The filming of all four Peking Opera movies was finished within a month in February 1949. Afterward, Yu Zhenfei left for Shanghai, and Ma Lianliang and Zhang Junqiu remained in Hong Kong. Due of the lack of professional Peking Opera practitioners and the limited audience base of Peking Opera in Hong Kong at the time, Ma and Zhang could only go on stage occasionally, and with temporary troupes. The troupe usually consisted of Cantonese Opera practitioners who knew a bit of Peking Opera. Sometimes Ma also invited movie stars, who were amateur Peking Opera performers, to perform with him. This kind of irregular performance schedule obviously did not help a great deal to pay off their debts. According to his grandson Ma Long, it was a very tough time for Ma Lianliang, in which he sometimes had to borrow money from his friends in order to survive.¹⁵³ In December 1950, Ma wrote to Yu enquiring about performing opportunities in Shanghai. Coincidentally, the Heavenly Toad Theatre (*Tianchan Wutai* 天蟾舞臺) in Shanghai was also looking for new performers, so the theatre manager sent Yu to Hong Kong to discuss the matter with Ma. Ma could not travel immediately due to health problems, so Yu stayed with him in Hong Kong for almost a year. Reunited in Hong Kong, the three Peking Opera stars tried hard to earn their living with occasional performances. But the reception was not good at all, and their financial problems persisted.

At the end of 1951, the three stars finally saw an end to their miserable time in Hong Kong when they became aware that the newly established Communist government of the PRC and the Nationalist government, which had moved to Taiwan after losing the civil war, were both interested in escorting them back to their territories. Several theatres in Beijing, which had reopened after the civil war and were in need of performers, tried to invite Ma back to Beijing. The PRC officials took advantage of this news, and expressed their interest in seeing the three return through Ma’s daughter. At almost the same time, the Nationalist also sent officials to invite them.¹⁵⁴ Here, despite a common discourse – mostly in

¹⁵¹ Ma 2007: 139.

¹⁵² *ibid.*

¹⁵³ *ibid.* 149.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.* 152-153.

Chinese-language scholarship – that stresses the two regimes’ appreciation of these artistic maestros, I argue that this was a political move by each “China” against the other. As Nancy Guy put it, there was a cultural battle between the two regimes, which were competing for legitimacy as the “true China” and for a seat at the United Nations.¹⁵⁵ They adopted similar cultural diplomatic policies, echoing the nationalization campaign of Peking Opera in the 1920s and 1930s, that saw Peking Opera as a powerful tool to promote to the world their cultural virtue and, hence, political legitimacy. To both regimes, any star performer who declared loyalty would be a weapon in this cultural battle.¹⁵⁶

At any rate, the three stars who were “stuck” in Hong Kong inevitably entertained the offers of both regimes. For example, both regimes approached Ma Lianliang and offered him financial help in exchange for his loyalty and return to their territories.¹⁵⁷ Eventually, all three decided to side with the PRC regime. On 1 October 1951, during the celebration of the PRC’s National Day, the Communists carried out an escort plan to bring them back to the mainland. Pretty much like an undercover operation, Ma and Zhang were stealthily escorted out from the event venue. They wandered around the streets for a while to shake off anyone who might try to tail them, and got on two different pre-arranged vehicles that drove them straight to the border.¹⁵⁸ However, according to Yu, the plan went wrong as the Communist officials could not locate him at the venue. As a result, he was left behind and remained in Hong Kong, while Ma and Zhang safely crossed the border.¹⁵⁹

Because of the strict border control between Hong Kong and the mainland that had been in place since June 1951, as well as growing financial problems that had to be settled, Yu was forced to stay in Hong Kong. As a performer of Peking Opera as well as Kunqu Opera,¹⁶⁰ he still relied on his profession for survival, in spite of the cold reception of both genres by the local community. He earned his living mainly by teaching in private and in institutional settings. For example, he was employed by the New Asia College as a Kunqu teacher.¹⁶¹ In addition, he also had several appearances in mainstream movies. Finally in April 1955, Yu also left Hong Kong for the Chinese mainland with the help of the Communist regime.

4.1.3 A site of nostalgia

From the story above, we can see that the familiar yet exotic “national drama” began to lose its impact in Hong Kong once it became regularly available for the locals. And the evaluation by Shen Jichen about the failure of the three Peking Opera stars provides valuable insights into the reason why Peking Opera lacked local support in general when it seemed on the verge of taking root in Hong Kong society.

As noted, Shen ascribed this failure to the infelicitous choice of venues in terms of

¹⁵⁵ Guy 2005: 53.

¹⁵⁶ Chan 2012: 75-77.

¹⁵⁷ Ma 2007: 150-152.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.* 162-163.

¹⁵⁹ Yu 1985: 26-27.

¹⁶⁰ He was already an established Kunqu Opera performer before he learned Peking Opera.

¹⁶¹ The New Asia College was established in 1949. It was one of the three founding colleges of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, which was established in 1963.

location, and the theatres' exclusive focus on Cantonese Opera. In the same article, he also pointed out the aggressive ticket pricing by Zhang Shankun.¹⁶² According to Shen, the most expensive ticket cost twenty Hong Kong dollars, and an average ticket cost twelve. This far exceeded what the general public could afford, and hence the majority of locals – who were mostly unskilled workers that earned an average of one hundred dollars per month – were effectively excluded from attending.

In my view, the unwise marketing decisions by the three organizers resulted from a difference in valuation of Peking Opera by themselves and local society. I argue that a high and exclusive valuation of Peking Opera was generated by Chinese intellectuals in the May Fourth period, and reflected their nationalist ideology. As noted, these southbound intellectuals generally had antagonistic attitudes toward local popular culture. In the arena of traditional Chinese theatre, this created an ideological hierarchy between Peking Opera and all other regional genres due to the “national” status of the former. Great symbolic value was thus ascribed to Peking Opera.¹⁶³ Echoing Qi Rushan's theorization of Peking Opera, its status was elevated not only from regional to national, but also from a popular art form to a high art form. While the elevation worked as a step for Peking Opera to be on a par with western theatre in Qi's case, this had its impact here on the marketing strategy of the three organizers who expected spectators to pay generously for what they considered a highly refined art form.

By contrast, the local community valued Peking Opera as a form of popular entertainment. They went to the theatre expecting to be entertained more than to appreciate the splendor of the “national drama”. In this regard, Peking Opera in Hong Kong failed to serve its purpose in three aspects. Firstly, it was expensive. Even with private sponsorship, mostly by rich businessmen who had moved from the mainland to Hong Kong, the major portion of the huge production cost of the events still had to be covered by the revenue from ticket sales. This would also have contributed to the high ticket prices. For the majority of the local working class, the tickets were simply unaffordable. Secondly, the same plays were frequently repeated. This was largely due to the lack of Peking Opera performers in Hong Kong. If we take the period from 1948 to 1955 as an example: after the high-profile event in 1949, Ma Lianliang had sent back almost all members of the troupe to the mainland, leaving only the three stars to stay behind. The inadequate number of supporting cast, musicians and backstage crew greatly limited the repertoire, and they could only perform small-scale plays or excerpts from complete plays. In order to maintain regular performances, they had no choice but to repeat over and over what they could put on. Predictably, despite the short-term attraction of the Peking Opera stars, local spectators soon tired of the same old fare.

Thirdly, there was the language barrier. This may well have been the most important aspect that prevented Peking Opera from receiving a warm reception by the locals: as a non-Cantonese genre, Peking Opera was not readily understandable for the majority of local spectators, who only spoke Cantonese or other southeastern Chinese vernaculars. Unless the

¹⁶² Shen 1976: 60-61.

¹⁶³ We are engaging here the assumption that “national arts” equal to arts with high aesthetic merit, which is not always true. However, I do not intend to go deep into this discussion in this dissertation.

play was based on a famous Chinese myth or legend, the locals could barely understand the lyrics and dialogues. From a spectator's perspective, it is understandable that comprehensibility matters a great deal. Ye Shaode, a Cantonese Opera scriptwriter, commented that local spectators usually go for the stories of the plays and rarely for the skills of performers or the niceties of the art form.¹⁶⁴ If that is the case, one can imagine how little the locals were likely to enjoy Peking Opera, which, to them, spoke a "foreign language".

These issues of course hardly presented problems to the mainland immigrant community. First of all, due to the popularity of Peking Opera on the mainland, most among that community came with a cultural background of which Peking Opera was a part. In particular, many of them were from Shanghai, where Peking Opera was considered a major genre. Therefore, for them, language was never a problem, even though the performing language of Peking Opera might be different from the standard Mandarin or other Chinese vernaculars they spoke. Secondly, people of this community were generally richer. For example, as a long-time observer of Peking Opera in Hong Kong, Shen Jichen pointed out the greater buying power of the immigrant community. He identified some wealthy businessmen from Shanghai in particular, mentioning their willingness and financial ability to support Peking Opera performances in Hong Kong by sponsoring the events and buying tickets.¹⁶⁵

There is also a social factor, which in my view is more significant than personal preference and financial ability, for the exclusive support of Peking Opera in Hong Kong by the immigrant community: it was a site of nostalgia. Many reports commented on the domination of the immigrant community at Peking Opera events in Hong Kong, and on the socializing aspect of performances. For example, a column in the *New Life Evening Post* on 23 December 1957 reads:

For the purpose of budget control, the troupe has to book the slot from half past nine in the evening. The movie that started at half past seven has not ended yet, and spectators have to wait outside the theatre. To all intents and purposes, it looks like a "Shanghai-nese clansmen gathering." People appear to be constantly shaking hands with each other, to the point where they end up shaking hands with the same person twice, but they still seem to want more... Although the performance is proceeding, spectators do not sit properly, and face backward, because this position enables them to conveniently greet friends sitting a few rows back... Rather than just a Peking Opera performance, it may be more exact to describe the event as a social gathering.¹⁶⁶

For the immigrant community, who had to adapt to a new place, a new society, and a new culture, Peking Opera served as a platform for the community members, who shared similar backgrounds, to maintain their connections in the diaspora. Therefore, boredom at a repetitive repertoire might have been compensated by the desire to remain connected with a familiar past, and this generated an incentive for attendance.

¹⁶⁴ Li 1993: 91-92.

¹⁶⁵ Shen 1976: 60.

¹⁶⁶ *New Life Evening Post*, 23 December 1957.

4.2 Peking Opera training schools in Hong Kong from the 1950s to the 1970s

The story of Yu Zhenfei teaching in Hong Kong from 1951 to 1955 may have suggested an alternative for Peking Opera performers to make a living in the city. However, since the local community regarded Peking Opera as popular entertainment rather than high art, the language difference still presented a problem and might make potential learners think twice before committing to Peking Opera. Nevertheless, the tough economic environment in Hong Kong in the post Second World War period provided an opportunity for some Peking Opera performers to break through these barriers. Eventually they managed to establish a sustainable recruitment system, in the form of training schools, in the 1950s. This marked the beginning of institutional Peking Opera training in Hong Kong. In the following, I will introduce the operational basis of these training schools with a case study of the China Drama Academy, and discuss the social and cultural impact of these schools on local society and the martial arts movie industry, respectively. But first I will give a brief history of the recruitment system of Peking Opera at large.

4.2.1 The recruitment system of Peking Opera from the 1790s to 1950s

In the 1790s, while Peking Opera developed into its mature form in Beijing, a recruitment and training system for the genre also emerged. Here I will limit my scope to the period between 1790s and the 1950s, as this will enable me to present the case of Hong Kong. I have divided my discussion of this development into three phases, each reflecting the development of Peking Opera itself in its social context.

The first phase was from the 1790s to the 1860s. At that time, boys of seven or eight years old were bought for training in Beijing. The scope of the trade was nationwide, as many boys from southern provinces – especially Anhui and Jiangsu – were also bought and taken to the capital. In my view, the far reach of trade to the south was probably due to the continuing domination of *erhuang* and *kun* singing modes in Peking Opera at the time. Not being local modes in Beijing, it was practical for troupes in Beijing to look for boys in Anhui and Jiangsu, which were the core areas of the two respective modes, because these boys' familiarity with southern modes and their language advantaged them against recruits from Beijing. The trade was based on an indenture system, in which teachers from Beijing would look for new boys depending upon their personal needs or at the request of troupe leaders. They would offer the boy's parents an amount of money in return for the "ownership" of their child for a specific period of time. A pre-expiration buy-back clause applied, though the cost was usually way beyond what ordinary families could afford. Upon arrival in Beijing, the boys would either join a troupe or be re-sold to established performers. Regardless of where the boys ended up, they were trained in a traditional fashion of a master-disciple relationship. The only difference was that those who were sold to individual performers, who were called "young gentlemen" (*xianggong* 相公), would also have the status of adopted sons of the performers. According to Colin Mackerras, the indenture system was facilitated by population growth in China in the second half of eighteenth century. But at one point continuing growth turned from an

economical advantage, which was generated by a growing labor force, into a problem of over-population and poverty.¹⁶⁷ Mackerras concludes, in this social context, that “it is not altogether surprising that poor people should have sought economic relief by selling a child for a given period.”¹⁶⁸

The second phase began in the 1860s, with the Taiping rebellion in 1850-1864 as a prelude. The rebellion had caused devastation in southern China, and disrupted the trading route between the southern areas and Beijing. This affected the trade of boys to the capital. In order to sustain their supply, troupes and individual performers turned their eyes more to the capital itself. Meanwhile, after decades of refinement, Peking Opera had established *pihuang* as its major singing mode. The local flavor of *pihuang* had removed the linguistic advantage of the southern boys and paved the way for a shift of scope from national to local for new performers. This led to a major change of the recruitment system with training as the institutional basis. Troupes-cum-training-schools, known as *keban* 科班, were set up. As the name suggested, these schools not only trained Peking Opera performers, but also ran commercial performances by their students. One well-known example was the *Xiliancheng* Troupe, which trained some of the most renowned Peking Opera performers in the twentieth century such as Mei Lanfang, Zhou Xinfang 周信芳 and Tan Fuying 譚富英. Contracts were still used as a form of agreement between schools and parents, but different terms from those in the old system applied. Parents no longer received monetary indenture, but instead a guarantee of free training, accommodation, and meals by the schools, usually for a period of seven years.¹⁶⁹ The closure of *Xiliancheng* in 1948 marked the end of this phase.

Overlapping with the second phase, the third phase began in the 1910s, when Chinese society was experiencing rapid ideological change in the turmoil of modernization. Two schools stand out as examples of the new form of training schools in the third phase. The first was the Nantong School for Theatre Performers (*Nantong Linggong Xueshe* 南通伶工學社), established by Zhang Jian 張謇 in 1919 and managed by Ouyang Yuqian. The school was progressive and offered a broad curriculum in addition to Peking Opera training. Academic subjects such as Chinese language, mathematics, history and geography were also taught; performing skills in spoken drama were included in the curriculum; Western drama theories, dramatists and their works were also introduced. Also, physical punishments – a brutal, traditional disciplinary act – were forbidden at school, as this was increasingly considered to be morally wrong in highly educated, progressive circles in society.¹⁷⁰ Around the same time, the trade of *xianggong* faded away after persisting condemnation of the system by the government and the public from novel socio-moral perspectives, in which issues such as slavery and homosexuality between the boys and their masters as well as their patrons were regarded as morally inappropriate.¹⁷¹

The Nantong School closed in 1926 due to financial problems, but the progressiveness of

¹⁶⁷ Ho 1959: 270.

¹⁶⁸ Mackerras 1975: 71.

¹⁶⁹ Shen 2006: 269-276.

¹⁷⁰ Ouyang 1990a: 86-87.

¹⁷¹ *ibid.* 72.

the recruitment system was carried forward by the Vocational School of Traditional Chinese Drama (*Zhonghua Xiqu Zhuanke Xuexiao* 中華戲曲專科學校). Established in 1930 by prestigious Peking Opera performers and enthusiasts, the school also provided a broad curriculum of academic subjects and, furthermore, adopted a management system from regular schools. Staff committees were set up for student affairs such as academic affairs and discipline. Most significantly, it also adopted the admission system from regular schools and abandoned the indenture system and the use of contracts. The school continued the agenda of the Nantong School in eliminating what they considered inappropriate old practices, and tried to eliminate the practice of homosexuality. According to Mackerras, to tackle the problem, doors of the student dormitories were left open all night, and girls were also recruited into the school.¹⁷² I would add here that the recruitment of girls was likely not only intended as an attempt to repress homosexuality, and also reflected the loosening of restrictions on female performers and a gradual acceptance of them by Peking Opera spectators.

4.2.2 Jackie Chan's childhood

Born in 1954, Jackie Chan was the second generation of a mainland immigrant family in Hong Kong. His real name, Kong-sang 港生, literally means “born in Hong Kong”. Compared to many of their fellow mainlanders and locals, who were living hard lives in ghettos, his family was among the more fortunate ones. His parents found jobs soon after immigrating, both working for the French consul: his father as a cook and his mother as a housekeeper. They lived in the ambassador's house on Victoria Peak, among the rich and powerful. Jackie Chan's childhood was secure in material terms. His family could even afford to send him to primary school – something that not every family in Hong Kong at that time could do.¹⁷³ However, Chan's first year at school showed that he was a poor student, and he was notorious for being a troublemaker.

Chan's first life-changer came when he was seven, after his first school year. At that time his father received a job offer as the head chef for the American ambassador in Australia. He accepted the offer, but decided to go alone. This left some concerns for the parents. First, it might be too heavy for a single mother to work and to raise a growing boy at the same time. Second, they were worried about Chan's personal development after his poor performance at school. They were concerned about him losing his discipline after his father left, and wondered if they should let him try something else. Finally, they decided to send Chan to the China Drama Academy, a well-known Peking Opera training school in Hong Kong.

4.2.3 Life in a training school

The China Drama Academy was established by Yu Zhanyuan 于占元 (1905-1997). Yu had been a martial male role in Shanghai. In the late 1940s, during the second Chinese civil war, he fled with his first wife to Hong Kong. He established the training school almost a decade later, in 1959. The school was one of four Peking Opera training schools in Hong Kong at the

¹⁷² Mackerras 1975: 75.

¹⁷³ Free primary education became only available to all in 1971.

time – the other three were the Spring and Autumn Drama School (*Chunqiu Xiju Xuexiao* 春秋戲劇學校) founded by Zhang Suqiu 張素秋 (a.k.a. Fen Juhua 粉菊花), the Eastern China Opera School (*Dongfang Xiqu Xuexiao* 東方戲曲學校) founded by Tang Di 唐迪, and the Chung Wah Chinese Opera School (*Zhonghua Xiqu Xuexiao* 中華戲曲學校) founded by Ma Chengzhi 馬承志. Unfortunately, no further information about the latter three has been found to date.¹⁷⁴

The institutional setting of the Academy was much like a second-phase training school as described above. It was not affiliated with a Peking Opera troupe – in fact, there was no troupe in Hong Kong that it could affiliate with; all students were locally recruited; and it used modified terms in its contracts with parents, which obliged the Academy to take care of the young intakes instead of monetary indenture to the parents. Meanwhile, it had one characteristic of a third-phase school, in that it had both female and male students (teachers were all male though). Moreover, it allowed try-outs. According to Chan, his father brought him to the Academy several times for try-outs before the contract was signed, probably to see whether Chan would really settle in well. The story goes that Chan, as a young and active boy, showed reluctance to leave the Academy after the try-outs every time, and this convinced his father to put Chan in the Academy. Eventually, his father signed a ten-year contract with Yu, which was the longest possible contract Yu would offer to a new intake.

4.2.3.1 Core values: discipline and pride

A characteristic of institutional Peking Opera training in general was the intensive and highly demanding training, as the professionals felt that this was the only way to a successful career. Yu carried out this philosophy in the Academy in two ways. Firstly, he maintained strict discipline in regard to training in the Academy. Secondly, he instilled a sense of pride in students, as representatives of the Academy. Discipline and pride were like the two sides of a coin, in which discipline controlled the students, while the assertion of pride empowered them. Together, this motivated students to keep up with the high training intensity. In the following we shall see how this played out in various practices in the Academy.

The first was the naming tradition in Chinese theatre, in which every student would be given a stage name when they joined a troupe or *keban*. In the case of the Academy, the names contained two Chinese characters and shared the common character “Yuan” 元, which was taken from the masters’ name (Yu Zhanyuan). For example, Chan was named Yuan Lou 元樓 and Li Juhua Yuan Fu 元甫.¹⁷⁵ This naming practice gave all students a collective

¹⁷⁴ Yamada and Udagawa 1998; Hong Kong Film Archive 1999: 86.

¹⁷⁵ For troupes with more students, different “common characters” were used to indicate seniority. For example, the famous *Xiliancheng* Troupe in Beijing had seven classes, and seven “common characters” for its students, namely “Fu” 富, “Lian” 連, “Xi” 喜, “Sheng” 盛, “Shi” 世, “Yuan” 元 and “Yin” 音. In addition to the indenture system, *keban* at that time would also invite young performers, who already had established some reputation on stage, to join the troupes. They would receive privileges of being exempted from some rules in the troupes. That’s why Mei Lanfang, who joined the *Xiliancheng* troupe under this alternative, was excluded from the naming tradition. The purpose of this alternative was to fill in roles in troupes’ performing crews that none of their own students could take up.

identity. This constrained students' behavior and was an incentive for them to work hard, since anything they did, in and out of the school, would affect the reputation of their entire peer group and, more importantly, the school. This could be a life-long identity if they kept using the name after graduation, which many students of the Academy did.

Another aspect showing Yu's emphasis on discipline in the Academy was his request of absolute obedience to the demanding daily schedule. As Chan and Li recalled, the everyday routine started at five in the morning with a "wake-up" session, which consisted of running several laps on the rooftop of the building where the Academy was located. After the run there was a simple breakfast, usually a bowl of congee. Then came the morning training session, which normally lasted for five to six hours without a break. Students practiced all foundational skills in Peking Opera performance, including movements, footwork, martial arts and acrobatics. Then there was time for lunch and a first toilet break – there was no toilet break allowed before lunchtime, as Yu believed that all toxins inside one's body should have been sweated out during the "wake up" run and the morning training, and any needs to go to toilet before lunchtime could only mean that the student was not exercising hard enough.

After lunch came flexibility trainings. Insiders considered this the most important training, as it was the foundation of most performing skills in Peking Opera. The training consisted of different kinds of body stretching, and was considered by the students as the most horrible part in the daily routine. Training contents included full leg-splits: both horizontally on the ground, and vertically by holding one leg above one's head. Students also needed to practice handstands, and in addition to executing a perfect handstand, they were expected to do it for a long time – as recalled by Li, sometimes they had to hang on for half an hour.¹⁷⁶ In Chan's words, "As soon as the exercises began, the room would be full of howling, because frankly, it hurts like hell."¹⁷⁷ After the flexibility training, students were divided into groups. The majority were given housekeeping work, while a small selective group would receive special trainings in singing and martial arts move with prop weapons. This lasted until dinnertime in the evening, and after that students were given lessons in reading, writing, Chinese literature and Chinese history. Sometimes after the lessons, Yu would give extra lessons on other practical matters in Peking Opera, such as face painting and knowledge about props and costumes. The daily schedule ended at midnight.

If the daily schedule did not push students to their limits, the harsh physical punishments certainly did. In a publication in 2009, named *Shaonian Chu Yingxiong* 少年出英雄 (From Youngsters to Heroes), which was dedicated to the fiftieth anniversary of the Academy's establishment, almost all contributing students recalled Yu's merciless, almost brutal beatings during their trainings.¹⁷⁸ In fact, Yu made this an admission requirement, as he always added a term in the contract that read "No complaints if (the student is) beaten to death" (*dasi wuyuan* 打死無怨).¹⁷⁹ According to Chan, the first heavy beating for every new student on their butts, after their punishment-free first week, even became a sort of "welcoming ritual" in

¹⁷⁶ Li Juhua (interview. 11 November 2015).

¹⁷⁷ Chan 1998: 42.

¹⁷⁸ Qixiaofu 2009.

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.* 15.

the Academy. Sometimes, beatings were collective, in which a mistake by one student would cause suffering for all. This was another measure to strengthen the students' collective identity. It worked apparently, as according to Chan they would help each other in training because they did not want to be implicated by others' mistakes, and they would also work harder as they did not want to be blamed as troublemakers.¹⁸⁰

Something special about Chan's story in the Academy was that he received harder training and heavier punishment than his fellows, partly because of his family. A few years after his admission, his mother decided to join his father in Australia. Worrying about his behavior when he would be alone in Hong Kong, his parents asked Yu to be his godfather. Yu accepted the request. On the one hand, Chan benefited from his new status as the godson of the master. For example, while he was initially one of the last to get his share of food at meal times – where one sat and when one got one's food was according to seniority – his new status made him to be the first. On the other hand, Yu expected more from Chan from that time onwards. He had to train much longer than the others, with higher standards on every move he learned, and received double beatings when he made mistakes.

4.2.3.2 The beginning of the “Seven Little Fortunes”

The Academy had two financial sources to maintain its daily operations. The first was donations from local churches in the form of rice, milk powder and clothes. This material income was particularly significant during the early period of the Academy, as students were still working on their basic skills and were not yet ready to go and present commercial performances. But already several months after its foundation in 1960, the Academy received its first work offer – not for a Peking Opera performance, but for an acrobatics show in a club called the Happy Palace (*Legong Lou* 樂宮樓).¹⁸¹ This show was arranged by Sun Shenghai 孫勝海, who was then both a teacher of academic subjects in the Academy and the manager of the Happy Palace. Seven students were selected for the show, and the group was named “Seven Little Fortunes” (*qixiaofu* 七小福) after a movie of the same title in 1961. The show received high acclaim among club guests, and was restaged regularly both at the Happy Palace and at several other venues. At some point there were three teams of students staging the “Seven Little Fortunes” show at different places on the same evening.¹⁸² This success was a huge step for the development of the Academy. It brought financial relief by utilizing what the students were capable of at that point; it also helped promote the Academy in society at large, which was significant for this newly established institution to secure future performance opportunities.

It took Chan and other students in the Academy about three years of basic training before Yu put them in commercial performances. In 1962, Yu secured a contract with the Lai Chi Kok Amusement Park for daily performances in one of the Park's theatres.¹⁸³ He

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.* 51-52.

¹⁸¹ The Happy Palace was a Chinese restaurant in daytime, and a nightclub in the evening that mainly served foreigners.

¹⁸² Li Juhua (interview. 11 November 2015).

¹⁸³ There were nine theatres in the Park, staging a wide range of entertainments.

immediately stopped all the “Seven Little Fortunes” shows and made the Park’s performances the sole obligation. The students debuted on 2 August 1963 for two weeks, before becoming the resident troupe on 16 March 1964. The engagement lasted for almost five years, with selected students performing every evening from eight to eleven. This was a golden age for the Academy. For example, their daily programmes of the Park show a gradual expansion of their repertoire from 1964 to 1966, including complete plays (*quanben xi* 全本戲), which require a large and strong cast of performers in a troupe. This reflected the growth of the Academy.¹⁸⁴ At one point during this period, Yu also re-staged the “Seven Little Fortunes” acrobatics shows in local clubs. In addition, the students also occasionally performed on temporary, mobile stages providing entertainment at special events like festival celebrations and private parties.¹⁸⁵

As another measure to encourage hard work from his students, Yu made the Park performances and the “Seven Little Fortunes” shows the exclusive territory of the best students in the Academy. Only top students would be chosen for those performances regardless of seniority. The starting group was given material incentives in addition to the sense of pride in representing the Academy. For example, they were given extra pocket money for each performance, and occasionally Yu would bring the group to a Chinese restaurant for a lavish meal. At the same time, he constantly changed the rosters for these performances, so as to give out a signal to the members of the starting group that they could be easily replaced if they failed to do their best on stage. Yu made his system feasible by training his students differently from a common training school in two ways. Firstly, unlike the conventional specialization of a student’s role type in a common training school, Yu trained his students as all-rounders. For example, Li Juhua learned to perform in the senior female role, martial male role and even the painted face role. Secondly, Yu always trained two to three students for a certain character in every play, so as to ensure that no one in the Academy was irreplaceable. In short, Yu gave every student a common goal to fight for – to get into the starting group. The incentive to be in the elite group and the fear to be dropped, again, persuaded every student to keep up with the intensive and demanding training.¹⁸⁶

4.2.3.3 The end of the Academy

As noted, the period of the mid-1960s, when the Academy performed regularly at the Lai Chi Kok Amusement Park, was its golden age in an operational sense. In 1965, Yu even purchased another apartment and expanded the Academy. However, things went downhill from that point onward. As a regular part of the Park performances, Chan witnessed the dwindling of the genre with a constant drop in attendance. The drop in numbers of complete plays on stage and the more frequent repetitions of the programme toward the end of the Park’s engagement in 1969, which were shown in their daily newspaper programmes, also exposed a struggling Academy in sustaining its performance level at the time, which was

¹⁸⁴ *New Life Evening Post*, 1962-1969.

¹⁸⁵ Chan 1998: 98; Qixiaofu 2009: 59.

¹⁸⁶ Qixiaofu 2009: 86-87.

probably due to the loss of students by graduations and a lack of new intake.¹⁸⁷ This was devastating to the Academy as it relied heavily on the income from this show. Noticing the rise of Hong Kong martial arts movies at the time, Yu tried to cover the loss from the performances by seconding his students more often to movie producers as extras and stuntmen (we will return to this cross-media connection later).

Right after the end of the Academy's contract with the Amusement Park in March 1969, Yu stopped all performances and acrobatics shows in Hong Kong, and brought all remaining students to Taiwan for a nine-month tour. Later on in 1970, he organized a tour to Thailand. Finally in 1973, Yu sold the apartments where the Academy was located, and led the whole school to the United States. His original plan was to tour the U.S. for a year and make this the grand finale of the Academy's history. Unfortunately, the tour was never finished, as the organizer on the U.S. side disappeared with all the tour earnings and all operational funds. In the end, Yu and some students decided to stay, while the others were sent back to Hong Kong with the help of the Hong Kong government. The fourteen-year history of the China Drama Academy officially ended here.¹⁸⁸ Notably, the other three training schools also closed roughly at the same time, which marked the end of a short history of Peking Opera training schools in Hong Kong.

¹⁸⁷ *New Life Evening Post*, 1962-1969.

¹⁸⁸ Qixiaofu 2009: 67.



Figure 4.1. (Right) The young Jackie Chan and (left) Yuan Hong 元紅 performing *The Jade Screen Mountain* (*Cuiping Shan* 翠屏山) at the Hong Kong City Hall. (Photo by anonymous, 1967)¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.* 49.



Figure 4.2. Students from the China Drama Academy performing *A Truce Between the Ba and Luo Families* (*Baluo He* 巴駱和) in the theatre at Lai Chi Kok Amusement Park. (Photo by anonymous, 1960s)¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.* 26.

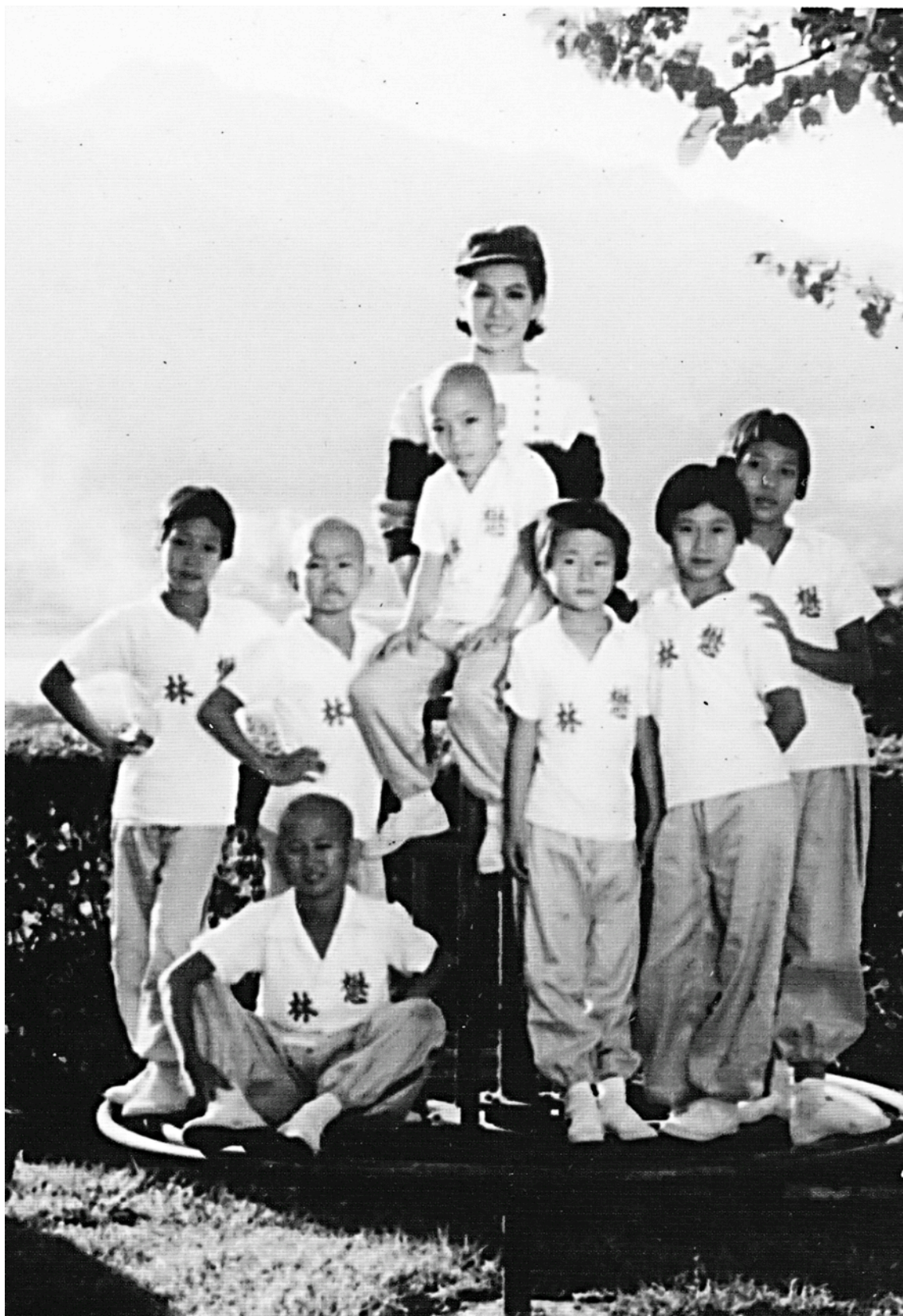


Figure 4.3. Students from the China Drama Academy participating in the movie *The Princess and the Seven Little Heroes* (*Gongzhu yu Qixiaoxia* 公主與七小俠). The lady in the middle is Lin Feng 林鳳, the leading actress. (Photo by anonymous, 1961)¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ *ibid.* 22.

4.3 Peking Opera training schools and Hong Kong martial arts movies

4.3.1 The rise of martial arts movies from the 1960s

Simultaneous with the dwindling of Peking Opera in Hong Kong in the 1960s, there was a new trend in the local movie industry. The era of romantic movies had passed, and was followed by a craze for martial arts movies. Here I use the term “martial arts movies” as an umbrella genre, with three sub-genres under it: *wuxia* 武俠 movies¹⁹², Kung Fu movies, and action-comedy movies.

The rise of *wuxia* movies started in the mid-1960s. According to Stephen Teo, there were two factors that contributed to it. Firstly, as Hong Kong was gaining international standing in the global economy, local people gradually shook off their old subordinated status as colonial subjects and became more confident of their identities. And the swordsmen heroes in the movies reflected this. Secondly, when the import of Japanese samurai movies became a big hit in the Hong Kong market, local producers were inspired and tried to make their own versions of samurai movies, which fed into the *wuxia* genre.¹⁹³ At the time, Kung Fu movies were also part of the local movie spectrum, including popular productions such as the *Wong Fei-hung* 黃飛鴻 series. However, they were less popular.

The watershed moment was in 1971, when the Golden Harvest Company released *The Big Boss* (*Tangshan Daxiong* 唐山大兄, 1971), a Kung Fu movie featuring an American-Chinese actor named Bruce Lee. The movie was a huge success in the Hong Kong market, and had a massive impact on the audience’s taste – with fist-fighting replacing sword-fighting. In other words, the year 1971 was an intersection point for the two sub-genres, with *wuxia* movies going downhill and Kung Fu movies uphill. It is worth mentioning that there was also a transitional period, probably around 1970, when the news of Bruce Lee’s hit circulated in Hong Kong and increased interest in Kung Fu movies. To cater to the changing audiences’ taste, local producers started making hybrid forms of *wuxia* and Kung Fu movies. Movies of this kind still adopted a *wuxia* movie setting, but fist-fighting scenes were added. For example, a fight between the protagonist and the antagonist would first start with swords, and at some point they would drop the swords and fight with their bare fists.¹⁹⁴

The phenomenon of Kung Fu movies and Bruce Lee did not last long, probably due to the sudden death of Lee in 1973. The “golden formula” of Kung Fu movies – the theme of revenge, the excitement of fist-fighting and, most importantly, Lee’s charisma – was left incomplete and started losing its magic. No matter how hard local producers tried to overcome the setback of his death by finding a new Kung Fu icon, this sub-genre was still under his shadow. The closest attempt to be “the new Bruce Lee” was by Jackie Chan, who made several popular Kung Fu movies in the conventional style such as *New Fist of Fury* (*Xin*

¹⁹² This sub-genre was also referred to as swordsmen movies. A sufficient explanation of the term *wuxia* was given by Law Ho-chak: “*Wu*, denoting militaristic or martial qualities, and *xia*, meaning chivalry, gallantry, and qualities of knighthood and heroism, constitute what is known as *wuxia*: a type of narrative characterized by the themes and principles of *xia* (chivalry or knight-errantry), portraying the *xia* (warriors) and their styles of swordplay.” (Law 2014: 25)

¹⁹³ Teo 1999: 97-98.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.* 99.

Jingwumen 新精武門, 1976) and *Shaolin Wooden Men* (*Shaolin Muren Xiang* 少林木人巷, 1976). In 1978, Chan made a revolutionary attempt in *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* (*Shexing Diaoshou* 蛇形刁手, 1978). He incorporated comedy elements into the conventional theme of revenge, and choreographed the action sequences in an acrobatic manner in contrast to the more rigid style in Lee's movies. This movie was a big hit in Hong Kong, and so were many of his later productions. After years of refinement, Chan thus made his name in the history of martial arts movies in Hong Kong with his contribution to a new sub-genre of action-comedy movies. We shall see more about his career change from a Peking Opera performer to a movie actor in the next section.

4.3.2 From Peking Opera performers to movie actors

Like their predecessors in the 1940s, Yu and his students in the China Drama Academy failed to build a sustainable environment for Peking Opera in Hong Kong. Apart from the language barrier, expensive tickets and the repetitive repertoire, the emergence of public television broadcast made the situation worse. Since the provision of wired television service by Redifusion in 1957, consumption habits in entertainment had changed radically.¹⁹⁵ And when the Television Broadcast Limited had its first free-to-air broadcast in 1967, the impact of televised entertainment on domestic households was further amplified. The dwindling of Peking Opera, which was already disadvantaged in the competition by its small audience base, seemed inevitable.

As noted, one of the financial sources in the Academy was seconding students to movie producers. The building of this cross-media connection, at first, did not start from the Academy's need for revenue, but originated in the relation between Yu and King Hu (a.k.a. Hu Jinquan 胡金銓, 1932-1997), a renowned director of *wuxia* movies. Deeply interested in Peking Opera culture due to his Beijing origins, he befriended Yu and was appointed as a trustee of the Academy.¹⁹⁶ Thanks to Hu, students in the Academy were given opportunities to appear in movies. During this period, Jackie Chan was one of the students who was very popular with the moviemakers. He made his movie debut in *Big and Little Wong Tin Bar* (*Daxiao Huang Tianba* 大小黃天霸, 1962) in a sidekick child role. After several appearances for other directors, King Hu used him in two of his famous productions *Come Drink With Me* (*Da Zuixia* 大醉俠, 1966) and *A Touch of Zen* (*Xianü* 俠女, 1971).¹⁹⁷

In 1971, Chan finished his ten-year contract with his master and left the Academy. He then followed the footsteps of his senior fellows such as Wu Mingcai 吳明才 (a.k.a. Yuan Ting 元庭) and Sammo Hung and immersed himself fully into the movie industry as a junior stuntman. Later, the movie studios became a popular destination for the Academy's graduates. They formed a big community in the martial arts movie industry, and shared more or less the same career path. They would first be junior, freelance stuntmen; then move up the ladder of seniority, in competition for the rare contracted positions. Some would go on to be martial

¹⁹⁵ Hampton 2011: 308.

¹⁹⁶ Yamada and Udagawa 1998: 61-63.

¹⁹⁷ Chan 1998: 327. Chan participated in the filming of these two movies in 1964 and 1968 respectively.

arts / action directors, and a very few, like Chan, ended up as actors and directors.

4.3.3 The significance of Peking Opera training schools in Hong Kong

Before the dwindling of the genre in the 1960s, the China Drama Academy served its primary function well as an institution that provided human resources to the small Peking Opera habitat in mid twentieth century Hong Kong. Meanwhile, the Academy made a social impact on local society, in which lower class people saw it as a potential source of financial relief. In the two decades of the Academy's history, the majority of students came from poverty-stricken families. They saw sending their children to the Academy as a quick solution to relieve their financial burdens through the training-in-residence system the Academy provided for their children. Career prospects were also a longer-term incentive to send their children to the Academy. In other words, what Yu offered to local society, with his establishment of the Academy, was an opportunity of free boarding, care and career training for children. This was too good to be ignored by a society that was developing but not yet free from poverty. But the social impact made by the Academy was still limited to a relatively small numbers of families, as there were only 48 students altogether in the Academy's history. Later from the mid-1960s, the rising economy of Hong Kong on one hand improved the living standard of local society, but on the other hand lowered the financial incentive offered by the Academy.

While the dwindling of the Peking Opera audience was disastrous for the Academy, it also led the graduates to seek new careers in the martial arts movie industry. The relationship between Yu Zhanyuan and King Hu had initiated the cross-media connection, offering the students a glimpse of a career possibility other than in Peking Opera. Then the dwindling of Peking Opera and consequently the more frequent opportunities to work in movie studios further introduced them to this new perspective. Furthermore, their physical abilities due to years of intensive acrobatics training, originally to prepare them for another career, had favoured them to be competitive candidates as stuntmen. For example, there is a acrobatic move in Peking Opera that requires a performer to jump down from a considerable height – usually of several tables stacked on top of the other – without any safety measures, and the performer must be able to take the jump with a front or back somersault and land gracefully. Mastering these sorts of moves, Chan once shocked everybody in the movie studio, during his early years as a freelance stuntman, when he successfully completed a backflip jump-off from the balcony of a fifteen-foot-high building without any safety measures.¹⁹⁸ In short, those graduates of the Academy, who later worked in the martial arts movie industry, discovered that the Academy had prepared them unexpectedly well to prosper in this new field.

Moreover, the existence of Peking Opera training schools in Hong Kong revolutionized the industry in additional ways beyond its legacy of graduates turned agile stuntmen. Here I will discuss the characteristics of Jackie Chan's innovations in his action-comedy sequences as a way to highlight the type of elements that make this sub-genre distinctive from sequences commonly found in mainstream action movies. I will trace Chan's innovations to his intensive

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.* 148-152.

Peking opera training. Firstly, the action sequences in his movies, which were mostly choreographed by himself or Sammo Hung, are very acrobatic. This is especially the case in his earlier movies, in which body spins, rolls and somersaults are frequently added into the sequences. One can easily associate these actions with similar skills found in Peking Opera routines. Secondly, Chan often stressed his character as a comedian by exaggerating his reactions to taking a hit in the action sequences. For example in a fight sequence from *Project A* (*A jihua* A 計劃, 1983), when Chan's punch is blocked by his opponent (portrayed by another Academy graduate, Yuan Biao 元彪) with a thick, wooden chopping board, the dynamics of the sequence are suddenly interrupted. This interruption makes way for a shot of Chan rubbing his fist painfully, a move that inevitably recalls the clown role in Peking Opera. This sort of clowning departs quite boldly from the image of the invincible main hero that was typically featured in the mainstream action movies at that time.

Thirdly, the action sequences choreographed by Chan show a great sense of rhythm. In Peking Opera, it is essential for a performer to synchronize her/his actions perfectly with the music – in particular with the rhythmic patterns of the percussion section. Thus, the years of training in the Academy had equipped Chan with a distinctive rhythmic sense in his actions, which in turn contributed to his success as an action choreographer. As Clyde Gentry III argues, “The most important aspect of fight choreography is rhythm, since that is what choreography is in the first place: arranging a dance.”¹⁹⁹ A good example is a fight scene, between Chan with his bare fists and his opponent with a long wooden stick, in *Drunken Master* (*Zuiquan* 醉拳, 1978). The rhythm in this sequence is reflected not only in the fight actions, but also in a pause during the fight. In my view, the pause is another stylistic trick that Chan borrowed from Peking Opera, in which a fighting sequence would be interrupted by a pause, with performers striking a powerful still pose before the fight resumes. The pause, both on stage and on screen, serves to give spectators time to digest previous actions, and to build up their expectation with what comes next.

Lastly, and this is the most significant characteristic that makes Chan's action-comedy unique, is that his solid action skills enable simpler and clearer frames in filming. According to Tony Zhou, in order to enhance the intensity of action sequences that are performed by actors without solid action skills, (action) directors have to make a lot of movements with the camera when filming so as to create the illusion of quickness and violence.²⁰⁰ In contrast, as Chan emphasized in the documentary *Jackie Chan: The Stunts* (1999), he always keeps the cameras in his movies in a fixed position and employs a wide-angle lens to capture the whole sequence in a single frame.²⁰¹ Specifically, he uses the scope format (aspect ratio 2.35:1) to film his movies, which shows everything of the sequence to the spectators and allows no room for the actor to “cheat” by using filming techniques.²⁰² For moving stunts such as car chases and jumps, he always employs long shots so as to capture the whole stunt unedited.

¹⁹⁹ Gentry III 1997: 128

²⁰⁰ <http://everyframeapainting.tumblr.com/post/104199069101/some-filmmakers-can-do-action-others-can-do>. Accessed on 26 July 2015.

²⁰¹ Chan directs all action sequences of his own movies that are produced in Hong Kong.

²⁰² Gentry III 1997: 73.

Moreover, he always takes several takes of the stunt sequences, from different angles, for use in the final product. The end results of these filming techniques were single-shot, multi-angle stunt sequences that are clearly done by Chan himself. Particularly exemplary are the multi-storey glass slide in a shopping mall in *Police Story* (*Jingcha Gushi* 警察故事, 1985) and the car-chase sequence in *Police Story 2* (*Jingcha Gushi Er* 警察故事二, 1988). The distinctiveness of this style is, in Zhou's words, that all elements involved in defining an "action" – actor, reactor, action, and reaction – are presented in the same frame, unedited, and even from different angles.²⁰³ This makes the stunt sequences in his action-comedy visually more convincing and more impressive than conventional action movies.

4.4 Peking Opera in Martial Arts movies in the 1960s

The China Drama Academy students' contribution to Hong Kong martial arts movies from the 1970s was revolutionary. At the same time, it was subtle, and not very explicit as it was situated mostly in the students' acrobatic skills. Bearing this in mind, it is worth taking a look at an earlier example of this cross-media interaction in the 1960s, in productions by King Hu and Zhang Che 張徹 (1924-2002). In the following I will discuss how these two movie directors drew on Peking Opera, and how this reflects their vision of the genre.

4.4.1 King Hu and his Cinema Opera

Hu was born and educated in Beijing before moving to Hong Kong in 1950. He had worked as a general officer in a movie company, a scriptwriter, an actor, and a radio broadcaster before he joined the Shaw Brothers Studio, a leading movie company in Hong Kong at the time, in 1957. He finished his first directorial work for the company, *The Story of Su San* (*Yutang Chun* 玉堂春) in 1964, and his first martial arts movie *Come Drink With Me* in 1965. At the time, locally produced *wuxia* movies were criticized as stagey and artificial.²⁰⁴ In response to this criticism, the Shaw Brothers Studio initiated a film movement called "The New Century of *Wuxia*" (*wuxia xin shiji* 武俠新世紀), to address this problem. Hu, as one of the leading directors in the movement, took this opportunity to reveal his own interpretation of *wuxia* and of the Chinese-ness of *wuxia* movies.²⁰⁵

In practice, he turned to Peking Opera as a source of inspiration. This innovative form has been termed Cinema Opera by Stephen Teo.²⁰⁶ Hu picked four characteristics in Peking Opera as his principles of Cinema Opera, summarized by Teo as follows: 1) More symbolism than realism; 2) The performers may step out of their characters to assume the role of a third person narrator; 3) The integration of musical effect with action; and 4) Special attention to the stage entrances of each character.²⁰⁷ In fact, the adoption of Peking Opera elements in movies was not new, as this had happened from as early as the late 1920s in the Shanghai

²⁰³ See footnote 192.

²⁰⁴ Law 2014: 25.

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*

²⁰⁶ Teo 1998: 20.

²⁰⁷ *ibid.* 20; Hu 2013: 84.

cinematic scene. But compared to the pragmatic uses in those days, Hu's treatment of Peking Opera in his *Cinema Opera* was rather stylized; his aim was to examine the feasibility of presenting the genre with the filming language. In Teo's words, "it was Hu's facility to realize that [Chinese] opera could be cinematic and that its stage mannerism could be applied as a distinctive cinematic style."²⁰⁸ In this sense, *wuxia* movies served as agents to reveal his vision of *Cinema Opera*.

In Hu's view, the cinematic power of Peking Opera was embodied in many of its performing practices and stage conventions. In particular, he addressed what he saw as three constraints in cinematic presentation – in time, character and context – that would provide an opportunity for the distinctive characteristics of Peking Opera to be presented effectively in the new medium and with a new set of techniques.²⁰⁹ Therefore, his appropriation of Peking Opera elements was selective and very much a response to the said cinematic constraints. In Rodríguez's words, the appropriation was "not always literal but filtered through a sense of the constraints and possibilities integral to the medium of film."²¹⁰

In Peking Opera the musical accompaniment, especially the formulated rhythmic patterns played by the percussion section of the ensemble, serves two functions. Firstly, it provides to the spectators information about characters' personalities and emotional states, as well as audio supplements on performers' movements and facial expressions, as the plot of the plays moves forward. Secondly, it coordinates with the performers, providing them audio cues to execute speeches or singing passages punctually. Law Ho-chak elegantly summarizes these two functions as representational (to spectators) and instructional (to performers).²¹¹ Echoing one of Hu's abovementioned observations on Peking Opera, his *Cinema Opera* displays an intimate parallelism between audio and visual elements. For example, the clash of swords and the characters' sighs or screams were synchronized with each bodily action or gesture, and rapid music was employed to parallel characters' running or galloping.²¹² This, indeed, recalled the similar double-function character of the percussive patterns in Peking Opera. However, an interview by Law with Cheng Pei-pei 鄭佩佩, the leading actress in *Come Drink With Me*, reveals that Hu applied this idea of audio-visual parallelism in a slightly different way. According to Cheng, Hu filmed the action sequences without the presence of any rhythmic patterns on the site. The musicians actually recorded the patterns according to the edited sequences in the post-production phase. The parallelism was not produced by the synthesis between the actors and the musicians, as was the convention on Peking Opera stage, but was reproduced through filming procedures.²¹³ In other words, the representational function of the rhythmic patterns remained, but the instructional function was reversed, because the cues of audio-visual synchronization here were given by the actors instead of the musicians.

²⁰⁸ Teo 1998: 20. His edition.

²⁰⁹ Hu 2013: 84.

²¹⁰ *ibid.* 81.

²¹¹ Law 2014: 27.

²¹² Rodríguez 1998: 82.

²¹³ Law 2014: 26- 27.

Similarly, Hu's appropriation of Peking Opera's movements in his Cinema Opera was with much personal style, which was based on his understanding of what "movement" is in Peking Opera:

"I've always taken the action part of my films as dancing rather than fighting. Because I'm very interested in opera, and particularly its movements and action effects, [I have] always keyed [the action sequences] to the notion of dance [so as] to emphasize the rhythm and tempo, instead of making them more 'authentic' or realistic."²¹⁴

To realize this appropriation in his movies, he created the position of "martial arts choreographer", an assistant directorial position whose responsibilities were to design action sequences and to assist the director in integrating these sequences into the movie.²¹⁵ This position was first introduced in *Come Drink With Me* when Han Yingjie 韓英傑, a former Peking Opera performer, was hired. With his own knowledge of Peking Opera and Han's assistance, Hu extensively adapted the dance-like Peking Opera movements into his movies and further styled them himself in the convention of realistic fighting scenes in mainstream Hong Kong martial arts movies of the time.

However, Hu again blended this appropriation with his own vision. In Cinema Opera, the splendor of Peking Opera movements was presented by Hu's storyboarding instead of the action skills by the actors. According to Hu, Han would first design the action sequences, and he would then do the storyboarding according to the designed actions.²¹⁶ In other words, Hu tried to heighten the presentation of stylistic Peking Opera movements, particularly with the aim to overcome the spatial limitation of Peking Opera stage in displaying these, with filming techniques such as mobile framing, telephoto and the application of several different lenses. In my view, the shift of the agency to filming devices in presenting the virtuosity of Peking Opera movements was also a practical measure, as there were not many actors at the time with sufficient skills to execute the movements in style.

To address the limitations in character presentations on Peking Opera stage, Hu turned to some conventions of the genre. First of all, there were hints of different role types in his design of characters, in which a simple but firm image (heroic, righteous, cruel, etc.) was given to each of his characters. For example, his setting of major characters in *Dragon Inn* (*Longmen Kezhan* 龍門客棧, 1967) included a scholar-swordsman, a female fighter, a clownish sidekick and a villain.²¹⁷ Such character design was a close match with the martial male role, martial female role, clown role and painted face role in Peking Opera respectively. Even the concurrent appearance of several military supporting characters was closely associated with the sidekick characters (*longtao* 龍套) on the theatrical stage. Based on the

²¹⁴ Rodríguez 1998: 81; original quote in Teo 1984: 36, with his edition.

²¹⁵ Yamada and Udagawa 1998: 61. This position was further developed into "martial arts/actions director", in which more directorial responsibility and freedom were given to this person for the action sequences in a movie.

²¹⁶ Hu 2011: 104.

²¹⁷ Teo 1998: 21.

character design, Hu would align those characters with corresponding practices that made it even easier to associate them with Peking Opera role types. For example, he would present the villain in the movies in a white tone, which recalled the conventional white face paint applied to villainous painted-face characters.²¹⁸ This representational tone setting of characters can be seen clearly in *Come Drink With Me*, in which he dressed the main villain in a set of white clothes.²¹⁹ Also in a fighting scene in *Anger* (*Nu 怒*, 1970), the villain had a bucket of flour poured over him by the heroic protagonist, exaggerating the villain's "whiteness" to signal his treachery.²²⁰

Secondly, Hu adapted the convention of opening narratives in Peking Opera to a cinematic context. He always started his movies with a short but clearly spoken narrative introducing the whole background of the story and the main characters. For example, in the openings of *Dragon Inn* and *The Valiant Ones* (*Zhonglie Tu 忠烈圖*, 1975), he adapted this theatrical introduction by using background narrative and a series of static images, usually a set of blank scene shots or historic photos and paintings, to begin the story.²²¹

Thirdly, following up on his other observations on Peking Opera and probably as a means to further sharpen the characters' images, he paid much attention to the screen entrances of characters. In Peking Opera, stage entrances of main characters are part of the performing practice of "showing the face" (*liangxiang 亮相*), and they are usually specially arranged. This may involve having supporting characters enter first, with stately lighting and music, particularly rhythmic patterns by the percussion section. All this is done to create the atmosphere for the "main entrance." After an occasional pause, the main character then will make his grand entrance. In Hu's films this theatrical arrangement is also found. One example is seen in *Dragon Inn*, in which in a scene when the main character arrives at the inn in the opening, Hu first showed a group of extras entering the inn, followed by music played by the Chinese double-reed trumpet (*suona 嗩呐*), and finally the entrance of the main character.²²² Yet another component of a *liangxiang*, Hu also took the static pose struck by the performer, after her/his entrance in showing her/his character's personality, into his account. This was reflected by Hu's extensive employment of close-up shots to capture the striking poses of his movie characters.

Hu's appropriations of Peking Opera practices also came on a grander scale. In 1970, when he was filming *A Touch of Zen*, he was invited to direct one part, *Anger*, of a four-segment movie called *The Four Moods* (*Xi Nu Ai Le 喜怒哀樂*, 1970). Because of the shorter playtime available for the movie, he decided to draw on the idea of excerpt plays (*zhezi xi 折子戲*) in traditional Chinese theatre. He adapted as the storyline of *Anger* a scene

²¹⁸ Face painting is a practice in Peking Opera to characterize roles in the play. Audiences can thus understand immediately from the colour of the performer's face painting whether the character is a protagonist or antagonist. For examples, a red tone represents righteousness; white represents treacherousness; and black represents justice.

²¹⁹ Yamada & Udagawa 1998: 72.

²²⁰ Jiao 1997: 34.

²²¹ Luo 2007: 82.

²²² Huang 1999: 103.

from the Peking Opera play *The Crossroad* (*Sancha Kou* 三岔口), which focuses on a nighttime fight in an inn between the protagonist and the villain. With the Peking-opera-inspired framework of this movie, Hu presented here more explicitly his style of Cinema Opera with an extensive use of rhythmic patterns and stage conventions in Peking Opera, such as the representational white tone of the villain.

4.4.2 Zhang Che: same source, different interpretation

In addition to King Hu, Peking Opera also inspired the filming philosophy of Zhang Che, another renowned martial arts movies director at the time. However, Zhang was inspired to give his audiences a different experience. One major difference was their dispositional setting of movie characters. As discussed above, Hu gave his characters – both heroes and villains – clear images inspired by the idea of face painting in Peking Opera. Zhang almost reversed this position: the heroic characters in his movies (usually the main characters) did not exclusively display the human dispositions of goodness, and the villains were not exclusively bad. As he explained in his autobiography, this idea of blurring characters' images was also inspired by Peking Opera, but from a different aspect. He observed several exceptions to the conventional positive portrayal of the male role, where in some plays the role is instead set as a villainous character.²²³ Zhang integrated this idea into his productions, creating an innovative approach. For example, the major storyline of his movie *Vengeance* (*Baochou* 報仇, 1970) is, as is clearly stated in the title, about the revenge of the main “heroic” character for his older brother. Indeed, revenge is the primary theme in almost one hundred movies directed by Zhang. In my view, Zhang made a smart choice to develop his stories with this theme, as it enabled him to manipulate his idea of blurred characters without entirely losing the heroic image of the main character.²²⁴

The difference between Zhang and Hu in appropriating Peking Opera elements into their movies lay not only in the image of their characters, but also in their ways of manipulating the “whiteness” of Peking Opera. While Hu took the white colour as a symbol of treachery, Zhang borrowed the idea of the usually white attire worn by the martial male role in Peking Opera and used this colour in his movies a reflection of goodness.²²⁵ Many heroic characters in Zhang's movies, such as the previously mentioned *Vengeance* and the more well-known *The One-Armed Swordsman* (*Dubi Dao* 獨臂刀, 1967), wore white. The white attire may also be associated with the traditional use of white as the color of mourning.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen how Peking Opera struggled to be a regular part of the Hong Kong cultural spectrum between the 1940s and the 1970s. The influx of mainland immigrants in the 1930s had created an audience base for Peking Opera in Hong Kong. Combined with

²²³ Zhang 2002: 107-108.

²²⁴ Since the act of revenge is thought to be more neutral, in the context of the “martial arts world”, than some other miscreant acts like stealing, greed and cruelty.

²²⁵ Zhang 2002: 107-108.

longer residencies of some professional Peking Opera performers in the city, the conditions for it to take root in the local cultural soil seemed fulfilled. However, Peking Opera failed to earn support from the local, Cantonese-speaking community due to the language barrier. This led to the reluctance of some performers to develop their careers in Hong Kong, for example Ma Lianliang, Yu Zhenfei and Zhang Junqiu, who were eager to go back to the Chinese mainland.

Nevertheless, some other performers who were determined to stay in Hong Kong found a way to continue their profession. In the case of Yu Zhanyuan, he saw the general problem of poverty in post-war Hong Kong. In this social context, he imitated the *keban* setting of the second half of the nineteenth century, and established the China Drama Academy. Offering a financial incentive and career prospects, the training school successfully attracted local children to enter the Peking Opera profession. And with the success of the “Seven Little Fortunes” acrobatic shows and regular performances at the Lai Chi Kok Amusement Park in the first half of the 1960s, it is fair to say that Yu and the Academy contributed to securing Peking Opera a place in the local cultural scene. Even the decline of the Academy from the second half of 1960s left a paradoxical legacy, as it reoriented Peking Opera graduates to the martial arts movies industry. With their acrobatics and action skills, they revolutionized the industry and created a new style of action movies – for example, Chan’s action comedy – that was distinctive from the mainstream.

This reorientation also clearly demonstrates Kopytoff’s perspective of recommodification in two senses. Firstly, when Peking Opera moved from its original sphere as theatrical art to that of martial arts movies, its original values – be they artistic or social – were stripped off and replaced by others. Here, Peking Opera was recommodified, in Kopytoffian terms. Secondly, those new values (acrobatic brilliance, unique action rhythm, etc.) were configured so that “Peking Opera in martial arts movies” was made ready for further movement – think about Jackie Chan’s adventure in Hollywood after his success on the Hong Kong market. In this sense, Peking Opera was recommodified by the martial arts movie industry for potential further transactions.

The contribution of the graduates of the Chinese Drama Academy to the Hong Kong movie industry was preceded in the 1960s by other interactions between Peking Opera and martial arts movies, when King Hu and Zhang Che extensively adapted performing practices and stage conventions in Peking Opera into their productions. Hu’s vision in his Cinema Opera was indeed radical, as his motivation was not to enhance *wuxia* movies with Peking Opera – like the inter-genre interaction between Peking and Cantonese Opera discussed in chapter three – but, conversely, to examine the presentational potential of Peking Opera in another medium. Despite their experimental innovations, Hu and Zhang’s influence on those Peking Opera graduates was limited, for two reasons. First, the two parties were focusing on two different sub-genres (*wuxia* and action movies respectively). Second, as mentioned above, the impact of the Peking Opera graduates was mostly through their acrobatic skills. Hu’s multi-faceted vision of his Cinema Opera was irrelevant to them.

In my view, the contrasting attitudes toward Peking Opera by the local and mainland immigrant communities were a miniature reflection of the cultural incompatibility of the new

Chinese nationalism and the unique Hong Kong colonial situation. In fact, such cultural differences between Hong Kong (and indirectly the U.K. as a colonizer before 1997) and the Chinese mainland, generated by the political dynamic between these two places, were an influential factor in the development of Peking Opera in Hong Kong since then. In the next chapter, I will focus on the impact of cultural policy on Peking Opera in Hong Kong across time, especially on its revival in the 1980s.

Chapter Five / Peking Opera and Cultural Politics: from the 1840s to the Present Liang Hanyong

Culture and politics are intimately connected. On the one hand, politics is cultural: Lane Crothers and Charles Lockhart have pointed out that culture has long been used as an important concept to explain political developments.²²⁶ On the other hand, culture can be political. According to Chin Wan, the politicization of culture, usually in the form of cultural policy, can be where politics both begins and ends: culture can be used as an instrument to consolidate and spread ideologies before a political act, and also to unify a community or nation after a political act.²²⁷ Culture can also be seen as an instrument in the political arena. For example, after the newly elected British Labour government led by Tony Blair brought up the notion of “creative industries” in 1997, culture soon became a frequently addressed topic among British politicians, who made it part of their political agenda.

In the introduction to *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (1997), Ackbar Abbas quotes Italo Calvino:

With cities, it is as with dreams: everything imaginable can be dreamed. But even the most unexpected dream is a rebus that conceals a desire or, its reverse, a fear.²²⁸

Taking the rebus metaphor, Abbas reflects on the cultural political situation in Hong Kong at the dawn of the handover of sovereignty from the UK to the PRC (hereafter “handover”) in 1997:

Cultural forms, too, can perhaps also be regarded as a rebus that projects a city’s desires and fears, although it is likely to be a rebus of a particularly complex kind.²²⁹

He claims that the complexity of defining Hong Kong’s culture lies in the fact that people overemphasize the city’s economic success when explaining its development. This in turn has stunted its cultural growth, by inhibiting bottom-up creative forces that could enable Hong Kong society to search for and establish its own culture in order to reinforce its city-building energy. Further to Abbas’ analysis, I note that the said complexity also lies in the political fact that Hong Kong’s governance has always been associated with, and co-determined by, more powerful sovereignties: China, the United Kingdom, and China again; and that these agents have played major roles in the cultural development of Hong Kong. In other words, cultural forms in Hong Kong can also be a means for the city’s various *rulers* through time to project *their* desires and fears for the city, from a top-down perspective.

²²⁶ Crothers & Lockhart 2000: xv.

²²⁷ Chin 2008: 9.

²²⁸ Calvino 1972: 44.

²²⁹ Abbas 1997: 1.

I will consider in this chapter the dynamics generated by various agents in the Hong Kong political arena from the turn of the twentieth century until today. Starting from the early colonial era in the 1840s, I will demonstrate how these constantly changing dynamics have shaped cultural developments in Hong Kong, with special attention to Peking Opera. I will then continue my narrative from the 1980s, when a revival of the genre occurred. This revival was signalled by the establishment of new Peking Opera troupes, and the notable government support received by these troupes, especially after the 1997 handover. I will then use the life story of Liang Hanyong 梁漢勇 (born 1960) and his troupe, the Hong Kong Youth of Chinese Opera College (*Xianggang Qingnian Jingju Xueyuan* 香港青年京劇學院, hereafter YCOC) as a case study to demonstrate how the Hong Kong government has supported Peking Opera through various institutional bodies, and how local troupes have benefited from this. Data will be drawn from government documents that address cultural development in Hong Kong, and from my fieldwork in 2009 and 2014.

By looking into the post-1997 government's motivation in promoting Peking Opera in Hong Kong, I found that an interesting cultural identity has been constructed. On the one hand, this subscribes to a Chinese-national discourse to view Peking Opera as a cultural symbol of the nation. On the other hand, it also produces local representations of this "national drama." This seemingly contrasting, national yet local identity makes Hong Kong a unique case in Peking Opera studies.

5.1 A look back: from the 1840s to the 1970s

Since the study of Hong Kong's culture rapidly developed in the 1990s, mainstream scholarship has tended to conduct its analysis using the three notions of the East, the West, and the local. Scholars often locate cultural expressions in Hong Kong as relative to this three-dimensional view, and classify them as pure or hybrid expressions of one or several of these dimensions.²³⁰ Seeing how common this framework has become, it is surprising that little discussion is found about the circumstances in which it emerged.

In my view, the emergence of this triple framework was greatly determined by the unique colonial experience of Hong Kong from the mid-nineteenth century. I have selected two periods in the political history of the city to illustrate my point. Firstly, I will discuss the collaborative and culturally tolerant approach of the British Colonial governments in Hong Kong at the turn of the twentieth century, and show how this created room for the survival and development of Chinese and local cultures. Secondly, I will discuss the completion of the new City Hall in 1962 and a massive riot in 1967, and analyse how these incidents affected the government's attitude toward supporting culture life in Hong Kong.

5.1.1 Collaborative coloniality

In *Hong Kong's History: State and Society Under Colonial Rule* (1999), editor Ngo Tak-wing summarizes scholarship on Hong Kong's colonial history into two conventional discourses: a mainstream discourse that emphasizes good policies by the British Colonial government to

²³⁰ See Abbas 1997; Lee 2002; Wu & Zhang 2002.

turn Hong Kong from a “barren rock” into a “capitalist metropolis,” and a Chinese nationalist discourse that features China’s influence on the city’s development.²³¹ He criticizes these two discourses for their ignorance of the complexity of colonial rule, and suggests revisiting the subject with a focus on the agencies of different social actors in shaping Hong Kong’s development in the colonial era.²³² Among the many examples in the book that support his argument, I would like to highlight the collaborative governing approach adopted by the Colonial government since the British gained sovereignty in Hong Kong in 1841, as it is a significant co-determinant of the development of local and Chinese cultural forms.

Collaboration between the British Colonial government and local Chinese settlers occurred since the First Opium War (1839-1842), which led to the cession of Hong Kong island to the U K. Some Hong Kong natives assisted the British in the war in the form of material supplies. After the British victory, Chinese settlers in Hong Kong, who were mostly refugees and opportunity-seeking merchants from the Chinese mainland and Southeast Asia, contributed to building the new colony as contractors and labourers. In reward, many of them were granted land and privileges in trade monopolies. Later on they were allowed to have businesses and residential areas exclusively for Chinese. Speculating on these material and social privileges, an elite local community of Chinese emerged.²³³ This Chinese elite – many of whom had been outcasts from the mainland – enjoyed privileges that they could never get in China, and the Colonial government saw this elite group as a valuable partner, for two reasons. Firstly, they needed these elites to mediate between them and the local Chinese population. Secondly, they needed the group’s trading networks on the Chinese mainland and Southeast Asia, since a major aim the British wished to pursue through their colonization of Hong Kong was to develop British trade in East and Southeast Asia. This mutual dependence of the Colonial government and the local Chinese elite resulted in a long collaborative relationship, which was much like a reproduction of earlier collaboration patterns in places like Batavia (present-day Jakarta) and Singapore. According to Law Wing-sang, the social role of the elite group grew from one in which they were simply members of the bourgeoisie to a role as leaders of the local Chinese community, and further to a situation in which they constituted one of the powerful voices in government at the turn of the twentieth century.²³⁴

At the same time, changes in British imperialist ideology further fostered the development of the local Chinese elite, and of local culture. According to Law, the British authorities gradually abandoned late-Victorian colonial perceptions of “mission” and “obligation,” and replaced them by the idea of a “voluntary association of free states in the form of a Commonwealth.”²³⁵ In Hong Kong this was reflected in the governing philosophy of Frederick Lugard (1858-1945) during his term as governor from 1907 to 1912, which saw close collaboration with the Chinese elites. He believed that colonial governance should not aim to create a class that was native in ethnicity but English in taste and culture. Rather, it was

²³¹ Ngo 1999: 1.

²³² *ibid.* 2.

²³³ Carroll 1999: 13-25.

²³⁴ Law 2009: 9-30.

²³⁵ Law 2009: 74-75; Thornton 1959; Eldridge 1973; Smith 1998.

to create a “nationality” that Hong Kong’s indigenous inhabitants were proud of.²³⁶ His philosophy was embodied in his culturally tolerant approach to policy making. Firstly, he consciously avoided a full-scale imposition of British culture. For example, he re-oriented the education system from a highly Anglican one to a secular one, in which English and Chinese (i.e. Cantonese) were both recognized as legitimate languages of instruction in schools. Secondly, he respected local culture. For example, when he established the (English-language) University of Hong Kong in 1911, he made sure the university was free from Anglicism from both cultural-moral and religious perspectives.²³⁷

In short, in Lugard’s eyes, replacing local culture with British culture was unnecessary, as he believed that his job as a colonizer was to establish a “Hong Kong identity” without compromising British colonialism. This was something of a conceptual breakthrough, as colonialism and nationalism were for the first time considered as each other’s precondition rather than as opposite discourses. From social and cultural perspective, this helped save local culture, which was partially Chinese, from being marginalized. Such a liberal colonial philosophy, which consciously and explicitly tolerated the development of local culture, also contrasts with the conventional image of Colonial government as marked by indirect rule and disengagement from social affairs that passively allowed for the development of local culture. Furthermore, we should note that Lugard’s culturally tolerant principles also included the promotion of traditional Chinese cultural values.²³⁸ In this light, traditional Chinese theatre would have a secure place in the local cultural scene, as it had long been a carrier of such values.

In fact, Lugard’s approach to local culture, which featured collaboration and minimal interference, was maintained by his successors up to the 1970s. In spite of fluctuations in their respective governing style and other changes in the political environment,²³⁹ they generally displayed considerable tolerance towards local cultural practices – unless these were seen to be opposing the colonizer’s authority or as having a negative impact on public order and security. One example of government interference in local cultural practices occurred in the 1950s, when government was concerned about the safety of the bamboo-built temporary stages used for outdoor Cantonese Opera performances, and thus passed a law to confine them.²⁴⁰

In contrast to this liberal attitude towards traditional Chinese theatre in Hong Kong, the cultural policies on the Chinese mainland were much more restrictive. As Colin Mackerras has pointed out, despite the support of Peking Opera for its national status, governments throughout the Qing dynasty, the Republican period and the PRC era watched traditional Chinese theatrical activities carefully for subversive or morally offensive materials. Censors

²³⁶ Law 2009: 69-70.

²³⁷ *ibid.* 68.

²³⁸ *ibid.* 110.

²³⁹ For example, Cecil Clementi (1875-1947) adopted a Chinese traditionalist approach during his term between 1925 and 1930, as a reaction to the radical Chinese nationalism on the mainland. See Law 2009: 106.

²⁴⁰ Chin 2008: 62.

would regularly attend performances, and they had the power to ban a play from the stage and close the theatre.²⁴¹

5.1.2 The new City Hall and the 1967 riot

One useful perspective to study the politicization of culture in a particular place is to look at government manipulation of public culture. By loosening or restricting public access to cultural forms, authorities can control the degree of public interaction with certain forms, and hence facilitate engagement with the forms the government desires. In the 1960s, two incidents clearly demonstrated how the British Colonial government shaped the cultural scene in Hong Kong through public access manipulation.

The first is the building project of the new City Hall. The old one had been built in 1869 and was exclusively for the European community in Hong Kong. It was torn down in 1947 to make way for the headquarters of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, and was never rebuilt until a new City Hall plan came up in 1956. The new building was completed in 1962 and was the first official cultural venue in Hong Kong that was open for public use. This was significant for both cultural consumers and producers in the city. For the consumers – the public – the new City Hall provided them a space for more and better engagement with different cultural forms. For the producers – art groups including local Peking Opera schools – it provided a professional infrastructure to reach the public. This was exactly the case when the China Drama Academy held its annual performances in the City Hall in the 1960s.²⁴² In addition, public access to cultural events was further encouraged when the government began to subsidize them. For example, according to Chen Dawen, the first manager of the new City Hall, a series of Sunday Outreach Concerts were organized in the 1960s for which a ticket only cost one HKD (equal to twenty HKD today) after government subsidies.²⁴³

The second incident that reflected government manipulation of public access to culture was its reaction to a massive riot in 1967, which was spearheaded by local communists and provocateurs. Beginning as a strike at a plastic flower factory, the incident escalated to a massive public demonstration against social injustice. Local communists took this opportunity for an anti-colonial campaign, as an echoing response to the ongoing Cultural Revolution on the Chinese mainland, and the strike became a riot against British sovereignty. However, some critics agreed that the inability of the government to provide an acceptable social environment and to protect the civil rights of young adults and workers were the real reasons behind the riot. Derek Davies, the editor of the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, commented in 1967:

The point is that the young men who threw stones and bottles at the Police were not members of Hong Kong's abject poor from the tenement slums or from the shacks on the hillside; they were reasonably well-dressed misfits from Hong Kong's vaunted resettlement estates and

²⁴¹ Mackerras 1975: 91-92; Song & Huang 2013: 131.

²⁴² Qixiaofu 2009.

²⁴³ Chen 2007.

from the streets of Kowloon. Apart from the fact that we have an educational system in Hong Kong which pushes children aged 14 or below out on to the streets, and industrial legislation which forbids them to be employed until they are 16 (which provides us with a built-in gang of unemployed potential hooligans), the Hong Kong authorities have shown no signs of appreciating the self-evident fact that the discontent is part of a “Revolution of Rising Expectations” and that it is official efforts to improve the lot of society which have largely aroused those expectations.²⁴⁴

This comment is reaffirmed by Chen Dawen. As he remembers, the colonial government claimed in an evaluation report that the lack of leisure and cultural activities was one of the reasons that citizens were recruited by left-wing parties and caused the riot. As a response, the government decided to greatly increase the resources for leisure and cultural services as a means of civil education.²⁴⁵ In the same light, this increase in cultural resources further favoured the expansion of cultural access.

So how did the publicization of cultural access favour traditional Chinese theatre? In practice, this was reflected by government’s administration in cultural affairs. For example, a point system was introduced in 1973 to evaluate the priority for a proposed cultural event in securing a City Hall venue for the period the event requested. A score table was formulated by the City Hall’s administration for assessment. It contains several determining factors, with concrete rating yardsticks as well as the weighting of each factor in overall consideration (Table 5.1). The point of interest here lies in the nature of the proposed event (see item G in the table), which reveals that a performance of traditional Chinese theatre (termed “Chinese opera” in the table) would be granted the highest point-value in the most heavily weighted item in the system. Though this may appear to be a small detail, I believe that this strongly affirmed Colonial government’s support for traditional Chinese theatre through its cultural administration.

Despite this cultural administrative advantage to traditional Chinese theatre, government support was still biased towards Western forms of high art, according to Chin.²⁴⁶ With regard to local and Chinese art forms, the Colonial government maintained its minimal interference policy, which also meant minimal support. In other words, the fates of these cultural forms would be overwhelmingly determined by the market. And, as I have discussed in chapter four, these traditional Chinese theatrical genres lost out against movies and television in the entertainment market of the 1960s and 1970s.

²⁴⁴ Davids 1967: 510.

²⁴⁵ Chen 2007.

²⁴⁶ Chin 2008: 47.

Factor	Rating Scale	Weighting	
A. Last successful booking (Concert Hall)	1-2 months before date required	0	10
	3-4	1	
	5-6	2	
	7-8	3	
	9-10	4	
	11-12	5	
B. Last successful booking (Theatre)	1-2 months before date required	0	5
	3-4	1	
	5-6	2	
	7-8	3	
	9-10	4	
	11-12	5	
C. Numbers of dates booked during 12 months preceding date required (Concert Hall)	More than 8 days	0	10
	7-8 days	1	
	5-6	2	
	3-4	3	
	1-2	4	
	nil	5	
D. Numbers of dates booked during 12 months preceding date required (Theatre)	More than 8 days	0	5
	7-8 days	1	
	5-6	2	
	3-4	3	
	1-2	4	
	nil	5	
E. Attendance at last function	Below 50% of capacity	0	30
	51-60%	1	
	61-70%	2	
	71-80%	3	
	81-90%	4	
	91-100%	5	
F. Ability of hirer to organize	Very poor	0	20
	Poor	1	
	Fairly good	2	
	Good	3	
	Very good	4	
	Excellent	5	
G. Cultural content of proposed function	Meetings, conference, etc. unrelated to art	0	50
	Meetings, conference, etc. related to art	1	
	Variety shows, pop shows	2	
	Drama, musicals not in Chinese	3	
	Drama, musicals in Chinese	4	
	Serious music/Chinese opera/dance	5	
H. Artistic merit of proposed function	Very poor	0	30
	Poor	1	
	Fairly good	2	
	Good	3	
	Very good	4	
	Excellent	5	
I. "Debut" bonus: add 100 points			

Table 5.1 Replication of the score table used in the point system of City Hall's venue booking.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ Urban Council 1976.

5.2 The 1980s: Rebirth

As the above two incidents suggest, government intervention in local cultural affairs can be seen as a response to domestic social needs. At the same time, it can also be a political act in response to international affairs.²⁴⁸ The minimal interference policy to local and Chinese cultural forms, for instance, was itself very political. Provided that ideologies were affiliated with cultural expressions in many cases, the colonial government did not want to be viewed taking a side in any ideological issue by supporting or suppressing an art form.

The political agenda behind the government support of culture was demonstrated more explicitly in the early 1980s, when the British and Chinese governments began to negotiate in preparation for the 1997 handover. As a strategy to retain its colonial legacy, the British government invested in making Hong Kong a well-developed city during the years leading up to the handover, not just institutionally and economically but also culturally. As a result, the Colonial government began a massive wave of construction in cultural infrastructure and further increased its support of cultural activities in the city. In the following, I will discuss how it carried out this cultural agenda and how Peking Opera benefited from it.

5.2.1 A descriptive cultural policy

As Ho Chi Ping suggests, the Colonial government in this period carried out its cultural agenda by adopting a descriptive approach to cultural policy making.²⁴⁹ In John Pick's words:

A policy may be said to be descriptive in nature when it makes generally available knowledge of all the existing definitions and practices which hold general sway within the country. Such policies do not set fresh targets nor propose new systems, but aim merely to disseminate knowledge about existing practice and announce an intention of sustaining what already exists ... A policy in this form does not seek to impose a persuasive redefinition of art, nor does it seek to impose systems of control; it is indeed possible for different notions of art to exist simultaneously and for control to be vested in various different authorities by this system.²⁵⁰

In practice, a government first sets up abstract internal guidelines for officials to work with; freedom is allowed on how these cultural guidelines are put into practice. The actual enactments of these guidelines will then be reviewed constantly, with public opinion also taken into account. After a certain period of time, usually several years, the actual working experiences will then be summarized into a systematic policy.

The history of cultural policy making in colonial Hong Kong between 1962 – the year when the government started paying serious attention to cultural affairs – and 1997 can be divided into two phases. The first was from 1962 to 1977. The aforementioned cultural acts, after the completion of the new City Hall and the 1967 riot, were summarized into a cultural statement in 1977. Originally intended for internal reference only and not available to the public until 1993, the statement reaffirmed the government's responsibility for local cultural

²⁴⁸ *ibid.* 36.

²⁴⁹ Ho 2006.

²⁵⁰ Pick 1988: 110.

development as a “coordinator and catalyst, as a provider of the necessary infrastructure and as a promoter, providing where necessary, financial or other assistance to nurture budding artists or new art forms.”²⁵¹ This statement was then transformed into an internal policy in 1981, which contained seven points concerning the government’s role in local cultural development, but without concrete instructions on their enactment:

The existing policy for the promotion and development of the arts was laid down by the Executive Council in 1981. Under this policy, the government is to focus on the development of the performing arts through opportunities, and through partnership with the Municipal Councils,²⁵² to provide the necessary infrastructural support in terms of building cultural venues and offering performances opportunities for the various performing arts groups. Specifically, these objectives include:

1. The provision of the necessary venues and facilities for the performing arts;
2. The development of community activities for the general public;
3. The provision of training in the performing arts at the pre-vocational and vocational level;
4. The development of professional performance groups;
5. The achievement of the highest standards possible within the constraints of finance and available resources;
6. The establishment of the Advisory Council for the Performing Arts; and
7. General support and encouragement of performing arts organizations.²⁵³

Overlapping with the first phase, these seven points also served as the starting point for the second phase of the colonial cultural policy. These abstract guidelines were carried out in the following decade by existing official bodies and new ones established for the purpose. For example, the provision and management of cultural facilities was carried out by the Urban Council and the Regional Council; the establishment of the Council for the Performing Arts (CPA) in 1982 provided an advisory body; and the establishment of the Academy for Performing Arts in 1984 was responsible for the training of professional artists. Through the actual operations of these bodies, as well as discussions within society on these practices, the guidelines were constantly reviewed and amended. The working experiences of more than a decade were finally summed up in a publicly available policy paper of the Arts Policy Review Report, issued by the Recreation and Culture Branch, in 1993.

5.2.2 The rebirth of Peking Opera in Hong Kong

At the same time as the aggressive cultural development campaign, the Colonial government in the 1980s also loosened its ideological strictures, as in the abovementioned non-interference policy, on local and Chinese cultural forms, and began to include them in the official payroll for cultural affairs. It was in this environment that Peking Opera reoccupied a

²⁵¹ Hong Kong Government Secretariat: Broadcasting, Culture and Sport Bureau 1993: 1-2.

²⁵² “Municipal Councils” here refers to the Urban Council (established in 1936) and the Regional Council (established in 1986).

²⁵³ Hong Kong Government Secretariat: Broadcasting, Culture and Sport Bureau 1993: 4.

spot in the local cultural scene after the disbandment of the Opera training schools in the mid-1970s. Several new troupes were established. The first was the short-lived Hong Kong Peking Opera Troupe, which was formed in 1981 and disbanded in 1984.²⁵⁴ Others followed, such as the Hong Kong Jing Kun Arts Association (1986) and the Hong Kong Youth of Chinese Opera College (1995). There were also amateur groups, such as the Hong Kong Peking Opera Club (1989).

The operational basis of these newly formed troupes is a point of interest. Some amateur groups were organized like clubs on the Chinese mainland and outside China, in which a fixed group of members would gather regularly. Other, more professional troupes operated in a style that I would call “professional one-person-troupes”.²⁵⁵ Unlike the conventional way, in which a group would have a fixed, contracted crew of performers, musicians and back-stage workers, a “professional one-person-troupe” only consists of one or two full-time performers – usually the founder(s) – and a handful of administrative staff. Performing cast and crews were hired in a production-by-production basis, and most of them held permanent positions in troupes elsewhere. This operational model was not unique to Hong Kong, though. It was also adopted by Guo Xiaozhuang 郭小莊 in Taiwan, when she established the Small Ensemble of Elegant Voices (*Yayin Xiaoji* 雅音小集) in 1979, as a means to survive the then shrinking Peking Opera market on the island.²⁵⁶ Nevertheless, while Guo was still able to hire her crews from other state-owned troupes within Taiwan, performers in Hong Kong had to turn to mainland troupes and training schools.

Whether amateur or professional, these newly formed local troupes enjoyed increasing official support in the 1980s. They were given performing opportunities in government-organized cultural events. For example, right after its establishment the Hong Kong Peking Opera Troupe was invited by the Urban Council to perform in the Festival of Asian Arts, in the years 1981, 1982 and 1983.²⁵⁷ In addition, being non-profit organizations, these troupes received rental fee waivers for performing venues that were managed by the Urban Council and Regional Council. The rental fee waiver is significant, because it provides long-term passive support (as compared to the one-off and more random nature of performance invitations). In this way, the Colonial government could still maintain its “minimal interference” attitude to cultural affairs.

Later, toward the end of the 1980s, a more active attitude by the government in supporting traditional Chinese theatre was observed, in which the CPA began to consider cultural policy on traditional Chinese theatre as a separate category. In its annual report in the financial years of 1989 to 1991, it was reported that a working group on traditional Chinese theatre had been set up to “advise on how Cantonese and other forms of Chinese opera could

²⁵⁴ No information could be found up to this moment on why this troupe ceased to exist so soon. Another troupe with the same name was formed in 1997 by Ma Changli 馬長禮, the son of Ma Lianliang.

²⁵⁵ Unless otherwise specified, my use of the terms “professional” and “amateur” is vocational. They do not necessarily indicate the difference in artistic quality and seriousness between performers.

²⁵⁶ Guy 2005: 29-30.

²⁵⁷ See programme leaflets of the Festival of Asian Arts (1981-1983), published by the Urban Council.

be encouraged, and to decide on project grants for Chinese opera performances.”²⁵⁸ Accompanying the formation of the working group was, as suggested as the function of the group, the first grants to local Peking Opera troupes in 1990-1991. The Hong Kong Peking Opera Club was awarded a project grant for its annual performance, and The Hong Kong Jing Kun Arts Association was also awarded a matching grant after it had received a commercial sponsorship from a certain Xerox Corporation.²⁵⁹

5.3 Peking Opera and politics after 1997: a case study of Liang Hanyong and the YCOC

Following the 1997 handover, the cultural-political environment in Hong Kong changed. In the following section I will first briefly discuss how the post-1997 Hong Kong government formulates cultural policy. Then I will focus on how post-1997 cultural policy impacts Peking Opera. I will illustrate this with a case study of Liang Hanyong, who started his Peking Opera career in Hong Kong in 1995, when he formed the YCOC. The case of Liang is significant not only because he practiced Peking Opera in the years around the handover, but also because most of his activities with the YCOC were funded by the government. In other words, government support played a large role in establishing the troupe’s current status as one of the two active Peking Opera troupes in Hong Kong. In this sense, the case serves as a good example to illustrate how Peking Opera in contemporary Hong Kong has benefited from a further increase of government support after 1997.

5.3.1 Cultural policy after 1997

After the handover, Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region of the PRC. A new Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government was formed, headed by a Chief Executive. Despite the massive change in government structure, the descriptive approach to cultural policy remained. A new phase of policy-making began in 1997, when Tung Chee-hwa, the first Chief Executive, re-positioned Hong Kong’s culture with this rather abstract statement:

Ours (Hong Kong) is a cosmopolitan city. Our ability to embrace the cultures of east and west is one of the secrets of our success, shaping a unique social culture of our own. While we deepen our understanding of Chinese history and culture, we will continue to develop our own diverse cultural characteristics. China’s culture, like every other culture, is growing and changing as we journey forward into the 21st century. Hong Kong stands in a unique position in this process, able to act as the centre of exchange for China to learn about western cultures and for the world to learn about Chinese culture.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ Report of the Council for the Performing Arts (1989-1991): 9.

²⁵⁹ The Matching Grant Scheme was introduced in April 1990. Under the scheme, art groups that had obtained commercial sponsorship for their productions were eligible to be awarded a matching grant from the CPA.

²⁶⁰ 1997 Policy Address of Hong Kong: 111.

Setting up this general frame that emphasized a “cultural return” (*wenhua huigui* 文化回歸) to Chinese culture and a continuation of an “East meet West” cultural cosmopolitanism, the statement was then transformed to detailed programmes that were carried out by various government bodies, such as the Education Bureau, the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (ADC) and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD). Again, these programmes were subjected to constant amendments based on the effectiveness of their operations and on public opinion. Finally, in 2003, the Culture and Heritage Commission summarized these years of administrative experience and submitted a Policy Recommendation Report. The 54-page report contained detailed policy suggestions that covered a wide range of cultural aspects, including Hong Kong’s cultural position, arts education, cultural facilities, resource deployment and institutional framework.

5.3.2 Liang Hanyong and the YCOC

The notion of “cultural return”, proposed by the HKSAR government, indeed changed the unfavorable market-driven environment for Chinese art forms. It also became the cultural-political context of Liang Hanyong’s Peking Opera career in Hong Kong. Born in Suzhou, China, Liang began his Peking Opera training in 1972, when he was twelve years old, at the Suzhou Peking Opera Troupe in Jiangsu province. This was during the Cultural Revolution, when traditional Peking Opera had been banned. Although the ban had loosened at the time, the so-called Revolutionary Model Opera (*geming yangban xi* 革命樣板戲) was still the dominant theatrical form. For this reason, Liang’s first few years of training focused exclusively on the eight most popular model opera plays, such as *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (*Zhiqu Weihushan* 智取威虎山) and *The Legend of the Red Lantern* (*Hongdeng Ji* 紅燈記), although the generic performing skills required to perform these plays were similar to those needed for traditional plays. It was in 1978, after the end of Cultural Revolution in 1976, when the ban on traditional plays was removed, that Liang started to become acquainted with traditional plays.

At the time when Liang graduated from training school, Hong Kong was economically more developed than the Chinese mainland, and the living standard in Hong Kong was higher. Hoping to make more money, Liang headed to Hong Kong in 1982. During his first decade in Hong Kong, he worked in a factory, with no use for his professional training. In 1995, having learned that the leader of an amateur Peking Opera troupe in Hong Kong, Li Shaohua 李少華, was emigrating to Canada, he took this opportunity to take over the troupe and renamed it the Hong Kong Youth of Chinese Opera College. As he remembered when I interviewed him in 2014, he immediately faced a great challenge, because many of the group’s original members quit for various reasons. In response, Liang decided to abandon the troupe’s old amateur basis, and restructured it as a “professional one-person-troupe.” He released all members and kept only one administrative employee. When the opportunities to perform presented themselves, he would seek temporary assistance by qualified people who were available through his network on the mainland. From then on, he gradually gained a reputation as an active Peking Opera practitioner in Hong Kong. Evidence of this was the endorsement of his work by the

cultural support offices of the HKSAR government, which came in the form of constant funding.

5.3.3 Peking Opera under the post-1997 policy

5.3.3.1 The Arts Development Council

Under the post-1997 cultural policy, most cultural support measures were carried out by the Arts Development Council (ADC) and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department. The ADC was the product of CPA's reformation in 1995. As a statutory authority, the government grants the ADC the power to distribute a considerable portion of the annual government funding for cultural affairs. Cultural support from the ADC is mainly through organization-based and project-based direct funding.

Clearly, an increase in the ADC's funding for Peking Opera troupes and related projects means increased government support for the genre. Here are the ADC's financial data showing its funding to Peking Opera troupes and/or projects in Hong Kong from the financial years of 1994/95 to 2014/15. Rough equivalents of the funding amounts to US Dollars are also given for reference:

Year	Amount (HKD/USD)	Year	Amount (HKD/USD)
1994/95	87,000 / 11,230	2005/06	672,000 / 86,710
1995/96	129,000 / 16,650	2006/07	637,000 / 82,190
1996/97	251,000 / 32,390	2007/08	874,404 / 112,830
1997/98	652,000 / 84,130	2008/09	1,140,000 / 147,100
1998/99	540,000 / 69,680	2009/10	900,000 / 116,130
1999/2000	726,000 / 93,680	2010/11	900,000 / 116,130
2000/01	918,000 / 118,450	2011/12	1,286,603 / 166,010
2001/02	781,000 / 100,770	2012/13	998,000 / 128,770
2002/03	779,000 / 100,520	2013/14	1,050,000 / 135,480
2003/04	653,000 / 84,260	2014/15	1,050,000 / 135,480
2004/05	636,000 / 82,060		

Table 5.2. ADC's funding to local Peking Opera troupes/projects from the financial years of 1994/95 to 2014/15.²⁶¹

The more than tenfold increase is remarkable, even if we take inflation during these two decades into account. In particular, there is a large increase in total funding from 1996/97 to 1997/98. This was the year when a re-structuring of functional committees in the ADC occurred. A new traditional Chinese Theatre Committee (*xiqu weiyuanhui* 戲曲委員會) was formed and separated from the Drama and Traditional Performances Committee.²⁶² It was

²⁶¹ Source: Hong Kong Arts Development Council, Annual report (1994/95 – 2014/15).

²⁶² The working group for traditional Chinese theatre, which was formed in the year 1990-91, was structured

also after this reorganization that, for the first time, Peking Opera troupes were awarded “One Year Grants,” which were designed to provide more holistic support to art groups. Of course, this does not imply that the ADC only funded Peking Opera. In fact, Cantonese opera is still the traditional Chinese theatrical genre that receives the biggest portion of funding from the ADC, and some other forms such as Shaoxing Opera (*yueju* 越劇) are also funded occasionally. My point is to stress the noticeable increase of the government’s support of Peking Opera, in particular right after the HKSAR government’s proposal of the notion of a “cultural return”.

According to Liang, one significant highlight of the ADC’s funding to the YCOC was when they received a “Commissioned Projects Grant”. Under this grant scheme, the ADC funds projects that “aim to develop a favorable environment for local arts development.”²⁶³ A general description of the overall goal is given for each project, and art practitioners or groups are then invited to submit proposals and compete via open tendering. For instance, in 2008, the ADC initiated a “School *Xiqu* Education Project” under the scheme. Together with three Cantonese Opera troupes and two traditional Chinese puppetry troupes, the YCOC was chosen to carry out the project with a proposal to conduct Peking Opera training classes in primary and secondary schools.

According to Liang, four schools signed up for the programme out of a hundred invitations he had sent out. He developed a three-year teaching plan for each school, which was divided into three stages of training. The first was foundational skills, such as stage steps, body movements and basic martial arts moves with bare hands or prop weapons. In the second stage, he divided students into different groups according to role types and taught them associated skills. Once they were comfortable with their role types, Liang moved on to the third stage, in which several excerpt plays were rehearsed. Classes in each school were scheduled twice a week, at ninety minutes per class, after normal school time. The finale of this programme was a joint-school graduation performance, in which students from all four schools presented their learning outcomes in front of an audience. In particular, the majority did group performance of isolated skills, while some outstanding students were given the opportunity to perform the rehearsed excerpt plays in full make-up and costumes.

Despite the seemingly smooth completion of the programme, Liang considered it a failure, for two reasons. First was the small number of participating schools. As he pointed out, the amount of funding the ADC would actually give out for the project depended on the number of participating schools. Four was far fewer than he had expected, especially when he hoped for a higher budget to cover the costs of props, costumes, logistics for the classes, and production of the graduation performances. Secondly, he was concerned with the students’ lack of discipline. Compared to a traditional-style training school, Peking Opera teachers in recent decades possess far less power in disciplining their students according to Liang. For example, beating students would be seen as abuse nowadays. Also, the ADC advocated a leisurely nature of the programme, in which no serious in-class assessment was encouraged.

within the Drama and Traditional Performances Committee during ADC’s reformation in 1995.

²⁶³ <http://www.hkadc.org.hk/en/content/web.do?id=ff80818121cfed6e0121d3f97b1b0003>. Accessed on 10 June 2015.

Liang noted that this made it hard to ensure the students' commitment to training, and as a result, low class attendance in all four schools became a serious problem for the whole programme. Liang said that students would often skip classes with the excuse of being occupied by other academic subjects or other hobbies, slowing down class progress and causing administrative problems, as the attendance record was also a determining factor for the final funding amount. Facing these challenges, Liang decided to give up on school training activities after finishing this project in 2011.



Figure 5.1. Liang Hanyong tutoring secondary school students in a foundational skills class. (Photo by YCOC, 2008)

香港青年京劇學院主辦
仁濟醫院第二中學協辦

學校戲曲教育計劃(四) 「校園弘揚育京苗」聯校結業演出

藝術總監：梁漢勇
藝術顧問：羅家英 南鳳
音樂領導：李樹祥 吳鐵平



節目：基本功、形體身段、把子功、《賣水》及《拾玉鐲》片段

崑劇：《乾元山》

京劇：《貴妃醉酒》由香港青年京劇學院與上水惠州公立學校聯合演出

崑劇：《林冲夜奔》由香港青年京劇學院與大坑東宣道小學聯合演出

節目全長約2小時

日期：2011年9月24日(星期六) 時間：下午2時30分

場地：大埔文娛中心演奏廳

票價：HK\$40

節目查詢：9312 9578 (香港青年京劇學院)

門票現於各城市電腦售票處、網上及信用卡訂票熱線發售

設有六十歲或以上高齡人士、殘疾人士、全日制學生半價優惠

票務查詢：2734 9009

信用卡訂票電話：2111 5999

網上訂票：<http://www.urbtix.hk>

電郵地址：hkyco2006@yahoo.com.hk

 香港藝術發展局
Hong Kong Arts Development Council
藝發局資助計劃
This project is commissioned by the ADC

如遇特殊情況，主辦機構保留更換節目及表演者的權利

Figure 5.2. Poster of the graduation performance of YCOC's Peking Opera training programme in 2011.

5.3.3.2 The Leisure and Cultural Services Department

In terms of the amount of funding received, Liang engaged much more with the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD). This department was formed in 2000 as a department of the main government structure, to replace the Urban Council and the Regional Council. The LCSD inherited all powers and responsibilities of its predecessors in cultural and sports affairs. In addition to distributing government funding, it also manages cultural venues in Hong Kong. Therefore, besides offering direct funding to art groups, it also establishes venue-based funding schemes.

In particular, there are two funding schemes that have involved Peking Opera troupes as frequent participants. The first one is the Artist-in-Residence Scheme, which was first introduced by the Provisional Urban Council (a transitional government body between Urban Council and LCSD) in 1998, continued by LCSD, and ended in 2007. Under this scheme, via open tendering, selected individual arts practitioners and groups would be funded and assigned to a cultural venue for a period of time, where they would conduct their proposed activities. The residential basis of this scheme, according to the official phrasing, aimed to provide a more sustainable means of establishing artist(s)-community relationships, providing “opportunities for the community to gain insight into an artist’s work”.²⁶⁴ At the same time, from the artist’s perspective, the scheme provided a guarantee of regular, funded performing opportunities. This is particularly helpful for newly formed self-financed art groups to survive before they can build up a solid audience base.

This applies very much to Liang and YCOC in 1998. As a young Peking Opera troupe, it was one of the first recipients of funding from this scheme, and was assigned to a six-month residence in the Ngau Chi Wan Civil Centre, the main cultural venue of the East Kowloon area. There Liang conducted a programme that consisted of three courses in foundational skills and a graduation performance, which aimed to introduce Peking Opera to the community through personal learning experience. In the next four years, the troupe was re-selected by the LCSD as the artist-in-residence of the same venue, and Liang basically repeated the same programme every year. He also conducted short-term courses in a similar fashion with funding of the LCSD’s “Community Cultural Ambassador Scheme” (to which I will return below) in 2009, and as self-financed activities throughout the last decade. In the following section I will illustrate what the courses were like in terms of technical facts (class setting), production (selection of teaching staff) and consumption (background of participants).

Each short-term course focused on one of the following generic elements in Peking Opera performing: on the performing side, body movements and martial arts moves; on the musical side, a Chinese two-string fiddle used in Peking Opera called *jinghu* 京胡 and Chinese “gongs and drums” (*luogu* 鑼鼓). Each course consisted of around twenty classes of two hours each. It spanned three to six months, with the classes meeting weekly or twice a week. Targeting mainly people of working age in the community, classes were scheduled to start

²⁶⁴ Leisure and Cultural Services Department, 2002 Annual Report (<http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/dept/annual2002/en/cultural02.php>). Accessed on 15 June 2015.

after normal working hours, usually around seven or eight in the evening. In most cases, different courses within a programme were scheduled on different days of the week, so that Liang could teach all performing courses by himself. For the instruments courses, he turned to his network of Cantonese Opera musicians in Guangzhou, where he found some musicians who had received serious training in Peking Opera training schools, but then moved on to a career in Cantonese Opera troupes. I took part in some of these courses myself in 2008 and 2009.

The pedagogy of these courses can be summarised as numerous repetitions of the learning content by students after the instructor(s) and hand-to-hand coaching for refinements, with the use of notation in instruments courses depending largely on convention. For example in the Chinese gongs and drums course that I participated in 2009, the traditional notation, the *luogujing* 鑼鼓經, was really an unnecessary reference.²⁶⁵ Students did not learn how to read it, and the instructor only occasionally wrote down a rhythmic pattern in *luogujing* notation as some sort of notes that students could jot down and take home. On the contrary, numbered notation (Ziffersystem) was used extensively in the *jinghu* course. Students would learn to read it and play some basic accompanying melodies from it. However in either case, musical embellishments that are difficult to notate were still taught in the traditional means of oral transmission.

Some interesting observations can be made about the course participants. Firstly, among the usual twenty people in each class, middle-aged citizens formed the majority of participants, with the remaining part formed by young adults and teenagers. There were also occasional participants from older and younger age groups, including people in their sixties as well as primary school students. In terms of gender, female participants formed the majority: on average only two males were present. Apart from these general observations, the participants' artistic background was noteworthy: many of them had some degree of experience in Cantonese opera. Among this group of "experienced" participants, the majority were amateur performers who frequently engaged in Cantonese opera performances or operatic singing activities. A few were professionals. For example, when I participated in the Chinese percussion course in 2009, I became acquainted with a professional Cantonese Opera playwright named Mr. Liu. In an informal conversation, I asked him why he was taking the course, and he answered:

Percussion music in Peking Opera has become an integral part of Cantonese Opera's music. Learning this will help me a lot in writing scripts that are more compatible with the music.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ *Luogujing* is a traditional notation system for Chinese percussion, and is commonly used in traditional Chinese theatre. It uses Chinese characters, such as *cang* 倉 and *cai* 才. In light of the fact that a typical percussion ensemble in the theatre consists of four or more instruments, this system does not notate rhythms for each individual instrument. Instead, each character represents a certain combination of instruments, and the choice of character is based on a mimic of the resulting sound from that instruments combination. For example, *cang* represents the whole ensemble, and *cai* means all but the big gong (*dalu* 大鑼).

²⁶⁶ Mr. Liu (personal correspondence. 17 July 2009).

This comment reaffirms the close connection between Cantonese Opera and Peking Opera in Hong Kong. In my view, this connection may also have subtly influenced the choice of courses Liang decided to offer. By organizing these courses, he could include Cantonese Opera practitioners in his target groups, so that a high participation rate for the courses would be guaranteed. This also suggests that even with government support, Peking Opera in contemporary Hong Kong is also shaped by market forces. Activities were co-determined by commercial motives as much as by artistic motives.

Teaching and performing are the most effective ways of introducing a performing art when interactions are carried out through face-to-face encounters. As such, it may well be the case that the residential, single-venue nature of the Artist-in-Residence Scheme discouraged artists from conducting performing activities and, hence, self-limited the variety of activities available to respective communities. Provided that artists were expected to focus on their residence community, they would have to come up with new programmes constantly in order to keep the limited target audience entertained if they wanted to do performances. This is financially very difficult for most of the scheme recipients, because they are small to mid-sized, self-financed art groups. Alternatively, they would have to attract new audiences from outside their residence community, which was practically difficult and, moreover, not encouraged by the authorities if we consider the initial aim of the scheme.

The “Community Cultural Ambassador Scheme” (CCAS), introduced by the government to encourage performing activities in local communities, provided a solution for this dilemma. Also introduced by the Provisional Urban Council a year after the Artists-in-Residence Scheme, the CCAS is different in that individual art practitioners and groups are not obliged to conduct their activities at the same venue. On the contrary, they are expected to “conduct a wide range of outreach activities that are both educational and fun at various indoor and outdoor venues, including public spaces in the community.”²⁶⁷ Since 2004, YCOC has been a frequent participant in the scheme with its thematic performances. In the following section I will illustrate the organizational details of the performances, again, in terms of technical facts, production and consumption.

In most cases, YCOC’s programmes under the scheme were performing tours around local communities.²⁶⁸ They gave an average of fifteen performances within the funded period, usually two to three months. The tour covered a wide range of communities in terms of numbers – if we use the official 18-district division to define communities in Hong Kong, the tour in 2009 covered eleven districts with thirteen performances, and in 2014 the number went up to fifteen with twenty performances. Performances could be attended for free, and were held in community halls, which are government-managed venues for communities to gather and organize collective activities. Liang would set a theme for each tour, for instance, to introduce the audience to a particular role type or performer. For example, the four legendary female role performers, Mei Lanfang, Cheng Yanqiu 程砚秋, Xun Huisheng 荀慧生 and Shang Xiaoyun 尚小雲, were the themes from 2011 to 2014. A repertoire that

²⁶⁷ <http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/ab/en/ccas.php>. Accessed on 15 June 2015.

²⁶⁸ The only exception was in 2009, in which YCOC also conducted four short-term courses.

consisted of several excerpts from the signature plays of each particular role type / performer would be set, and each performance would include several excerpts from the repertoire, forming a show of about two hours in length. Classical excerpts that featured fancy acrobatics were also included, as Liang thought this would be visually more appealing for the audience, who were mostly non-specialists.

Due to the “professional one-person-troupe” setting, Liang had to find all his performers, musicians and backstage crew from elsewhere. He recruited them from various sources, mainly on the Chinese mainland. Liang usually targeted junior performers in troupes or students in training schools, as they were the most likely to be available to work with another troupe for a period of time. Nevertheless, this also created an organizational limitation, because it meant that the tour could only be held in summer, since this was the only practical time for young performers to be away from their home troupes and schools. The second source was Peking Opera performers who had been trained in Hong Kong. Although few in number, there were some graduates from the four disbanded local training schools who had stayed in Hong Kong and practised Peking Opera on an amateur or freelance basis. For example, Li Juhua, mentioned in chapter 4, engaged frequently with YCOC. For the music ensemble, Liang usually looked to mainland Peking Opera troupes or training schools, but sometimes also to Hong Kong or mainland Cantonese Opera troupes for percussionists. The backstage crew was usually made up of volunteers, who were mostly former participants of the short-term courses.

With the cast assembled, all members would gather in Hong Kong several weeks prior to the first performance for rehearsals. Since the repertoire was made up of popular plays, the “temporary troupe” usually did not need much time to rehearse, especially since Liang always approached those who already knew the plays in the repertoire. In general, the staging of these community performances was in a conventional style, except that some stage practises were downscaled. For example, conventionally there would be four sidekick characters entering the stage before the entrance of main character, but Liang would usually use only two. According to Liang, this arrangement was necessary because of the limited production budget provided by the scheme, and the smaller stage size of the community halls compared to a normal Peking Opera stage.

Compared to the short-term courses, the community performances attracted a very different audience in terms of age, in which senior citizens dominated. The phenomenon was common on weekday performances, while a comparatively balanced distribution of age groups among audiences was seen in weekend performances. I also saw parents with children of primary school age in a few performances. In addition to the obvious time clash between the show time of weekdays performances and normal working hours, the dominance of senior citizens in the audience could also be explained by another reason. As Liang explained, there was a guideline in all community halls that no promotional materials could be distributed or put on before the day of performance. Because of this, he and his colleagues could only do publicity in the office of the district councillors, where many senior citizens would go seeking assistance on social affairs, or homes for the elderly. This directly resulted in the relatively high average age of the audiences. Also, unlike the short-term courses, the audiences were

more balanced in terms of gender.

At the same time, I observed a similarity between participants of short-term courses and community performances: in both settings, a considerable proportion of the audience had a certain background in Cantonese opera. In an informal conversation with Miss Lau, a temporary manager of the Shatin Wai Community Hall in the New Territories, after a performance in 2009, she told me that many of the audience there were also frequent spectators at Cantonese opera performances and operatic singing concerts held in the hall. This fact leads to an interesting comparison, in which a similar artistic background found in these two groups of participants both became their motivation to join YCOC's activities, while they acted on different assumptions. The course participants were aware of differences and similarities between the two genres, and this knowledge motivated them to join the courses. On the contrary, the senior citizens went to community performances because they could *not* differentiate between the two genres. Indeed, in the same conversation, the Community Hall manager also told me that many senior citizens came to the performance because they thought it was a Cantonese Opera performance. Such a misunderstanding was also observed in some other communities, when some audiences members told me that they had been invited by their friends to come to a Cantonese Opera performance. In other words, their motivation was generated by the combination of their preference for Cantonese Opera and their inability to distinguish it from Peking Opera. However, they did not seem bothered by the misunderstanding, as they appeared equally fond of this "new" form of entertainment. Their post-performance comments showed that they were actually amused by the acrobatic and the choreographed fighting scenes, as well as the performers' skill of scenario simulation.²⁶⁹ The language barrier was also overcome to a certain degree, as plots and lyrics were projected on a screen that was set up on one side of the stage. (See figure 5.4.)

²⁶⁹ Scenario simulation is a core presentation skill of Peking Opera, in which performers mimic certain scenarios with their body movements and simple props. For example, a performer walks along behind a flag, with a print of wheels on it, to represent riding a vehicle. Another involved a performer rolling an oar in his/her palm, and going up and down to represent a boat ride.



Figure 5.3. Before a YCOC community performance in Sai Ying Pun Community Complex, on Hong Kong Island. (Photo by the author. 11 December 2015)



Figure 5.4. The daughter of Liang Hanyong performed as Concubine Yang in *The Favorite Concubine Becomes Intoxicated* in the community performance. (Photo by the author. 11 December 2015)

5.3.3.3 Other activities of Liang

In addition to the abovementioned government-funded teaching and performing activities, Liang also engaged in private teaching. Again, most of his private students were professional or amateur Cantonese Opera performers, who wished to improve their foundational skills through what was called a more formulated training manner of Peking Opera, or to learn some specific skills that had been integrated into Cantonese Opera.

5.4 Performances by Chinese mainland troupes

The growth of Peking Opera activities produced by local troupes does not mean that performances given by Chinese mainland troupes are totally erased from the scene. Quite the opposite, mainland troupes have never stopped touring Hong Kong after the historical event by Mei Lanfang in 1922. For example, Cheng Yanqiu toured Hong Kong with his Harmonious Troupe (*Minghe She* 鳴和社) in 1923.²⁷⁰ Also recalled in chapter four was the original tour plan of Ma Lianliang, Zhang Junqiu and Yu Zhenfei at the end of 1948 before the unexpectedly long stay afterward. Moreover, many more performances by mainland troupes were documented in the second half of the twentieth century, on which I will elaborate later.

One main theme of the Peking Opera reform on the mainland after the establishment of the PRC was the institutionalization of troupes, by which I mean the establishment of state-owned troupes, at both national and provincial level, and the (re)allocation of performers into these troupes. Though high-profile performers were still an attraction to the audiences, they no longer constituted the cores of the troupes. Such institutionalization was also seen in mainland troupes' tours to Hong Kong in the mid-twentieth century, as advertisements of these tours on local newspapers suggest that the troupes, as a collective group, were featured instead of individual performers. For example, when the Troupe of Chinese Arts visited Hong Kong in 1956, the two leaders – Qiu Shengrong 裘盛戎 and Tan Fuying 譚富英, who were both star performers at the time – were seldom singled out and featured in publicity.²⁷¹ Another example was in 1963 when Ma Lianliang and Zhang Junqiu revisited Hong Kong, this time as members of the Peking Opera Theatre of Beijing.

As noted, the ban on traditional Peking Opera plays in the PRC was lifted in 1978. Performers began to pick up their profession again and the genre gradually revived, as did the “export” of Peking Opera performances by mainland troupes. An inventory of articles and advertisements in the *Great Achievement Magazine* shows that mainland troupes that toured Hong Kong from the 1980s include the China National Peking Opera Company (1979, 1993), the Shanghai Peking Opera Company (1982, 1987, 1992, 1994), the Tianjin Peking Opera Troupe (1986), the Tianjin Youth Peking Opera Troupe (1987, 1989, 1990, 1995), the Yunnan Peking Opera Troupe (1988), the Jiangsu Peking Opera Troupe (1988), the Shandong Peking Opera Troupe (1988), the Peking Opera Troupe of The Political Department of the Beijing Military Region (1988) and the Shenyang Peking Opera Troupe (1993). These tour

²⁷⁰ Li 2007: 307.

²⁷¹ *New Life Evening Post*, 11 and 20 June, 7 July 1956.

performances were mostly organized by private parties. First of all, they were organized by individual, wealthy Peking Opera lovers, such as the previously cited example of Shen Jicheng, Sun Lanting and Zhang Shankun in organizing Ma Lianliang's tour in 1948. After 1977, when the Hong Kong United Arts Entertainment Company Limited was established, it became the organizer of most tour performances from the mainland.

In addition to Hong Kong, the export of Peking Opera performances from the mainland was worldwide. However, in many parts of the world there was little follow-up in subsequent decades after the initial curiosity value of the revived Peking Opera had worn off. On the contrary, tour performances in Hong Kong maintained their regularity and indeed gradually gained government support. For example, the government-funded Hong Kong Arts Festival, which was first organized in 1973, started inviting mainland Peking Opera troupes in 1976.²⁷² Since then, mainland Peking Opera productions became an occasional highlight of the Festival. After 1997, they even became a regular programme, with the China National Peking Opera Company and the Shanghai Peking Opera Company being the two most frequent visitors. At present, mainland Peking Opera productions are mostly presented by the Hong Kong government in the Hong Kong Arts Festival and the Chinese Opera Festival, both held annually.

Especially before the 1970s, tour performances by mainland Peking Opera troupes were often major occasions in Hong Kong society. A review of local newspapers shows that public attention spiked and vigorous discussions on Peking Opera continued during the whole period of the tours. For example, *Wenhui Bao* 文匯報 (Wenwei Po) gave full coverage of the Shanghai Youth Peking Opera Troupe tour in 1961, reporting the troupe's schedule and the performers' daily activities, along with critical reviews and more general articles on the subject of Peking Opera.²⁷³ Even though general enthusiasm naturally waned once the tours were over, one could still find some media coverage, for instance, in cultural publications such as the *Great Achievement Magazine*. My personal experience in attending these tour performances from 2005 to 2013 also suggests that they still received good receptions, as attendance rates were high and I heard many positive comments from the spectators. In my view, there are two reasons for the success of these performances in maintaining good receptions. Firstly, they still served as sites of nostalgia for the considerable mainland immigrant population in Hong Kong. Secondly, the Hong Kong government made a great efforts in promoting them as a tourist attraction. For example, the two abovementioned art festivals are regularly featured by the Hong Kong Tourism Board.²⁷⁴

5.5 Post-1997 Hong Kong's national yet local identity

With reference to the rebirth of Peking Opera in the local cultural scene in the 1980s and a noticeable increase in government's support to the genre from the 1990s to the present, I

²⁷² <http://www.hk.artsfestival.org/tc/about-us/past-programmes/past-programmes-1973.html>. Accessed on 28 July 2015.

²⁷³ *Wenhui Bao*. 17 December 1961 to 18 January 1962.

²⁷⁴ <http://www.discoverhongkong.com/tc/see-do/arts-performance/highlight-events/index.jsp>. Accessed on 28 July 2015.

argue that the HKSAR government showed an ideology that values Peking Opera as a means to construct a “national yet local” identity of Hong Kong. On the one hand, they still shared the nationalizing discourse on Peking Opera, which was created by Chinese intellectuals in the early twentieth century. In other words, they still saw the genre as a representative of, or even an equivalent to, “Chinese culture”. It is noteworthy that their definition of “Chinese culture” is holistic, not to say abstract – neither traditional nor contemporary, neither authentic nor invented – and in fact a straightforward reference to the cultural essence of a nation-state.

One good example of such a subscription to the nationalizing discourse occurred when the newly formed HKSAR government brought up the aforesaid notion of “cultural return to China” as one of the major directions of local cultural development. The ADC responded immediately with the formation of the *Xiqu* Committee and a considerable increase of funding for Peking Opera activities. In addition, two other episodes in Liang’s career support my argument, reinforcing the impression of widespread subscription to the nationalizing discourse. The first was when Liang was conducting the school training programme with ADC funding. As he recalled, the ADC required a graduation performance as a final assessment of the quality of the current programme and future funding potential. The assessment team included both ADC officials and several professional Peking Opera performers from the Chinese mainland. Apparently the performance was badly reviewed by the professionals, mainly for the sub-standard performance by the students. Nevertheless, the ADC officials did not seem to find this much of a problem. They not only appreciated Liang’s work in introducing Peking Opera to primary and secondary school students, but also showed a positive attitude toward YCOC’s potential in receiving future grants.²⁷⁵ Such disregard by an official body for professional comments could, in my view, indeed be interpreted as reflecting an attitude that rates the symbolic value of Peking Opera in Hong Kong over the artistic quality of the presentation itself. In other words, Peking Opera was to them part of a national culture that needed to be introduced to the society, even at the cost of low performance standards. The second anecdote was more self-evident, in which a LCSD official said to Liang, in an opening ceremony of CCAS, that “the national drama has to be promoted in Hong Kong.”²⁷⁶

While displaying a cultural-nationalistic vision, in practice the government has shown a desire to distinguish “Chinese culture in Hong Kong” from “Chinese culture on the mainland” by stressing the differences in practice between these two places. In other words, while subscribing to the nationalizing discourse, which had emerged from the Chinese mainland throughout the twentieth century, it also tried to claim a certain degree of Hong Kong local identity. Here I quote again Tung Chee-hwa’s statement about Hong Kong’s cultural position in his first Policy Address in 1997, which offered a first glimpse into this dual approach:

While we deepen our understanding of Chinese history and culture, we will continue to develop our own diverse cultural characteristics ... Hong Kong stands in a unique position in this process,

²⁷⁵ Liang said that it was him who gave up applying for another similar grants because of the challenges faced.

²⁷⁶ Liang Hanyong (interview. 17 August 2014).

able to act as the centre of exchange for China to learn about western cultures and for the world to learn about Chinese culture.²⁷⁷

This positioning of a co-existence of “cultural return” and “cultural cosmopolitanism” was also seen in the organization of the Chinese Opera Festival. According to the official statement of this annual cultural event, which was first organized in 2010, one main motivation for the LCSD to organize it was to “profit from the geographical advantage of Hong Kong, and make it the centre of traditional Chinese drama in Asia.”²⁷⁸

One may find the above two quotes obscure – what is the “unique position” of Hong Kong? What is the “geographical advantage” of Hong Kong? In my view, such obscurity also reflects the government’s hesitation to make explicit claims about local identity. Its political affiliation with the People’s Republic gives it little room for an explicit claim. Therefore, while it kept stressing the cultural diversity of the city, due to its long exposure to European culture, it still positioned Chinese culture at the top of the cultural hierarchy. Nevertheless, the words of Wang Weimin, who supervised the LCSD for the programmes of the Chinese Opera Festival, may provide an explanation of the difference between practicing traditional Chinese theatre in Hong Kong and on the mainland in the contemporary era:

On the other hand, under the premise of “one country, two systems”, Hong Kong is a capitalist city. There is no government-operated troupe of traditional Chinese theatre, but a multi-dimensional cultural market that caters to the varied cultural demands of a multi-dimensional society ... Hong Kong is different from the Chinese mainland in the sense that there has not been any interference with the cultural field from political movements. For example, no frameworks are set by political ideologies, nor is there the influence by revolutionary model operas. It can be said that audiences of traditional Chinese theatre in Hong Kong value the art form according to universal values and aesthetics. Therefore, they appreciate any traditional Chinese theatrical genre that has real quality.²⁷⁹

In other words, in Wang’s view, compared with the highly politicized cultural environment in twentieth-century mainland China, a free, capitalist cultural market that is relatively free from political interference is an advantage that makes practicing and presenting traditional Chinese theatre in Hong Kong profoundly different from doing so on the mainland – even though this very political flexibility of the Hong Kong cultural climate gave Peking Opera a hard time in the 1960s and 1970s.

The articulation of two seemingly polarized identities in the same body at the same time – in this case national and local – is not entirely new in the realm of traditional Chinese theatre. Ashley Thorpe’s discussion of Ione Meyer’s Peking Opera performances in the UK highlights the hybridity of British-Chinese identity demonstrated by Meyer’s performing body. Borrowing Judith Butler’s poststructuralist theory of gender performance, he reads such

²⁷⁷ 1997 Policy Address of Hong Kong: 111.

²⁷⁸ Liao 2012: 8.

²⁷⁹ Wang 2013: 24.

hybridity as a deconstruction of the association of Peking Opera with Chinese identity, arguing that while the genre might be perceived by the Western public as a signifier of a relatively more stable and homogeneous Chinese identity, Meyer's performance challenges this by putting forth "the derivative nature of Chinese identity as fundamentally connected to the 'Other' [Western] within the self [Chinese]."²⁸⁰

This analysis is directly relevant to my research, in the sense that the notion of "local identity" may also be viewed as derivative in nature, and as unable to stand alone without the constructed reference to the "national". More importantly, homogeneous assumption of Chinese identity is challenged in both cases, albeit in different geographical frameworks. Thorpe's research focuses on a diaspora setting which is – given the white British identity of Meyer – set broadly within the intercontinental and intercultural framework of "orient" and "occident"; given the political affiliation of Hong Kong to the Chinese mainland, my work focuses on a more intimate, intra-China framework, and leads to the observation of the Hong Kong government's agenda to demonstrate "multi-Chineseness", by means of traditional Chinese theatre, within a homogeneous Chinese discourse. Also, Thorpe's discussion of the simultaneous building of various identities proceeds from a perspective of theatrical performativity, meaning that his analysis is based on Meyer's performance on stage (i.e. a Western body performing Chinese theatre). By contrast, my discussion proceeds from a paratheatrical perspective, showing how the Hong Kong government performed their identity by differentiating themselves from mainland conventions in practicing traditional Chinese theatre.

5.6 Conclusion

In *Performing Arts, The Economic Dilemma: a Study of Problems Common to Theater, Opera, Music, and Dance* (1966), William Baumol and William Bowen developed a model of "cost disease", which describes a phenomenon that involves a rise of salaries in jobs without a correspondent rise of labor productivity in some job markets, such as that of the performing arts. Even though their model is now half a century old, I believe it remains useful in considering the situation of Peking Opera in Hong Kong. Baumol and Bowen used this model to legitimize state funding for art activities, which should compensate for the rising cost of art productions.²⁸¹ This explanation for state funding was open to some criticisms. For example, some criticized them for ignoring the fact that art groups in modern days have actually adopted various labor-saving measures in order to cut down production costs²⁸² – such as the idea of "professional one-man-troupes" in the case of Peking Opera in Hong Kong. More importantly, Baumol and Bowen offered another perspective to justify state funding from the concept of "mixed commodities". According to them, "mixed commodities" are "goods and services whose characteristics are partly private, partly public."²⁸³ They then gave the example of public education, from which both individual consumers (students) and society as

²⁸⁰ Thorpe 2011a: 40.

²⁸¹ Baumol & Bowen 1966.

²⁸² Laing 2003: 315.

²⁸³ Baumol & Bowen 1966: 381.

a whole will benefit, and went further in an attempt to categorize performing arts as “mixed commodities”:

If the performing arts are mixed commodities which confer direct benefits on those who attend a performance but which also offer benefits to the community as a whole, government support of the arts might well be completely consistent with the desires of the entire community.²⁸⁴

Baumol and Bowen tried to justify this argument by giving four advantages that performing arts can bring to the society: prestige to the nation, conferment of attendants to other business, involvement of future generations, and educational contribution.²⁸⁵ From this perspective, in order to justify the Hong Kong government’s funding for Peking Opera, the question becomes: Does Peking Opera bring any advantage to Hong Kong society? If so, what are these advantages? In other words, what is the social value of Peking Opera that makes it worth government’s funding?

In this chapter I have illustrated how cultural politics in Hong Kong, from the early colonial era until today, have affected the development of Peking Opera in the city. Firstly, the liberal governance ideology of the Colonial government and the collaborative relationship between the government and the Chinese elite in Hong Kong set a relatively free cultural ground for Chinese art forms, different from a conventional vision of colonialism as bent on eradicating local forms. Then, from the construction of the new City Hall in the 1960s to the new cultural infrastructures and administrative measures by the Colonial government in the 1980s, official encouragement of public access to cultural activities also passively contributed to the survival and then the rebirth of Peking Opera. After 1997, under the notion of “cultural return”, the symbolic value of Peking Opera as a “national” culture was presented by the government as a social value, and this provided it with the legitimacy to actively fund this genre. My case study of Liang Hanyong and YCOC has illustrated how government sponsorship worked in practice through various government bodies, and how local Peking Opera troupes made use of this funding to promote the genre in local communities by different kinds of activities.

Nevertheless, my case study of Peking Opera in Hong Kong also shows that the post-1997 cultural position defined by the HKSAR government was not purely nationalistic, but also displayed a subtle claim of Hong Kong local identity. In fact, such a heterogenous Chinese identity was also shared by local Peking Opera practitioners. In the next chapter, we will see how Tang Yuen-ha, another active Peking Opera performer in Hong Kong, perceived Peking Opera in Hong Kong, and how this perception led her in a quest of a local way to present the genre.

²⁸⁴ *ibid.* 382.

²⁸⁵ *ibid.* 382-385.

Chapter Six /

Local Innovation in the Twenty-First Century

Tang Yuen-ha

In the previous chapter, through the career of Liang Hanyong, I discussed the role of government support in facilitating local reception of Peking Opera in present-day Hong Kong. Liang is not the only Peking Opera performer who has been supported by the government. Tang Yuen-ha 鄧宛霞, who is a Hong Kong-born and mainland-trained Peking Opera performer, has also received substantial government funding for her career in Hong Kong. I chose Liang as the focus of the previous chapter because his story reveals much about the interaction between local performers and government funding bodies; as such, his situation tells us more about the influence of cultural politics on Peking Opera in Hong Kong. Not that local cultural politics is not relevant to Tang's case – it matters to her greatly, as evidenced by her involvement in official funding mechanisms, such as the ADC's grant schemes and LCSD's audience-building programmes discussed in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, Tang's story relates more directly to the localization of Peking Opera's presentation, by which I mean the form in which she takes the genre to its wider audience. While both artists share the same goal of facilitating local reception of Peking Opera, Liang does so through regular performances only, but Tang has been trying to find a "Hong Kong way" through her invention of what I will translate as 'guided demonstration' (*daoshang* 導賞, literally 'guided appreciation') – an innovative, interactive mode to present the "national drama" to local audiences. Notably, she has created something new in the presentation of Peking Opera, while keeping the performing practices (for example, acting and music) authentic and traditional.

My main question in this chapter is: how does Tang localize Peking Opera activities and discourse, and how has this affected Peking Opera's reception in Hong Kong since the 2000s? Through a discussion of Tang's career with the Jingkun Theatre (Jingkun Juchang 京崑劇場), a local Peking Opera troupe that she established in the 1980s, I hope to unfold her long quest in localizing the genre. Initially, she strongly subscribed to the mainstream, mainland discourse of Peking Opera as a "national" phenomenon. Toward the century's end, however, her increasingly traditionalist views toward Peking Opera departed from what I will call the "contemporary" approach to the genre on the mainland (I will return to this usage below). This turn led her to rethink her artistic direction and eventually led to a major change in her productions. From "contemporary" plays in the 1990s, which echoed the mainland trend, she moved on to traditional plays and, more significantly, to the invention of her signature device of guided demonstration. I will discuss both the innovative nature of guided demonstration and Tang's motivation for inventing it.

The phenomenon of guided demonstration did more than just raise awareness of the localization of Peking Opera. It was also seen as something initiated in the artistic "periphery" that influenced the presentational dimension of the genre in the "core" area that is the mainland. Hence, I also ask: How did Tang's invention of guided demonstration concretely

affect Peking Opera in the Chinese mainland? I will show how mainland performers became acquainted with the idea of guided demonstration, and discuss how this idea moved them to revisit their method of facilitating the reception of Peking Opera by younger generations in the twenty-first century, and how this led to changes in mainland's presentational conventions of the genre.

6.1 Tang Yuen-ha and the Jingkun Theatre

Tang Yuen-ha was born into an upper-class family in Hong Kong. Her grandfather was Cen Chunxuan 岑春煊, a high-ranking official in the late Qing and early Republican periods. As a result of her family background she was able to explore both Chinese and Western high culture from an early age. In particular, as her mother who loved Peking Opera had regular operatic singing lessons at home, Tang was exposed to the genre from her earliest childhood. When she was six, she joined the Spring and Autumn Drama School and received informal training from Zhang Suqiu, who was the founder of the school. This informal training continued until she graduated from secondary school in 1974.²⁸⁶ Upon graduation, she went to Switzerland and France to study Western classical music. She stayed in Europe for eight years and obtained a degree in piano pedagogy from the Conservatoire de Musique de Genève in Switzerland.

Nevertheless, as Tang recalled, even after having completed her studies as a Western music professional and despite having been cut off from Peking Opera when she was in Europe, she still felt more drawn to practicing Peking Opera. Therefore, instead of taking up a career as a pianist, she went to the Chinese mainland in 1983, and privately studied Peking Opera with Yu Zhenfei and Zhang Meijuan 張美娟.²⁸⁷ She eventually became a disciple of Yu in 1985. One year later, she established the Hong Kong Jing Kun Arts Association (renamed as the Jingkun Theatre in 2004), though she herself still spent most of her time in Shanghai. It was not until 1991, after she had won the mainland Plum Blossom Prize (*Meihua Jiang* 梅花獎)²⁸⁸ for her performance in *The Great Heroine* (*Daying Jielie* 大英傑烈), that she resettled in Hong Kong and continued her Peking Opera career with her troupe.

From the outset, the Jingkun Theatre was a self-funded troupe. Similar to YCOC, it was a "one-person troupe", with Tang being the only structurally affiliated performer. Probably because of this, Tang identified herself as an individual performer in the first few years after she had established the troupe. She started performing using the troupe's name in 1990,²⁸⁹ while she still had to collaborate frequently with mainland troupes, for example the Peking Opera Theatre of Beijing, because she was the only structural member of the Jingkun Theatre.²⁹⁰ 1997 was a significant year for the troupe. Firstly, Geng Tianyuan 耿天元 (born

²⁸⁶ *Wenhuibao*, 11 January 2014.

²⁸⁷ Zhang's expertise was in the martial-female-role. She was a member of the Shanghai Jingju Theatre Company since the 1950s. She was teaching in the Shanghai Chinese Opera School when she met Tang.

²⁸⁸ The Plum Blossom Prize is the highest theatrical award in China. The award is presented by the China Theatre Association to top performers of both traditional Chinese theatre and spoken drama.

²⁸⁹ The troupe was named the Tang Yuen-ha Peking and Kunqu Opera Troupe of Hong Kong at that time.

²⁹⁰ <http://www.jingkun.org.hk>. Accessed on 19 August 2015.

1951), who was the former leading performer and director of the Shandong Peking Opera Theatre, joined the troupe. Secondly, the troupe received a first ADC One-Year Grant. With the addition of a renowned performer from the mainland and growing attention and support by the Hong Kong government,²⁹¹ it gradually developed into a productive troupe in Hong Kong, in terms of both performing and educational activities.

Similar to YCOC, the Jingkun Theatre has relied mostly on government funding for its artistic productions and daily operations. For example, in addition to receiving the ADC grants the troupe also participated in the two LCSD's audience-building programmes in the 2000s. Nevertheless, while YCOC is rather conventional and tied to local communities, the Jingkun Theatre shows greater inventiveness and ambition in its productions. In addition to the invention of guided demonstration, to be discussed below, its productions are also often grander in scale, being organized as major events in major theatres in Hong Kong. In my view, this is because the troupe has been supported mainly by ADC's long-term funding, which is more substantial and places fewer constraints on the structure and content of productions by the grant recipient than, for instance, the one-off project grant also by the ADC. Thus, Tang was given more freedom to realize her own artistic taste through her productions.

6.2 The national vision among local performers

Despite the different paths taken by Liang Hanyong and Tang Yuen-ha, they both clearly subscribe to the ideology of Peking Opera as a national genre. It appears that a strong belief in Peking Opera's national status was the main motivation for both to practice it in Hong Kong, as a place where people might not automatically offer it the welcoming reception it enjoyed on the mainland. As Liang said:

I am not saying that I must do this. However, Peking Opera is a theatrical genre that represents the nation (*daibiao guojia* 代表國家), and it should be promoted and carried forward. It represents a national spirit.²⁹²

Tang has expressed similar sentiments. In particular, she has stressed her desire to promote Peking Opera's connotation of traditional Chinese culture:

I will say my goal now does not contradict [the desire to facilitate local reception of Peking Opera]. However, I will further introduce to audiences the connotation of traditional Chinese culture through Peking Opera. My view is that people can love or hate the art form, but the connotation of traditional Chinese culture is beneficial for the whole world.²⁹³

Tang's subscription to this national vision was reflected not only in her upholding of Peking Opera's national status, but also in the echoing of mainland-national trends in

²⁹¹ The Jingkun Theatre became a frequent recipient of ADC's One-Year and, later on, Multi-year Grants. Also, it has been enjoying a constant increase in funding since 1997.

²⁹² Liang Hanyong (interview, 17 August 2014).

²⁹³ Tang Yuen-ha (interview, 25 July 2014).

producing Peking Opera plays. A 1999 Jingkun Theatre production that was adapted from European literature will be discussed as an example below. But first, by way of background, I will provide a brief survey of Peking Opera's development on the mainland after the Cultural Revolution.

6.2.1 Peking Opera on the mainland after the Cultural Revolution

Traditional Peking Opera repertoire was strictly regulated and eventually banned in 1965, one year before the outbreak of Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). It was not fully reinstated until 1978. This long break resulted in a generation who lacked knowledge of their theatrical tradition. Thus, there was a need for Peking Opera performers to reestablish an artistic trend.²⁹⁴ When the PRC government adopted its policies of Reform and Opening Up, as Colin Mackerras has observed, a “dichotomy between modernization and traditionalist revival” developed in the post-Cultural Revolution era, and “the arts, including the performing arts, [were] one of the sites of this modernization and traditionalist revival.”²⁹⁵

Elizabeth Wichmann has observed two contradictory but simultaneous approaches to Peking Opera productions in that period. The first was a return to traditional plays, which I will refer to as the “preservative” approach. In general terms, followers of this trend – including the PRC government in the early period after the reinstatement of traditional plays in 1978 – attempted to preserve traditional plays in their authentic form (that is, as they were performed in the 1950s). However, as many textual references were destroyed during Cultural Revolution, followers of this approach had to turn to other sources such as performers who survived the Revolution. For example, Yeung Ming in his book *Quyū Menghēn: Yang Ming Jingkun Yishu Pinglunji* 氍毹夢痕：楊明京崑藝術評論集 [Scattered Dreams on the Stage Carpet: An Anthology of Critics on the Arts of Peking Opera and Kunqu Opera by Yeung Ming, 2001] tells the story that a PRC cultural official had asked him, soon after the reinstatement, to recreate the original script of an excerpt play, “Autumn River” (*Qiujiang* 秋江), from memory.²⁹⁶ But even while traditional plays were revived, innovations in performing techniques, such as challenging melismatic passages with high notes or fancy acrobatic skills, would be added into the plays so as to impress the audience. Moreover, the form was also updated. Plots would be tightened, and repetitive components in performing conventions – for instance, dance sequences – would be cut. As such, plays were concentrated in order to cater to the changing taste of contemporary audiences.²⁹⁷

The second approach, which emerged a bit later than the preservative one, was the creation of new plays in a contemporary manner, which I will refer to as the “contemporary” approach. Compared to the preservative approach, innovations were more extensively found in these plays, and mostly in evidence in script writing, performing conventions, music, and *mise en scène*. Some innovations were inspired by other regional genres. For example, in

²⁹⁴ Li 2012: 135.

²⁹⁵ Mackerras 1996: 79.

²⁹⁶ Yeung 2001: 268-269.

²⁹⁷ Wichmann 1990: 151-152.

Cave of the Coiled Web (*Pansi Dong* 盤絲洞), a 1987 production by the Shanghai Peking Opera Company, the actress portraying a spider demon employed the technique of “face changing” (*bianlian* 變臉), which was borrowed from Sichuan Opera.²⁹⁸ Western theatrical genres, such as western opera and spoken drama, were another source of inspiration. According to Wichmann, Western influences on contemporary plays included modern stage techniques such as lighting, sound and stage effects, as well as the extensive use of composed music and the addition of Western musical instruments into the traditional ensemble.²⁹⁹

From the early 1990s on, the contemporary approach gained greater popularity than the preservative approach. In addition to the extensive employment of Western theatrical devices, performers began to adapt Western literature into new Peking Opera scripts. For example, the Beijing Peking Opera Theatre staged an adaptation of Giacomo Puccini’s *Turandot* in Rome in 1994.³⁰⁰ This predominance of contemporary plays on the mainland must be viewed within the social context of the post-Cultural Revolution era, in which the PRC government gradually loosened its regulation and control of Chinese performing arts, and of cultural production at large from 1978 on. This de-politicization was accompanied by marketization, as government subsidy of Peking Opera troupes was substantially reduced. To sustain themselves financially, troupes had to strengthen their audience base. It was in this context that Wichmann compares the two approaches and argues that the contemporary approach was a type of reform that was primarily intended to attract the broadest range of audience in terms of age and educational level.³⁰¹ In this sense, the popularization of contemporary plays could be regarded as a logical choice made by mainland Peking Opera circles so as to achieve their practical goal of audience building and economic independence.

As Mackerras has observed, the growth of the contemporary approach was also favored by PRC government policy in the Reform era. Firstly, direct censorship had become less strict since 1992, compared to any previous period in PRC’s history. This allowed for the emergence of more new scripts.³⁰² Secondly, the Reform era also catalyzed the modernization process of Peking Opera. As Mackerras has noted, “the principle adopted [in the policy of Reform and Opening Up] is that foreign influence is fine as long as it helps China and does not oppose socialism.”³⁰³ This provided some space for Peking Opera performers to appropriate foreign theatrical elements.

6.2.2 From Notre Dame de Paris to The Great Belfry

As noted, Western literature had become a regular source of inspiration for new Peking Opera scripts since the 1990s. In addition to *Turandot* on the mainland, Wu Hsing-kuo 吳興國 and his troupe, the Contemporary Legend Theatre of Taiwan (*Taiwan Dangdai Chuangqi Juchang* 台灣當代傳奇劇場), had also been adapting works of William Shakespeare and Samuel

²⁹⁸ *ibid.* 153.

²⁹⁹ *ibid.* 151, 157.

³⁰⁰ *Wenhui Bao*, 25 March 1994.

³⁰¹ Wichmann 1990: 165-66.

³⁰² Mackerras 1996: 81.

³⁰³ *ibid.*

Beckett since the troupe's establishment in 1986. This phenomenon of Peking Opera adaptations from Western literature was also echoed by Tang in her 1999 production of *The Great Belfry* (*Da Zhonglou* 大鐘樓), an adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris* (1831). In the following, I will discuss this production in relation to the mainland trend of contemporary Peking Opera plays.

Firstly, Tang made a thorough adaptation of the story, translating it from its original French setting into a Chinese one. The central setting of the original novel, the Cathédral Notre Dame de Paris, was adapted to a belfry where the Chinese emperor stored his collection of Western clocks. Also, the characters' backgrounds were rewritten within the Chinese context. For example, the Romani woman Esméralda in the original story became Aisimei 艾思梅 (a transliteration from Esméralda), princess of the Calabash Gang (*Hulubang* 葫蘆幫). Claude Frollo, the Archdeacon of Notre Dame, who is her main antagonist in the original story, was rewritten as De Gonggong 德公公, a "fake" eunuch (in the sense that he has not undergone castration) in the emperor's court.³⁰⁴

Secondly, *The Great Belfry* demonstrated a less stylized portrait of characters by crossing over between various role types in Peking Opera. The leading actress portraying Aisimei, for instance, integrated the singing style of the mature female role with the action skills of the martial female role. Another example is the main protagonist, Yachou 亞丑 the hunch-backed bell-ringer. To give the audience a more life-like portrait of the character, the conventional choice would have been to have a clown role performer in this role. However, it is rare in Peking Opera tradition for a clown role to take on the leading role. As such, the character was eventually performed by a martial male role. While performing in his typical style, the performer borrowed some stage-steps techniques from the clown role; this allowed him to give a greater sense of reality to the presentation of a hunchbacked person.³⁰⁵

Western influence as reflected in the *mise en scène* was also noteworthy. For example, according to contemporary practice in traditional Chinese theatre, the curtain typically would close between scenes for scene and props changes. However, in *The Great Belfry* the function of the curtain was replaced by a rotating stage, in which the props of several scenes were pre-set and the stage was rotated for scene changes (Figure 6.2). Musical features also reflected Western influence. A mixture of traditional operatic music and Western composed music was heard, and the ensemble was expanded to about twenty musicians in a Western orchestral setting. Moreover, the leading role of the single-sided drum (*bangu* 板鼓) player in the traditional ensemble was replaced by a conductor who took control over all musical aspects in the play.³⁰⁶ In fact, apart from Tang's own performance as Aisimei, all other performers, backstage crew members, and musicians were guests from the mainland. In my view, their familiarity with contemporary plays provided yet another way for this Hong Kong production to relate more naturally to this mainland trend.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴ Tang Yuen-ha (interview, 17 December 2008).

³⁰⁵ *Mingbao*, 11 October 1999.

³⁰⁶ *ibid.*

³⁰⁷ *Mingbao*, 28 October 1999.

Indeed, Tang followed closely the mainland trend of contemporary plays in the period around the turn of the century. In addition to *The Great Belfry*, she also produced a similarly fashioned presentation in her 2001 adaptation of Louis Cha's *The Romance of the Condor Heroes* (*Shendiao Xialü* 神鵰俠侶). In fact, Tang herself noted that these two productions, which featured popular stories and more modern presentations of the art form, were attempts to expand the audience base by attracting new generations in Hong Kong. Her statement reaffirms Wichmann's argument that contemporary plays worked better in attracting a broad range of audience members.



Figure 6.1. A scene from *The Great Belfry*: De Gonggong (right) tries to take Aisemei (middle) away from Yachou (left), and put her into custody. (Photo by Jingkun Theatre, 1999)



Figure 6.2. The rotating stage used in *The Great Belfry*. (Photo by Jingkun Theatre, 1999)

6.3 In search of a “Hong Kong way”

While Tang continued to view Peking Opera as a national genre, the years spent honing her career in Hong Kong broadened her perspective, and she developed a distinct view of the differences between practicing it on the mainland and in Hong Kong. This eventually led her to affiliate herself less closely with mainland artistic trends. According to Tang, the difference mostly concerned creative freedom, which she traced to two causes. Firstly, there was censorship on the mainland:

Also we have more creative freedom [in Hong Kong], without the invisible pressure exerted by a political system. There is indeed such pressure on the mainland. For example, some mainland scriptwriters whom we worked with always have to ask themselves “Can I pass [the censors] if I write this?” In this aspect, Hong Kong is indeed a better place.³⁰⁸

The second cause was the different artistic horizon one could gain in particular places. In Tang’s view, the contemporary trend on the mainland often amounted to blind imitation of Western theatrical forms by mainland performers, after these forms had entered the mainland from the late 1970s onward, with the assumption that they were artistically and technically superior eventually resulting in the dominance of the contemporary trend. From this perspective, she considered that this uncritical acceptance of Western influence was

³⁰⁸ Tang Yuen-ha (interview, 17 December 2008).

constraining creativity. In contrast, Tang experienced Hong Kong as a better place because of its richer cultural cosmopolitan history:

Moreover, one can gain a wider horizon in Hong Kong, as you can always see many different cultural forms. This will indeed shape one's artistic taste and, as I have said, one should not be attracted impulsively to some so-called "new" things ... I always lamented the hardship of doing [Peking Opera] in Hong Kong. But now, to a certain degree, I feel fortunate to be here. It is because I can have real creative freedom here, in which I can hold onto my own ideas and artistic views.³⁰⁹

The last statement in the above quote is remarkable, as Tang indeed had an artistic view of her own to hold on to – namely, a traditionalist view toward Peking Opera – that departed distinctively from the mainland trend. In her view, the core of Peking Opera's aesthetic was the stylized portraiture of characters through performance. In this sense, the contemporary trend on the mainland, in particular its features of verisimilar *mise en scène* and the use of modern stage technology, ran counter to this aesthetic. She said:

You cannot say we are completely against the use of lighting and scenery, but the question is 'how should we use it?' ... Everything [on stage] is not real, but I am pursuing a state of *emotional truth*, and this is the core characteristic of traditional Chinese arts. *Do not be faithful to your eyes, but to your heart* ... Therefore, when I create new productions I must follow the spirit of my intention. And if I follow it, it will not demand verisimilar scenery and props. On the contrary, there were occasions when mainland troupes hired some stage designers who had no sense of Chinese aesthetics. I have actually discussed this in my dissertation,³¹⁰ they constructed a very three-dimensional stage and thought it was nice. However, this actually contradicts the aesthetics of Peking Opera.³¹¹

In fact, Tang's departure from the mainstream mainland path was quite similar to the Hong Kong government's attitude toward Peking Opera. As discussed in the previous chapter, in Hong Kong there was a clear sense that the national vision of the genre should be embodied in a simultaneous claim of local identity in its presentation. I submit that this is an excellent demonstration of what I have called the "national yet local" identity of local Peking Opera performers.

6.3.1 Return to traditional plays

In practice, two kinds of theatrical productions by the Jingkun Theatre reflected Tang's claim of locality. The first was conventional performances. In a spirit of revitalizing the preservative approach in the 1980s mainland observed by Wichmann, Tang first attempted to realize her

³⁰⁹ *ibid.*

³¹⁰ Tang has obtained her PhD in December 2016 at the School of Culture, History and Language at the National Australian University. The title of her dissertation is "The Aesthetics of Chinese Classical Theatre: A Performer's View".

³¹¹ Tang Yuen-ha (interview, 25 July 2014).

traditionalist view in 2003 with the Kunqu Opera production *Wusong and Pan Jinlian* (*Wusong yu Pan Jinlian* 武松與潘金蓮). This was followed by the Peking Opera productions *The House of Wulong* (*Wulong Yuan* 烏龍院, 2007),³¹² *You Sanjie* 尤三姐 (2007), and *Jin Yunu* 金玉奴 (2009). Geng Tianyuan was also involved in all these productions.

Nevertheless, rather than focusing on appealing performing techniques, as is the case on the mainland according to Wichmann, the innovation in Tang's and Geng's revision of the above-mentioned plays lies in the attention to the rediscovery (or reinterpretation) of characters, in addition to their efforts to achieve a more logical flow in the story, through revisiting the literature on which the stories originally are based. Here, I use their revision of *The House of Wulong* as an example to illustrate my point. This story from the Chinese classic novel *Water Margin* (*Shuihu Zhuan* 水滸傳) is about the murder of Yan Xijiao by her husband Song Jiang. In the 1930s this play became one of the signature plays of Zhou Xinfang. His treatment of the play, for example in portraying the character of Song Jiang as an absolutely heroic protagonist, and that of Yan Xijiao as absolutely negative, had become the standard for performers ever since.³¹³ With this well-established tradition before him, Geng, as the main script-editor of the Jingkun Theatre's 2007 version, made a bold revision to Zhou's version after revisiting the original text and reviewing the story's logical flow. Firstly, they discarded the stock image of Yan as a "loud-mouthed, ignorant shrew" and represented her character as a "sharp-witted vixen with a mind of her own." Also, the heroic Song Jiang in Zhou's version was represented more realistically, with a dark side to his personality as well. Secondly, in regard to the plot development, Geng added more contextualization to the rather impulsive act of Yan's murder by Song in Zhou's version. As Geng put it:

A chance happening puts them at loggerheads with each other, simply because they have different goals and motives in life. The contradictions intensify and lead to the inevitable tragic end.³¹⁴

6.3.2 The innovative guided demonstration

Compared to the revision of traditional plays, which could still be viewed as somehow building on the mainland preservative approach of the 1980s, the other kind of production by the Jingkun Theatre, guided demonstration, comes across as a local invention. Since the first presentation in 1997, Tang has been bringing this production to primary and secondary schools, universities, and other communities, and they are still doing so regularly. In the following I will make a detailed description of the full process of a guided demonstration. According to Tang, she added some minor refinements to the production throughout these years, for example to the choice of excerpts being performed and the order of items in the

³¹² *The House of Wulong* has won the *Prix Special du Jury* (Special Jury Prize) in the Third Festival of Traditional Chinese Opera in Paris in 2007.

³¹³ This fashion of character setting was popular in Peking Opera plays in the early twentieth century. See *Wenhui Bao*, 11 January 2014.

³¹⁴ Geng Tianyuan, translated by [anonymous]. "Gaibian yu Daoyan de Hua" 改編與導演的話 [Message from the Script-editor and Director], in the programme booklet of *The House of Wulong*, performed by the Jingkun Theatre and the Shandong Peking Opera Theatre. 30 January 2008.

production, but the overall flow and style remained unchanged from what I observed in her earlier productions during the course of my earlier fieldwork, from 2008 to 2010.

A guided demonstration is different from a conventional performance of traditional Chinese theatre in various ways. First of all, the demonstration is structured in four parts, one for each of the four main role types in Peking Opera. In each part, the typical performing style of the role type in question is highlighted, together with the related technical knowledge. This content is demonstrated through the live performance of excerpts and the digital projection of pictures. A demonstration is hosted by Tang and Geng as Masters of Ceremonies (MCs). Their main function is to talk the audience through the demonstration with verbal introductions prior to and during each item.

A guided demonstration begins with a very brief introduction to the history of Peking Opera by the two MCs. At the moment when they introduce the role type system, four performers representing the four main role types come on stage dressed up so as to give the audience a visual impression of how the role types typically appear. After clearing the stage, the first part focuses on the martial clown role. After a few words by the MCs, the performer comes on stage and performs an excerpt as the character Sun Wukong 孫悟空 in the “monkey plays,”³¹⁵ which showcases his characteristic acrobatic skills in somersaulting. The second half of this part focuses on the civil clown role, in which the performer performs a short excerpt as the character Benwu 本無, the monk in *Longing for the Mortal World, Escaping from the Temple* (*Sifan, Xiashan* 思凡, 下山), showcasing his skill in Buddhist necklace tricks. For example, he swings the necklace with his hands, throws it up high and catches it with his neck. (Figure 6.3) The second part features the female role. Here the MCs first talk about the highly stylized characteristics of Peking Opera and the skill of mimicry as the major representation of such stylistic performance. Then the female role performer will perform an excerpt from *Picking Up the Jade Bracelet* (*Shi Yuzhuo* 拾玉鐲), in which she demonstrates the mimicking of sewing and feeding chickens.

The next role type to be introduced is the martial male role. Both sub-types, namely the lightly-suited (*duanda wusheng* 短打武生) and the battle-gearred (*changkao wusheng* 長靠武生), are presented. The former only has a brief appearance here probably because he will reappear in the last item, while the latter is given some time to perform. Before the performer plays a skit from *The Little Shang River* (*Xiaoshang He* 小商河), the MCs will first take some time interacting with the audience on interesting facts about Peking Opera costumes. For example, they may discuss the materials that the fake beard is made of. This will be followed by the fourth part that focuses on the painted face role and the related knowledge about face painting. The MCs first introduce various color tones in the face painting tradition of Peking Opera and their characteristic associations. This presentation is accompanied by the projection of visual pictures. Then a painted face role performer demonstrates performing

³¹⁵ In Peking Opera there are several traditional plays that feature Sun Wukong the Monkey King. These plays are collectively called “monkey plays.”

conventions of the role type with an excerpt from *The Sunny Mansion* (*Yanyang Lou* 艷陽樓).

After these topical introductions to role types and technical knowledge in Peking Opera, the guided demonstration concludes with two longer excerpts so as to give the audience an idea of how an actual play would be performed. The first is the excerpt “Autumn River” from the Kunqu Opera play *The Jade Hairpin* (*Yuzan Ji* 玉簪記). The play dramatizes the romance between a scholar, Pan Bizheng, and a nun, Chen Miaochang, who meet in the White Cloud Convent. The story tells that Pan is forced by his aunt, who is the head of the convent, to leave the convent for the imperial exam after she has discovered his affair with Chen. Pan is in such a hurry that he cannot even say goodbye to Chen. By the time Chen finds out that Pan has left, Pan has already crossed a river. In the excerpt that is performed during the guided demonstration, Chen rushes to the riverside and tries to hire a boat to cross the river so she can see Pan one last time. This excerpt features the stylized simulation of a boat ride by a female role performer as Chen and a clown role performer as the boatman; the two mimic, for instance, the bobbing of the boat when Chen tries to get on and while the boatman is negotiating a rushing river (Figure 6.4).

The second excerpt is a martial arts excerpt from the Peking Opera play *Crossroads* (*Sanchakou* 三岔口). In the story, the main antagonist, Ren Huitang, is on a mission to secretly protect Jiao Zan, a Song dynasty general who was charged with a murder and sentenced to exile. Ren follows the escort to an inn at *sanchakou* (literally ‘crossroads’), where the latter plans to stay for the night. The story tells that a misunderstanding emerges between Ren and Liu Lihua, the inn owner. Liu has the mistaken impression that Ren intends to kill Jiao Zan. Because of this, Liu sneaks into Ren’s room at night and tries to kill him. The martial arts excerpt that is demonstrated is this “fight in a dark night.” In the excerpt, the reappearing *duanda wusheng* performer as Ren and a martial clown role performer as Liu mimic a fight in a completely dark room, through their stylized movements and fighting moves. For example, at the beginning, both Ren and Liu stretched out their arms moving around on stage, indicating that they are “searching” for their opponents in the dark. In addition to the stylized performance, this excerpt also showcases the fighting and acrobatic skills of the two performers (Figure 6.5).



Figure 6.3. The civil clown role performing in a guided demonstration. (Photo by Jingkun Theatre, 2015)



Figure 6.4. The comprehensive excerpt of “Autumn River”. (Photo by Jingkun Theatre, 2015)



Figure 6.5. The comprehensive excerpt of *Crossroads*. (Photo by Jingkun Theatre, 2015)

6.3.3 Motivation behind the local invention

Questions arise about the numerous choices made by Tang and Geng in the making of a guided demonstration. Why do they choose to cover these particular technical aspects over so many others? Why do they choose to perform particular excerpts to showcase these technical aspects? And, fundamentally, why is there a need for guided demonstration? Tang has answered this last question from the perspective of audience building, as she believes that providing the audience with an emotional and sensory first experience, rather than a theoretical introduction, is the best way to advance local reception of the genre. In other words, she hopes that her audience's first experience watching Peking Opera would leave them hungry for more. From this perspective, she considers guided demonstrations the best form to achieve her objective.

In my view, Tang's objective to give her audience a pleasant first encounter with Peking Opera could also be interpreted as an attempt to change the perceptions of the public, especially of the new generation, who tend to regard traditional Chinese theatre as slow, difficult and boring. Understanding this makes it easier to understand the presentational choices she made in the demonstration. Firstly, the separate parts that make up a guided demonstration are short and scheduled tightly. None is longer than ten minutes, including the introductory talk as well as the actual performance, and this even holds for the last two comprehensive excerpts. Secondly, the main content is delivered in an interactive fashion with occasional multi-media presentations, which is not possible in conventional performances. This stimulates the audience's reception of information. Thirdly, aspects covered are all visually centered – acrobatic skills, mimicry, costumes, and face painting. In other words, the audience is presented with a visually oriented experience of Peking Opera. In my view, this is more appealing than aural and textual stimulations.

In addition, the audience's experience is further enhanced by Tang and Geng's flexibility during demonstrations. Firstly, as the MCs, they do not have a fixed script. Rather, they always improvise their speeches according to the age of the group members and the educational level of the audience. For example, if the demonstration is held in a primary school, where the audience is expected to have shorter attention spans and limited tolerance for long and difficult explanations, they will only touch on the very basics of the aspects in question; they will also interact more directly with the audience by frequently asking questions, so as to maintain the audience's attention. In contrast, if they are giving a demonstration at a university, where the audience is expected to be more intellectual, Tang and Geng will go deeper into theoretical aspects and provide more contextual information.

Moreover, on occasion they even work their way out of bureaucratic requirements that would hamper their effectiveness. For example, on one occasion, the Jingkun Theatre was running a series of guided demonstrations in primary schools with the funding from the ADC. The ADC required the troupe to design a worksheet and circulate it as an assignment to the students when they are watching the show. According to Tang, she and Geng thought that this requirement would distract the audience from focusing on the show. They also thought giving an assignment along with the show would contribute to giving the audience a negative first impression not only of the show itself but also of Peking Opera. Therefore, they set only very

easy questions on the worksheet and never distributed it to the audience prior to or during the demonstration.

In sum, every element in a guided demonstration – from the choice of topics and excerpts to the tight structure of the flow, and from the interactive nature to resistance to bureaucratic requirements – serves the same purpose: to give the audience a first impression of Peking Opera as a breath-taking and visually appealing traditional art form.

6.4 Guided demonstration on the Chinese mainland: the periphery impacting the core

On the one hand, the invention of guided demonstrations made an impact on local society by offering Hong Kong audiences a distinctive form to engage with a traditional theatrical genre. On the other hand, it also made an impact on the presentational trend of Peking Opera on the mainland. This is particularly interesting if we consider the mainland and Hong Kong in a relationship of “core” and “periphery” in terms of how popular and rich in history Peking Opera is in these two places. In other words, my case is significant because it shows that influence is not a one-directional phenomenon, and the periphery has also “reversely” influenced the core. In the following, I will show how mainland performers learned about the idea of guided demonstration in the first place, and how they appropriated the idea into their own use in advancing the reception of Peking Opera by new generations of mainland Chinese.

6.4.1 Mainland-Hong Kong collaboration in the making of guided demonstrations

Although a guided demonstration requires fewer personnel than a conventional performance, the small number of Peking Opera professionals in Hong Kong still posed a problem to Tang and Geng. Similar to YCOC, they have dealt with it by collaborating with mainland troupes. Thanks to Geng’s personal relations with the Shandong Peking Opera Theatre (SPOT) also after his departure in 1997, the partnership between the Jingkun Theatre and the SPOT developed well, and the SPOT became the exclusive partner of every guided demonstration project since 1997.

In the period from 1997 to 2015, the team of performers and musicians in every project completed was comprised entirely of members from the SPOT, with the exception of Tang and Geng as the two MCs. The roster includes six performers and an ensemble of around six musicians. According to Geng, the SPOT would first form a team a few months prior to the first show of a project. Then Tang and Geng would let the SPOT know which particular play they would need performed by each performer, and how long they would need for each play (notably, the repertoire has remained the same for many years). Team members would then rehearse at their base in Jinan, the home of the SPOT, without Tang and Geng’s supervision. After several initial rehearsals by the team, Tang and Geng would visit the SPOT and work on refinements with them. As Tang recalled, since the repertoire was mostly signature plays of respective role types, performers usually had no problem mastering them; thus, refinements mostly involved tightening plot development. At the end they would travel to Hong Kong and perform.

So what has contributed to the solidity of their collaboration? For the Jingkun Theatre, why did they only work with the SPOT but not with any other mainland troupe? And for the SPOT, is there any incentive, other than their connection with Geng, which led to the troupe's frequent engagements with this Hong Kong troupe? On the one hand, I would submit that it was Geng's personal relationship with the SPOT, which was based on his history with them and knowledge about them, that put the Jingkun Theatre into an exclusive partnership with the SPOT for guided demonstration projects. According to Geng, the sense of seriousness displayed by the SPOT was the main reason for this collaboration. For example, they would make the project their top priority in their annual plans. They would have their best performers and musicians assigned to the project, and, when there were time clashes, they would give priority to this over other tasks. Besides, the SPOT demonstrated eagerness in engaging in this collaboration especially in terms of finances; they were reasonable in negotiations over remuneration and flexible in arrangements, such as meals and accommodation, during their stay in Hong Kong.

On the other hand, in addition to personal relationships, the cultural policy on Peking Opera by the PRC government has also indirectly encouraged the SPOT to work with the Hong Kong troupe. The agenda of the sixteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2002 included the identification of several National Key Peking Opera Troupes (*guojia zhongdian jingju yuantuan* 國家重點京劇院團). In 2006, the Ministry of Culture of the PRC finalized a list of eleven troupes, including the SPOT.³¹⁶ According to an official announcement regarding the evaluation method and criterion published by the Ministry of Culture, these key troupes would enjoy substantial government funding. At the same time, they had to maintain a certain standard in terms of artistic achievement, finance, and marketing in order to keep their Key Troupe status, which would be re-evaluated every three years.³¹⁷

Particularly in the realm of artistic achievement, these troupes must meet quantitative requirements that can be roughly categorized according to three aspects: production of performing activities, creation of new plays, and completion of "external cultural exchange" events (*duiwai wenhua jiaoliu* 對外文化交流).³¹⁸ The third aspect is particularly important in my discussion as, according to Geng, it proved the most challenging for many of the key troupes, since opportunities for performance invitations from outside the Chinese mainland were rare. However, as Hong Kong was regarded as external for this purpose, the SPOT could easily fulfill this requirement with their constant collaborations with the Jingkun Theatre. Moreover, the collaborations between Jingkun Theatre and the SPOT was not only limited to local projects of the former. For example, the SPOT members formed the main rosters in Jingkun Theatre's award-winning performance in the Third Festival of Traditional Chinese Opera in Paris in 2007, as well as several guided demonstration projects held in Australia in the 2000s; and these indirect overseas engagements were also taken in account by the PRC

³¹⁶ Anonymous 2006: 1.

³¹⁷ Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China, 2005

³¹⁸ *ibid.*

Ministry of Culture in their evaluation of the SPOT's Key Troupe status. Moreover, the PRC government has adopted another policy in recent years, namely "Peking Opera on campus" (*jingju jin xiaoyuan* 京劇進校園). According to this policy, mainland troupes are expected to organize Peking Opera activities in schools as a means to facilitate reception of the genre by the new generation Chinese. By participating in guided demonstrations that were usually held in primary or secondary schools – even though this was in Hong Kong – the SPOT could fulfill this requirement, which led to extra funding from the PRC government.³¹⁹

In sum, in addition to the personal relationships between the two troupes, practical reasons also contributed to their exclusive partnership. The Jingkun Theatre could conduct guided demonstration projects on a smaller budget, and the SPOT could fulfill the PRC government's requirements and secure a constant source of funding.

6.4.2 Appropriating guided demonstration on the Chinese mainland

Even as the "national drama," changing patterns of cultural consumption and new technologies and new modes of entertainment in the twenty-first century are inevitably challenging the traditional Peking Opera. As Li Ruru points out, despite the booming budget for mainland troupes to stage performances – thanks to the fast-growing economy in the post-Mao era – the reality of Peking Opera is "perilous."³²⁰ The old generation of spectators is aging, and the genre is failing to attract younger generations. Thus, its popularization has become a major task that mainland troupes are facing. In section 6.2.1, I discussed the notable production of "contemporary" plays in the mainland Peking Opera market of the 1990s, and I submit that this phenomenon resulted from attempts by mainland troupes to address the issue of popularization by experimenting with forms that, in their eyes, suited the taste of younger generations. The parallel emergence of audience-building campaigns and the production of contemporary plays were truly remarkable in the 1990s mainland circuit. For example, the Shanghai Peking Opera Theatre has completed two audience-building programmes since 1996. These campaigns have resulted in two new productions: *The Upright Official Yu Chenglong* (*Lianli Yu Chenglong* 廉吏于成龍, 2002), a play based on a historical tale, and *Notre Dame* (*Shengmuyuan* 聖母院, 2008), an adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris*.³²¹

Nevertheless, one should note that these new contemporary plays have shown only innovations in the performing practices of Peking Opera. To a certain degree, Peking Opera on the mainland was still rigid in limiting itself to the form of conventional performances.³²² Even if any sort of lecture was observed, for example in educational activities, it was isolated from the performance – by contrast, lectures in a guided demonstration are an organic part of

³¹⁹ Here, the PRC government's ambiguity regarding whether they regard Hong Kong as "inside" or "outside" China in various circumstances is noted. Since this is not relevant to the main scope of discussion, I do not intend to address this issue deeply here.

³²⁰ Li 2012: 131-32.

³²¹ *ibid.* 132. This is a very interesting issue, but unfortunately I do not have any information at this moment to discuss the connection between the two Peking Opera adaptations of the same Western novel, one by a Hong Kong troupe and the other by a mainland troupe.

³²² Here, I define conventional performance as performance in which plays or excerpts are acted out without interruptions by non-theatrical components, with the obvious exception of intermissions.

the whole performance. As Zheng Shaohua 鄭少華, the head of the SPOT and a professional performer since the 1980s, recalls from his own experience, there was nothing like guided demonstration on the mainland before the idea was brought there from Hong Kong.³²³ From this perspective, the innovation of guided demonstration was significant in the development of Peking Opera beyond Hong Kong itself.

Being the sole partner and the major task force of every guided demonstration in Hong Kong since 1997, the SPOT first appropriated this idea into a version of their own in 2001. Named “Chinese Peking Opera with Explanation” (*you jiangjie de Zhongguo jingju* 有講解的中國京劇), the troupe staged this production in its tours in South Korea and Japan for the years 2001 to 2004 (Figure 6.6). According to Zheng, the SPOT’s version of guided demonstration basically followed the structure of the Jingkun Theatre’s version. Two MCs were present, one who spoke Mandarin and the other spoke whom the local language (i.e., Korean or Japanese), and they were responsible for talking the audience through the whole programme with verbal introductions to the various theatrical elements of Peking Opera in between excerpts. The choice of excerpts, however, was a bit different. While keeping “The Autumn River” and *Crossroads* from the Jingkun Theatre’s version, the SPOT’s version added a number of comprehensive excerpts highlighting dance sequences by the female role characters. This repertoire included *The Favorite Concubine Becomes Intoxicated*, *Farewell My Concubine* (*Bawang Bieji* 霸王別姬), and *Wang Zhaojun Leaving China* (*Zhaojun Chusai* 昭君出塞). In my view, this inclination to favor physical performance may well have originated in a concern for the incomprehensibility of Peking Opera to foreign audiences due to language barriers. Moreover, the musical element in Peking Opera was also introduced in the SPOT’s version; for example, a separate item would be allocated to the ensemble for a performance of a few fixed tunes (*qupai* 曲牌) (Figure 6.7).

Having set up a structure of their own version of guided demonstration, the SPOT not only continued to bring the production on its overseas tours, but also started staging this on the mainland in the late 2000s as another response to the PRC government’s “Peking Opera on campus” policy, in addition to its work in Hong Kong.³²⁴ The troupe kept the dance excerpts alongside the topical items concerning role types, which made the whole performance longer. Facing an audience that could be considered culturally more homogeneous, the troupe also made the verbal explanations more sophisticated. For example, when the MCs talked about the indicative function of the various kinds of fake beards, they would go further than the usual black and white beards and touch on some very specific ones such as the “three-willow” beard (*sanliu hu* 三柳鬚). Lectures on performing styles and manners of various role types also went deeper than that in the Jingkun Theatre’s version. In regard to differences in the explanations for the Hong Kong and mainland versions, Geng sees this from a social perspective. In his opinion, being the core region of the genre, Peking Opera was still more visible to younger generations of mainland Chinese than it was to Hong Kong locals. The influences of the grandparents’ generation, who mostly grew up with traditional

³²³ Zheng Shaohua (interview, 24 November 2015).

³²⁴ Under this policy, SPOT also conducted more orthodox after-curriculum classes in local primary schools.

Chinese theatre, and having a national television channel dedicated to it (China Central Television Channel 11) are still effective nowadays to a certain degree. With their greater familiarity with Peking Opera, children on the mainland need more than the basics. He explained this with a comparison:

This is like explaining to children in Hong Kong “what is a car?” They have been learning about cars since birth because they have one at home. You have to go further than telling them “this is the wheel and this is the steering wheel.” Peking Opera is like this for children on the mainland. So it may not work if you just take the guided demonstration to the mainland completely unchanged. You have to adjust, say, by giving more detailed explanations on technical terms and performing practices.³²⁵

As a matter of fact, the idea of guided demonstration is still new to the mainland, and conventional, straightforward performance is still the major mode of presentation in educational activities among mainland Peking Opera troupes. Nevertheless, Zheng Shaohua is optimistic about the development of this new mode on the mainland, as he highly values the interactive nature of guided demonstration as a big advantage over orthodox performance:

I think the idea of guided demonstration is very good, and I believe that it is the only solution at this moment. It is because it is a face-to-face interaction, which offers the children a zero-distance engagement with Peking Opera. This will raise their interest more effectively ... Of course it is impossible for them to know everything about Peking Opera with only one performance, but it serves as an enlightener to raise their curiosity. With this curiosity, they will be willing to learn. I believe that their positive reception of Peking Opera can be built up this way.³²⁶

Moreover, to the SPOT, guided demonstrations in local schools and in public were also occasions for them to look for new talents. Zheng told me about a child who first became acquainted with Peking Opera in a guided demonstration. Having first had his interest peaked, he joined the extra-curricular class. Eventually, he participated in a local competition for junior amateur performers and won. This motivated him to join a professional training school, and he went on to become a professional performer. In other words, the guided demonstration also helped the SPOT with their task, as a National Key Peking Opera Troupes, in training new professionals.

³²⁵ Geng Tianyuan (interview, 25 July 2014).

³²⁶ Zheng Shaohua. (interview, 24 November 2015).



Figure 6.6. The “Chinese Peking Opera with Explanation” performance in the SPOT tour to South Korea. (Photo by SPOT, 2009)



Figure 6.7. SPOT’s ensemble performing Peking Opera music in the performance. (Photo by SPOT, 2009)

6.5 Teaching activities of Jingkun Theatre

In addition to performances of traditional plays and guided demonstrations, the Jingkun Theatre has also been organizing short-term courses of varied Peking Opera skills. These courses are in many ways similar to those organized by the YCOC: they share similar course design (class frequency and duration, etc.) and pedagogy; and they have similar demographics of students in terms of gender and age. Nevertheless, while the YCOC focuses mainly on local communities, the Jingkun Theatre demonstrates a wider spectrum of target groups, which also includes university students.

Due to the small personnel setting of the troupe, Tang and Geng have to adopt some labour-saving measures in their teaching activities. Firstly, courses are organized in the same period as the guided demonstrations. As such, the SPOT members who perform in the guided demonstrations can also teach the courses. Secondly, recorded music is used as accompaniment in singing courses, so that the troupe does not have to spend extra money for musicians. Thirdly, there is the use of numbered notation in singing courses. This mainland convention is different from the common use of *gongchi* 工尺 notation – a notation system that uses Chinese characters to indicate musical pitches – in Cantonese Opera learning in Hong Kong.

6.6 Conclusion

As a local-born Peking Opera performer who chose to develop her career in the cultural periphery, Tang Yuen-ha's negotiation between national(izing) discourse and local identity is intriguing. In her early career, as a *mainland* performer who happened to be a Hong Kong citizen, she followed the mainstream, mainland discourse and trends; her experiences were based mainly on the mainland; she produced a few positively acclaimed contemporary plays; and she even won national recognition through the Plum Blossom Prize. After Tang received the prize, some mainland critics even proclaimed the birth of "Peking Opera in Guangdong style" (*Guangpai jingju* 廣派京劇).³²⁷ To me, this anecdote only reaffirms the mainland's self-proclaimed superior position as the locus of the essential core of the genre – "You are doing my art in your style." Moreover, the use of "Guangdong" instead of "Hong Kong", despite Tang's background and citizenship, further implies a questionable vision of Hong Kong. Hong Kong, from this perspective, becomes the periphery of the periphery.

Nevertheless, as Tang has focused her career more in Hong Kong since the 1990s, such cultural distance between the core and periphery has provided her with some space to navigate back to her local identity. With her revisiting of traditional plays and, more significantly, the innovation of guided demonstration, Tang has re-positioned herself as a *Hong Kong* performer, who is searching for a local way to present the genre. The invention of guided demonstration, in this sense, is a local response to the national discourse on Peking Opera.

Moreover, through the partnership between the Jingkun Theatre and the SPOT, the significance of guided demonstrations has traveled back to the core of the discourse on Peking

³²⁷ Tang Yuen-ha (interview, 25 July 2014).

Opera as a national genre. It became a source of inspiration to Peking Opera on the mainland in response to the new cultural consumption patterns that have developed in the twenty-first century. Ashley Thorpe argues that Peking Opera displayed a notable “multiplicity” since the turn of the twentieth century, with its variety of geographical and personal styles, as well as numerous experimentation and innovations; and that such multiplicity is essential for Peking Opera to keep itself relevant to the contemporary world. In this light, the creation of guided demonstration and its travel from Hong Kong to the mainland can further be viewed as another chapter of Peking Opera’s story of survival.³²⁸

This is not to say that guided demonstration is the panacea to the endangerment of the genre, and the production of guided demonstrations still raises some problems. For example, it has been noted that the repertoire of the SPOT’s version has a tendency to highlight feminine dance sequences and physical spectacles. Would this reaffirm the argument, made by both Daphne Lei and Thorpe, that traditional Chinese theatre, when exported, or in a diaspora setting, or in (metaphorical) exile – i.e. transported from its traditional cultural habitat to a modernity in which it does not automatically have pride of place – tends to self-Orientalize itself as feminine and visually oriented?³²⁹ Similarly, the Jingkun Theatre’s version also has focused heavily on highlighting the mimicry nature of Peking Opera’s performance. Would this imbalance in programming, that ignores the complexity and sophistication of its music and vocal production, in turn affect the perceptions of an audience that has an incomplete understanding of Peking Opera? Thorpe may offer an answer from the perspective of Chinese foreign economic policy: this imbalance might just be what British audiences wanted from traditional Chinese theatre, and the critics preferred it over more experimental, contemporary plays. And the Chinese cultural authorities simply gave them what they wanted, in the name of cultural exchange, with the aim to gain material or political benefits in return.³³⁰ Or is this question irrelevant to the work of the two troupes, and should they be saluted for taking the more spectacular elements of Peking Opera and repackaging them through innovative presentation, in order to help increase Peking Opera’s chances of survival?

³²⁸ Thorpe 2011b.

³²⁹ See Lei 2006 and Thorpe 2016.

³³⁰ Thorpe 2016: 201-202.

Chapter Seven / Repackaging Cantonese Opera? Yeung Ming

As discussed in chapter three, one important theme in the biography of Peking Opera in Hong Kong is its interaction with the local genre of Cantonese Opera, with Cantonese Opera performers drawing on artistic devices of Peking Opera. Such influence has occurred ever since the first wave of adoption in the 1930s. More importantly, this tight connection between the two genres in contemporary Hong Kong creates a new platform for Peking Opera through the medium of Cantonese Opera, and moves the presentation of Peking Opera to a trans-genre level.

In this chapter I will first present a current account of Peking Opera's influence on Cantonese Opera. The discussion includes technical and ideological influences that continued from the 1930s throughout the twentieth century, as well as emerging discourse and practices regarding the interaction. Then I will focus on the lens individual for this chapter, Yeung Ming 楊明 (born 1941), who shows a different approach than Liang Hanyong and Tang Yuen-ha. Calling this the "repackaging" approach after an expression used by Yeung himself, I will show through a case study how he rearranges Cantonese Opera plays with extensive use of Peking Opera devices, and discuss the context that makes this rearrangement feasible. I will pay special attention to the artistic boundary between the two genres in question, arguing that the protection of this boundary by Cantonese Opera performers is key to Yeung's approach. I will also reflect on the limitations of his rearrangements. This will help us to rethink the potential of trans-genre presentations of Peking Opera and, to a certain extent, of traditional Chinese theatre at large.

I have also observed the phenomenon of the (recent) institutionalization of the interaction of Peking Opera with Cantonese Opera. Specifically, the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (HKAPA), the leading institution that offers certified programmes in Cantonese Opera, has integrated Peking Opera as an essential component of its study programmes. By investigating its programme design and actual operation, I hope to present a more holistic picture of the said interaction, and of Cantonese Opera's development as a whole in contemporary Hong Kong.

7.1 Current influence of Peking Opera on Cantonese Opera

In chapter three I argued that the urbanization of Cantonese Opera in the 1920s and the 1930s, which changed its main function from ritual to entertainment, pushed the genre to look for innovations. Due to the close connection in artistic origin between the two genres, some Cantonese Opera performers saw Peking Opera as a natural source of inspiration. Looking back, it may have been a surprise to these performers that since the 1930s, this artistic adoption from Peking Opera has not only served as a means for Cantonese Opera troupes to survive in the competitive entertainment market, but also has reshaped some of its performing practices.

7.1.1 Continuities

7.1.1.1 *Beipai* martial arts moves

The first example of this continuing influence is the adoption of *beipai* (“northern style”) martial arts moves. As discussed in chapter three, local spectators liked this adoption by Chen Feinong and Xue Juexian in the 1920s very much. This probably motivated many others to learn *beipai* from their northern colleagues, and Xue’s pioneer move of hiring Peking Opera performers to teach his troupe was quickly followed. According to Yu Siu-wah, in the 1950s almost all Cantonese Opera troupes employed at least one Peking Opera performer.³³¹ Judging by the small population of locally based Peking Opera performers at that time, I believe that these *beipai* teachers mainly came from the mainland. The low cost to hire them was also an additional incentive to the troupe, as many Peking Opera performers who fled the PRC at the time were probably looking for employment and would work for low wages.

The employment trend continued through the 1960s and 1970s, but the labour source changed. At the time many Peking Opera students graduated from the four local training schools. As discussed in chapter four, the dwindling Peking Opera market in Hong Kong could hardly absorb these graduates. While many entered the movie industry, some found their way into Cantonese Opera. One example was Li Shaohua 李少華, a teacher at the China Drama Academy. After the closure of the Academy, Li and several graduates from the school, including Li Juhua, were hired by the Voice of the Young Phoenixes Troupe (Chor Fung Ming 雛鳳鳴), one of the most popular Cantonese Opera troupes of its time. There they were involved in many of the troupe’s local productions and overseas tours of the 1970s. Called “martial arts masters” (*wushi* 武師) in the field, they had three tasks. Firstly, they performed dance sequences and martial arts scenes that did not require any verbal delivery. Secondly, they choreographed martial arts scenes. Thirdly, they taught their Cantonese-speaking colleagues *beipai* skills as necessary.³³² In my view, the assignment of such duties, which consisted mainly of pre-production and non-verbal performing works, had been well thought through by the troupe. As such, their skills were utilized, while the fact that these “masters” in general had little or no command of Cantonese presented no problem.

It is generally observed that by the mid twentieth century, *beipai* had replaced *nanpai*, the more realistic and masculine “southern style”, as the performing convention of martial arts scenes in Cantonese Opera. The common discourse in the Cantonese Opera circles throughout the century emphasized the foreignness of *beipai* from a southern point of view, and its take-over of the traditional *nanpai*. Nevertheless, He Jiayao 何家耀, an active Cantonese Opera performer in the late twentieth century, saw this from a different perspective. He argued that, considering the northern origin of Cantonese Opera, *nanpai* should not be counted as part of its tradition. Rather, it should be seen as an early localization process when the genre took root in Guangdong province, in which performers drew on martial arts practices in that area, for example Southern Chinese Boxing (*nanquan* 南拳, literally ‘southern fist’). In this sense, he argued that the conventionalization of *beipai* was in fact a

³³¹ Yu 1999: 265.

³³² Li Juhua (interview, 11 November 2015); Li Shaohua Juyi Liuhen 2005.

return to Cantonese Opera traditions.³³³

7.1.1.2 The *jingluogu* percussion set

In addition to *beipai*, the adoption of “gongs and drums of the capital” (*jingluogu* 京鑼鼓), the percussion set used in Peking Opera, also exerted a continuing influence on Cantonese Opera. Similar to the *beipai* case, it replaced the two traditional sets in Cantonese Opera and became the most frequently used set, up until today.³³⁴ Traditionally, the “gongs and drums of civilization” (*wenluogu* 文鑼鼓) and the “high-edged gongs and drums” (*gaobian luogu* 高邊鑼鼓) were the two percussion sets used to accompany civil and martial arts scenes respectively in Cantonese Opera.³³⁵ Later on, *jingluogu* became the third conventional set, soon after its introduction in the 1920s. According to Chen Zhuoying, there were practical reasons for the set’s quick popularity, as the instruments comprising the set are lighter, smaller and cheaper. Combined with the fact that civil plays were more popular than martial plays at the time, Chen argued that *wenluogu* was the most frequently used set in the early twentieth century, followed by *jingluogu* and *gaobian luogu*.³³⁶

Ma Manxia then observes a gradual process in which *jingluogu* became the most popular set within Cantonese Opera in the second half of the twentieth century. She attributes this to several causes. Firstly, as I have discussed, the massive popularity of *beipai* moves and, consequently, the sharp increase in the numbers of scenes borrowed from Peking Opera directly boosted the conventionalization of *jingluogu*. Secondly, the urbanization of Cantonese Opera moved many performances into the contained space of a theatre. This resulted in a change of acoustics, so that the balance between audio elements – the singing, melodic and percussion sections – had to be reconfigured. From this perspective, the relatively gentler timbre of *jingluogu* was an advantage over the cruder and more aggressive *wenluogu* and *gaobian luogu*. It gave a better balance to the whole performance, and a more comfortable listening experience to spectators. In present-day practice, *jingluogu* has largely replaced *wenluogu* in the accompaniment of civil scenes, and thus the ranking of use among the three sets has changed to 1) *jingluogu*, 2) *gaobian luogu*, and 3) *wenluogu*.³³⁷ To illustrate and support her argument, Ma analyzes a Cantonese Opera play, *The Flower Princess* (*Dinü Hua* 帝女花), where she finds that out of the eight sub-scenes of the play, *jingluogu* is used in five, while *gaobian luogu* is used in two and *wenluogu* in one. She also concludes that the functions of the latter two sets were specifically to emphasize the characters’ aggressive emotions in the play.³³⁸

³³³ He n.d.

³³⁴ Ma 2015: 38-41.

³³⁵ Chen 1985: 311.

³³⁶ *ibid.* 389.

³³⁷ Ma 2015: 38-39.

³³⁸ *ibid.* 40. An English translation of this play is available at Tong Dik-sang, trans. by Bell Yung. 2010. *The Flower Princess: A Cantonese Opera*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.

7.1.1.3 Ideology

In addition to tangible aspects, pioneering performers who were involved in the first wave of adoption also left to their successors a legacy with clear ideological hues. Their belief that Peking Opera is a source of inspiration for expanding the performance range of Cantonese Opera has become a consensus among performers nowadays. For example, Frederic Mao, head of the School of Chinese Opera in the HKAPA and an experienced Cantonese Opera director, firmly takes this view. In my interview with him, he stressed several times how much Cantonese Opera could benefit from Peking Opera. I believe that this is a great motivation for him to canonize Peking Opera in his department's study programmes. I will return to this later in this chapter.

Leading figures in the field share this view. Luo Jiaying 羅家英, for instance, described the use of Peking Opera devices as a way “to enrich the flaws in Cantonese Opera” in a public talk in 1990.³³⁹ In May 2008, the ADC invited and funded *Xiqu Pinwei* 戲曲品味 (Opera Review), a leading journal magazine about Cantonese Opera, to conduct an audience survey, as well as interviews with some fifty senior performers about the genre's future development. The survey report showed that many performers agreed that “[performers in] Hong Kong should interact more frequently with masters on the Chinese mainland. They should even draw on Peking Opera and Kunqu Opera, integrating their essence and make them complementary to Cantonese Opera.”³⁴⁰ This result further shows that a consensual view of Peking Opera as a source of inspiration for Cantonese Opera still holds almost a century after it first emerged.

7.1.2 A new role of Peking Opera performers in Cantonese Opera productions

From the 2000s a notable phenomenon has emerged in regard to the involvement of Peking Opera performers in Cantonese Opera productions, in that they have started to take up more important roles as directors or re-arrangers of plays. The formal introduction of directors in traditional Chinese theatre first happened on the Chinese mainland in the 1950s. Nevertheless, Li Zigui claims that the practice of some of what Megan Evans calls “directorial functions”, such as organizing a play and briefing performers on their responsibilities with their roles, were already observed in some early theatrical forms from the Tang dynasty.³⁴¹ These functions were first realized, for example, when performers gave indicative phrases on stage to cue another's entrance, or when playwrights marked critical notes on their own or others' works – which were regarded by Li as directorial notes from the modern perspective.³⁴² Later on, special positions were created in theatre troupes for organizing plays. For example in the case of Peking Opera, there was a position called “the one who puts the play together” (*cuanxi de* 攢戲的), who was responsible for assembling performers for rehearsals. They were also familiar with the scripts, so that they could talk the performers through the script if the

³³⁹ Li 1993: 64.

³⁴⁰ <http://www.operapreview.com/index.php>. Accessed on 28 March 2016.

³⁴¹ Evans 2007: 471.

³⁴² Li 1992: 4-8.

latter were not familiar with it.³⁴³ People who fulfilled the abovementioned “directorial functions” in traditional Chinese theatre were for the first time called “directors” (*daoyan* 導演) in the late 1930s, with examples like Ouyang Yuqian and Tian Han 田漢. However, it was not until after the early PRC period that the directorial system was promoted nationwide.³⁴⁴

The situation of Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong is similar, in that the “directorial functions” were first realized by performers and playwrights before the recent introduction of directors. In the late Qing period, it was common for Cantonese Opera troupes to perform new plays without a fixed script. Instead, the “master of playwriting” (*kaixi shiye* 開戲師爺) in a troupe would produce an outline, in which the basic story and its division into acts, instructions for stage setting and props, characters played by each actor, and some essential formulaic actions and percussion patterns required from performers and musicians were noted in an outline.³⁴⁵ This practice of performing from outlines was still seen in ritual performances in twentieth-century Hong Kong.³⁴⁶ Later in the era of urban performances, with a return to the use of fixed scripts, the directorial work was carried out through collaborations between the financial backer, main performers and musicians, the playwrights and “the play reminder” (*tichang* 提場, whose role is comparable to a stage manager in modern theatre). As Bell Yung has observed in his fieldwork, these people would hold a meeting, known as “discussing the play” (*jiangxi* 講戲), once the playwright had finished the script. They would go through the script, and make comments, suggestions and changes to the text. Since the script only indicated the singing mode of each singing passage but not its musical notation, performers and musicians would also try out some ways to sing out those passages later in the meeting. This session was called “measuring songs” (*duqu* 度曲).³⁴⁷ Yung did his fieldwork in the 1970s, but I believe that this practice was still common until the 2010s. Li Yaowei 黎耀威, for instance, an active Cantonese Opera performer, claimed in an interview in 2011 that there was no such position as “director” in Cantonese Opera.³⁴⁸ Nowadays the practice is generally accepted and sometimes eagerly received within the field, and it is not uncommon to see the names of Peking Opera performers in a directorial role.

From my observations and informal conversations with Cantonese Opera performers over the years, I have identified two approaches by these Peking Opera performers toward their directorial work. The first one, which is demonstrated by Geng Tianyuan from the Jingkun Theatre, was the “preservative” approach. Here I am reusing the term – which I used in chapter six to refer to the return of Peking Opera’s traditional plays on the mainland in 1978 – because the approach also shows key characteristic of an attempt to preserve the originality of the play. Like Geng did with the Jingkun Theatre’s productions of traditional Peking Opera plays, his focus in directing Cantonese Opera plays was mostly on the story, in the sense of

³⁴³ *ibid.* 11.

³⁴⁴ *ibid.* 13-18

³⁴⁵ Li 2010: 210.

³⁴⁶ Chan 1991: 51.

³⁴⁷ Yung 1989: 43-44.

³⁴⁸ Li 2011.

the script. He cared a great deal about the characters' emotional development and the logic of the plot. At the same time, he consciously avoided control over the performative aspect. For example, in a press release of the premiere of *The Thorn Hairpin* (*Jingchai Ji* 荊釵記), he described his job as director as “to effectively showcase the strength of individual performers, and to assist them in creating lively and sharp characters.”³⁴⁹ In my view, such a cautious negotiation of stylistic differences between his background and the genre in which he works, together with the mutual understanding of each other's style between the performers and the director due to the long interaction between Peking Opera and Cantonese Opera, was the key to the feasibility of this collaboration.

The second approach, which I will call the “repackaging” approach, is more aggressive in term of artistic adoption. The term comes from a phrase that Yeung Ming, a central figure for this approach, often uses to describe his works: “to repackaging Cantonese Opera with Peking Opera” (*yong jingju chongxin baozhuang Yueju* 用京劇重新包裝粵劇). This approach features a re-arrangement of Cantonese Opera plays with the extensive use of Peking Opera devices. In the following, I will discuss how this works using as case study “The Broken Bridge” (*Duanqiao* 斷橋) from the story of *The White Snake* (*Baishe Zhuan* 白蛇傳).

7.2 Yeung Ming and his “repackaged” Cantonese Opera

7.2.1 A brief biography

Yeung was born in 1941 into an upper-class family in Nanjing, on the Chinese mainland. His father was a high-ranking official of the Nationalist government. Similar to Tang Yuen-ha, Yeung's family was also fond of Peking Opera. They patronized professional troupes in private events, and a few of his family members were amateur performers. Yeung migrated to Hong Kong with his mother in late 1949, while his father and five siblings remained in Nanjing. Despite the migration, his mother was able to continue her involvement with Peking Opera. She actively participated in amateur clubs organized by the local community of mainland immigrants. As she was always bringing him along to the clubs, Yeung continued to live with Peking Opera moves and tunes in his new home. Besides, he also took part in the clubs with Ma Lianliang, Zhang Junqiu and Yu Zhenfei – the three stars who were stuck in Hong Kong in the early 1950s because of their financial troubles. Furthermore, Xiao Fangfang 蕭芳芳, his neighbor's daughter, who would become a movie star, was studying privately with Zhang Suqiu at home. Taking advantage from this connection, he joined the private class as an after-school activity, until he and his mother moved to Shanghai in December 1957.

The decision to move back to the mainland appears to have been occasioned by a congenital heart condition from which Yeung suffered, and the fact that his mother learned about two famous cardiologists who were based in Shanghai. When he was recovering from heart surgery in the hospital, Yeung met Yu Zhenfei again. Seeing some potential in Yeung, and wishing to offer a solution to his awkward schooling situation – his home schooling

³⁴⁹ Leisure and Cultural Services Department 2003.

background, due to his heart issue, made it virtually impossible for him to catch up in secondary school, while he was too old to start over in primary school – Yu invited him to join the newly reformed Shanghai Theatre Academy, where he served as the headmaster. Yeung accepted the offer, passed the entrance exam, and kept learning and practicing in local amateur clubs while waiting for the new semester to start in September 1958. Nevertheless, Shanghai was not his final destination. While singing in a club, he was scouted by Chen Hefeng 陳鶴鋒, the Academic Head and future headmaster of the Hubei School of Traditional Chinese Theatre.³⁵⁰ Eventually, he gave up his seat in the Shanghai Theatre Academy, moved to Hankou, and began his professional Peking Opera training in the summer of 1958 in the Hubei School.

Because of his talent and the school's lack of junior male role performers, which was his specialty, he soon became one of the school's favorites and was given many opportunities to perform. However, this apparently promising career was interrupted by the outbreak of Cultural Revolution in 1966, around the time of his graduation. The Hubei School, like many other institutions, became a target of Maoist revolutionaries and was disbanded. Yeung and his fellow students were allotted the status of “stay and await allocation” (*liuxia dai fenpei* 留下待分配), a euphemism for salaried containment. In fact, they had nowhere to go, since most institutions of traditional Chinese theatre had also been disbanded. It was not until the end of 1971 that this status was lifted and the students were allocated to various newly established, state-owned Peking Opera troupes. However, this was not the case for Yeung. Because of the strong Nationalist background of his family and the presence of family members in Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas, which was perceived as a suspect “overseas relationship” in Maoist terms, he was denounced as an “active counter-revolutionary” and was stripped of the right to resume his profession. Instead, he was sent to work in a pigsty for seven years until 1978, when traditional Peking Opera plays began to be reinstated. In an age that had severely damaged various cultural traditions, skillful performers who still remembered the old plays were in desperate demand by officials in charge of the state-owned troupes (cf. section 6.2.1). As such, Yeung gradually became involved again in mainland Peking Opera, from re-writing scripts of traditional plays to teaching in the Hubei Peking Opera Company, and finally to performing again in 1979. Accompanying his belated career was an ironic anecdote: the PRC government completed the long process to “correct” his “counter-revolutionary” tendencies in one day, so that he could legitimately be on stage the same evening.³⁵¹

Yeung's performing career on the mainland lasted until 1985, when he was fed up with the ideological conflict between his own vision and the mainland's artistic trends, which remained profoundly shaped by political dictates. Thanks to his family connections, he worked in industry for four years before moving back to Hong Kong in October 1989.³⁵² His plan was to take up his profession again. However, like Liang Hanyong, who had also

³⁵⁰ The school was reformed as the Hubei Art School in 2003.

³⁵¹ Yeung Ming (interview, 15 February 2012).

³⁵² Lao 2001: 312.

emigrated in 1982, he was discouraged by the near-invisibility of Peking Opera in the city. He was jobless for eight months and after that only received irregular invitations to write drama reviews for a local newspaper. Life got better when he was invited for guest lectures at the New Asia College of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and for classes at the Young Women's Christian Association clubhouse. From 1992 until his retirement in 2006, he worked at the Hong Kong International Airport as a security manager. Meanwhile, he was teaching individuals and groups in his leisure time, such as the amateur Hong Kong Peking Opera Club. Today, he is still an active freelancing Peking Opera teacher in Hong Kong and Shenzhen.

7.2.2 Repackaging Cantonese Opera

7.2.2.1 Background and general principles

Despite the seemingly discouraging nature of the first few years of Yeung's second stay in Hong Kong, his freelance work helped build up his reputation among local Peking Opera circles and, more significantly, Cantonese Opera communities. He was first approached by Cantonese Opera performers in the mid-1990s, when they asked for private tutorship in foundational skills. Noteworthy is Yeung's pedagogy, in which he always used non-verbal excerpts (for example, the sword dance sequence in *Farewell My Concubine*). This, to a certain degree, inspired his later "repackaging" approach to Cantonese Opera plays. The full nature of this approach was realized soon after, when he worked with Wenyi Xuan 雯藝軒, an amateur Cantonese Opera club. There he rearranged a few plays for the club's annual performances since 1993. More "repackaged" plays occurred after this five-year collaboration, after which he worked with individual performers.

When I interviewed him in 2012, he talked about the general principles of the multi-faceted rearrangements in his "repackaging" approach. He considered a key point his choice of repertoire, as he prefers to work on plays that are based on stories shared between Peking Opera and Cantonese Opera. There is a long history of adapting and rewriting tales and legends into scripts for traditional Chinese theatre.³⁵³ Moreover, these old stories travel across various genres. One can find plays in a wide range of genres that are based on the same story – usually in different versions, however. Indeed, the majority of Yeung's "repackaged" plays are "common plays" shared between Peking Opera and Cantonese Opera, such as "The Autumn River", *Escorting Jingniang at Night (Yesong Jingniang 夜送京娘)*,³⁵⁴ and *Picking Up The Jade Bracelet*. This attention to compatibility, from the initial stage of repertoire choosing, was an important first step toward an effective rearrangement.

Secondly, Yeung consciously avoided changing the verbal component of any play, as he also saw the language of performance as a distinctive feature of the hundreds of traditional Chinese theatrical genres. Instead, he drew on Peking Opera extensively in actions, make-up, and costumes. In his own words, what he did is patching "holes" and covering "flaws" with

³⁵³ Idema 2015: 27.

³⁵⁴ The play is also known, in both genres, as *Escorting Jingniang For A Thousand Miles (Qianli Song Jingniang 千里送京娘)*.

Peking Opera devices.³⁵⁵ In addition, he paid attention to making stories more coherent, like Geng did with his Cantonese Opera productions. One example was *Cleaving Mount Hua with Fury* (*Nupi Huashan* 怒劈華山). According to Yeung, the Cantonese Opera convention of the mountain cleaving scene in this play is performed with a prop spear. This struck Yeung as illogical, as one can jab or pierce with a spear, but not cleave. Therefore, when he rearranged the play, he replaced the spear with an axe or a Chinese glaive.³⁵⁶

7.2.2.2 A Case Study: “Broken Bridge” in *The White Snake*

The legend of the White Snake and her mortal lover, Xu Xian, is a hugely popular story among Chinese playwrights. Some speculations date the story’s original form back to the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279),³⁵⁷ but the earliest full-length version of the legend is a vernacular story found in Feng Menglong’s 馮夢龍 *Jingshi Tongyan* 警世通言 (Stories to Caution the World) in 1624, entitled *Madame Bai Is Imprisoned Forever under Thunder Peak Pagoda* (*Bainiangzi Yongzhen Leifengta* 白娘子永鎮雷峰塔).³⁵⁸ However, Feng was not the author. Adaptations of this story on stage have a similarly long history, of which the earliest attempt was as a “legend play” (*chuanqi* 傳奇) entitled *Thunder Peak* (*Leifeng Ji* 雷峰記), by a certain Chen Liulong 塵六龍. Information other than this, such as the date of the play, is unknown since it has been lost.³⁵⁹

On the Peking Opera stage, initially only individual scenes from the story were performed. Modern performances of the story are all based on the revised version by modern playwright Tian Han. He first adapted the White Snake story for Peking Opera in 1943 as *Story of the Golden Bowl* (*Jinbo Ji* 金鉢記). After a decade of revision, he finalized the play between 1953 and 1955 and named it *The White Snake*.³⁶⁰

Meanwhile, there is no concrete evidence of the story’s adaptation in Cantonese Opera before the twentieth century. In his account of Cantonese Opera performances in Shanghai in the early twentieth century, Song Zuanyou mentions the performance of *Shilin Paying Sacrifice at the Pagoda* (*Shilin Jita* 仕林祭塔) by Li Xuefang 李雪芳 in the 1920s.³⁶¹ Song believes that the play is based on an anonymous youth book (*zidi shu* 子弟書) entitled *Sacrifice at the Pagoda* (*Jita* 祭塔), which is yet another rewriting of the White Snake story. The story focuses on Xu Mengjiao, called by his courtesy name of Shilin, son of Xu Xian and the white snake. The action involves Shilin passing the metropolitan examinations as the top candidate, whereupon he shows his filial piety by making imperial offerings to his mother and liberating her from imprisonment under the Thunder Peak Pagoda.³⁶² Chen Feinong dates the existence of this play even further back, as he described it as a traditional play that was sung

³⁵⁵ Yeung Ming (interview, 15 February 2012).

³⁵⁶ *ibid.*

³⁵⁷ Yin 2015: 89.

³⁵⁸ Idema 2009: xii, xv.

³⁵⁹ *ibid.* xvii.

³⁶⁰ Luo 2014: 191, 196.

³⁶¹ Song 1994: 66-67.

³⁶² Idema 2009: xviii.

in mid-land dialect – meaning that the play preceded the localization of Cantonese Opera’s performing language in the 1920s.³⁶³ A web source also dates a full-length adaptation back to 1912, together with several later rewritings, for example a 1982 version which was based on Tian’s Peking Opera version and some other skits in Cantonese Opera.³⁶⁴

The case I am going to discuss is based on my observation of a rehearsal conducted by Yeung on 27 August 2014. The two collaborating performers were Chan Chak-lui, who impersonated Xu Xian, and Cheung Man-shan, who played the role of Bai Suzhen, the White Snake. They were both amateurs but experienced performers. Chan is a lecturer in the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Cheung is the administrative officer of the Chinese Opera Information Centre at the same university. Both had performed the conventional Cantonese Opera version of the play before. This was the first rehearsal for their upcoming small-scale performance. The rehearsal took place in an activity room at the private clubhouse of a residential building where Yeung lived, the usual place for his classes and rehearsals.

The rehearsal started with the practice of steps and body movements for Chan’s stage entrance. Having previous performing experience with this play, Chan first tried the entrance sequence from memory, while Yeung modified it, through hand-to-hand coaching, with his Peking Opera version of the actions. He also explained to her the reason for such rearrangements in accordance with the narrative. Chan then tried to internalize the new version by making several more runs of it. In the meantime, Cheung was practicing the actions and scripts by herself. After some twenty minutes, Cheung rehearsed her stage entrance with Yeung, while Chan continued to practice what she had just learnt. The rehearsal between Yeung and Cheung took place in a similar fashion, which featured hand-to-hand coaching of the rearranged actions as well as a discussion by Yeung on the rationale behind it. The remaining rehearsal time was devoted to the main duet sequence. Compared to the first two sections, more extensive rearrangement was observed here, on which I will elaborate below. Again, the section was dominated by hand-to-hand tutorship and repetitive runs. The rehearsal lasted for about two hours, and the result was broad-strokes of the “repackaged” version of the play that was expected to be refined in the next rehearsals. Unfortunately, I did not have the chance to witness these, nor the performance itself, as my field trip ended before the dates in question.

In her 2014 book Zhang Minhui observes some characteristics of Cantonese Opera in contemporary Hong Kong that she considers as weaknesses:

Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong emphasizes the freedom of representing real-life actions and, on the contrary, less the stylization of a performance. Formulated move-sets, either in *nanpai* or *beipai*, still exist in martial arts scenes. However, it is uncommon for a civil scene to incorporate the idea of “telling the story through song and dance”, or *zaige zaiwu* 載歌載舞.³⁶⁵

From this perspective, I suggest that what Yeung did with this play, and to an extent his

³⁶³ Chen 2007: 126.

³⁶⁴ <http://www.yuejuopera.cn/yjjs/ctyjjm/20140115/277.html>. Accessed on 27 April 2016.

³⁶⁵ Zhang 2014: 107.

“repackaged” Cantonese Opera in general, can be viewed as an attempt to address these “weaknesses”, which he has also observed. Firstly, he strongly stressed the formularization of actions in his works. For example, he drew on formulaic steps and body movements from the Peking Opera version to replace the original steps in the two entrance sequences, as he considered the original steps to be un lively – or “dead”, in his words. Secondly, he addressed the problem of *zaige zaiwu* in Cantonese Opera. He kept stressing this idea throughout the whole rehearsal, and urged the two performers to demonstrate it through their stylized performance. In particular, he also added a water-sleeve dance sequence, which is based on the Peking Opera version, to a singing passage. Moreover, he drew on actions that are exclusive to the Peking Opera version of the play in order to, in his words, “enrich” it. For example, in a scene where the character Bai Suzhen in a singing passage was questioning Xu Xian about his heartless abandonment of her, a set of “exclusive” actions was added, in which Cheung pushed Chan down to the ground, with her finger to his forehead, and Chan expressed his guilty frustration with his eyes and facial movements.



Figure 7.1. Yeung Ming (left) teaching Chan Chak-lui (reflected in the mirror in blue gown) a scene together with her partner Cheung Man-shan (right). (Photo by author, 2014)



Figure 7.2. The two performers rehearsing Yeung's version of the duet sequence. (Photo by author, 2014)

7.2.3 Some reflection on “repackaged” Cantonese Opera

We have seen that Yeung describes his “repackaged” Cantonese Opera in terms of “patching holes”, “covering flaws” and “enriching the play”. One notes the unequal status of the two genres as Yeung perceives them. He reaffirmed this, stating that what he has called the “national” Peking Opera is artistically superior to “local” Cantonese Opera. Therefore, he believes that his work contributes to the improvement of Cantonese Opera.

Moreover, in my view, his motivation to do this was not merely because of an unequal valuation of the two genres. I come to this conclusion by taking the double meaning of the notion of “repackaging” into consideration. From what I have discussed so far, “to repackage” apparently means to rearrange Cantonese Opera plays by the extensive adoption of Peking Opera devices. Meanwhile, what I argue here is that with such an extensive and explicit adoption of Peking Opera elements, “repackaging” can also be seen as a representation of Peking Opera *disguised* as a form of Cantonese Opera. In this sense, Yeung’s work is a fascinating case for the study of Peking Opera in contemporary Hong Kong, as he tries to present it through another traditional Chinese theatrical genre. He lifts the practice of Peking Opera to a trans-genre level.

Such trans-genre presentation is not unheard of in the history of traditional Chinese theatre. I have already given an example in chapter three, in which Cantonese Opera troupes tried to survive the ban during the Taiping Rebellion by labeling themselves as “Capital Drama” troupes, and performing in the language and style of Xiang Drama – an ancestral genre of both Cantonese and Peking Opera.³⁶⁶ But in Yeung’s case, i.e. Peking Opera disguised as Cantonese Opera, there is a major difference: the disguise is incomplete. While the physical elements in these plays come from Peking Opera, it is Cantonese Opera in terms of performing language. This may in turn hinder the recognizability and, hence, feasibility of the repackaging approach: if the plays are still performed in Cantonese, then how does Yeung’s approach differ from, for instance, Chen Feinong and Xue Juexian, who also did similar things nearly a century ago?

Nevertheless, I think my argument holds, as I also submit that the problem of recognizability is balanced out by the maintenance of a clear artistic boundary between the two genres. Many examples of such maintenance can be found, such as the differentiation between *beipai* and *nanpai* martial arts styles, as well as the naming of *jingluogu* to distinguish the percussion set from the traditional sets. As such, the identity of Peking Opera is preserved despite the shared origin of the two genres and the long history of organic integration of Peking Opera devices into Cantonese Opera. In another words, the “Peking-ness” in Cantonese Opera plays can still be recognized, because of this actively maintained boundary. Therefore, a combined effort of the maintenance of this artistic boundary and the more radical adoption of Peking Opera devices distinguish Yeung from those who also drew on Peking Opera in the early twentieth century. More than merely an adoption, it can be seen as a disguised presentation of Peking Opera in contemporary Hong Kong.

³⁶⁶ Liang 1982: 154; Li 2010: 104; Ruan 2008: 8-9.

This trans-genre endeavor is certainly not free of limitations. One major limitation is what Daphne Lei calls the “unequal bartering” behind it.³⁶⁷ In her own example of Robert Wilson’s 2009 production of *Orlando* in Taiwan, she mentions Wilson’s unexpected total fragmentation of Peking Opera to serve his own vision of experimental theatre. This led to contestation of the production’s artistry among different audiences – in short, it frustrated Peking Opera fans and amused avant-garde theatre lovers.³⁶⁸ In the same light, Yeung’s unequal bartering of different components in his rearrangements also casts doubts on the artistry of the overall end product and its various components, among performers and spectators alike. For example, a frequent collaborator with Yeung observed in an interview that in her experience Yeung paid much more attention to fixed-tune passages, which in many cases are drawn from Kunqu or Peking Opera, the two genres that Yeung knows best and values the highest. Conversely, he tended to be less devoted to musical passages that are exclusive to Cantonese Opera, of which his knowledge is less profound. Such inconsistency made her uneasy in rehearsals.³⁶⁹ I also found, on a serious online discussion forum about Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong, comments on a repackaged play in 2008. One major criticism was the incompatibility of the rearranged actions with the accompanying Cantonese Opera percussion patterns.³⁷⁰

7.3 Canonizing Peking Opera at HKAPA

I will now turn to the representation of Peking Opera in the educational system of Cantonese Opera in contemporary Hong Kong. Specifically, I will focus on the School of Chinese Opera (hereafter the School) within HKAPA, a leading institution that offers certified programmes in Cantonese Opera, and investigate the Peking Opera component in the School’s programme design and stage productions. I will also discuss how this reflects recent developments in Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong.

7.3.1 Peking Opera in the School’s programmes

Before the last two decades of the twentieth century, Cantonese Opera transmission relied mostly on discipleship in troupes and private training schools. In 1979, the establishment of a Cantonese Opera academy by the Chinese Artists Association of Hong Kong (CAAHK) marked the beginning of the institutionalization of Cantonese Opera training.³⁷¹ In the next year it opened three part-time, two-year training programmes in singing, performance and foundational skills respectively. The operation of the academy was halted by financial problems from 1987 to 1989. In 1998, it started collaboration with the HKAPA and opened a certificate programme. This was also the first time that the HKAPA provided professional training in Cantonese Opera. The partnership fell through in 2004, and both institutions have

³⁶⁷ Lei 2011: 176.

³⁶⁸ *ibid.* 176-177.

³⁶⁹ Here I intentionally keep the informant’s anonymity, in order to avoid undesired conflict between my informants. The personal pronoun, “her”, is used neutrally.

³⁷⁰ http://p1.ahlap.net/cgi-bin/p5a_patio.cgi?mode=view&no=1669&p=2. Accessed on 3 May 2016.

³⁷¹ Li 2010: 455; Tai 2012: 17; Ye 2008: 357.

been developing their own programme portfolios since then.³⁷² Currently, the CAAHK academy and the HKAPA are the leading two professionally recognized institutions that provide Cantonese Opera training.

In particular, the HKAPA has been developing substantially in this field. Its two-year Diploma and Advanced Diploma programmes have been solidly established, gaining a good reputation and popularity with both professional circles and the public since 2004. In 2013 a significant structural reform occurred. The Hong Kong government validated the institution's proposal of a four-year Bachelor's degree programme, and it is claimed to be the world's first undergraduate degree in Cantonese Opera.³⁷³ In the same year, the School of Chinese Opera was formed to oversee this programme, together with the existing two programmes. This development made the School the largest and the most representative institution in Hong Kong for Cantonese Opera training.

Despite the School's sole focus on Cantonese Opera, its faculty reflects a certain degree of Peking Opera's influence with the presence of former Peking Opera performers. For example, Ying Kam-sha 刑金莎, who joined in 2006, was a renowned female role performer on the mainland. Hu Zhifeng 胡芝風, a prestigious female role performer with nationwide reputation on the mainland, has also engaged with the School as a Visiting Artist since 2000. In my view, their influence, which flows from their Peking Opera backgrounds, is fundamental, as one of their duties is to teach courses in foundational skills.³⁷⁴ Moreover, the structure of this course further amplifies Ying's and Hu's Peking Opera influence. Their teaching is part of the core curriculum of all programmes and, hence, is compulsory for all students. It is structured in various levels and spread across the full academic year, so that students are enrolled in it continuously, from within their respective programmes. Throughout a semester there are three classes, two hours each, every week.³⁷⁵ Clearly, students will be profoundly shaped by a performing style that they experience so intensively and for such a long period.

In a similar manner, Ying's and Hu's duties as directors of the School's stage productions also reflects Peking Opera's influence. If the aforementioned example of Geng Tianyuan, who consciously avoided performative intervention in his directorial works, appears to contradict my current discussion, I should point out a crucial difference between these two cases. On the one hand, Geng worked with established performers. They were experienced, and knew how to respond to director's instructions with their own "tool box" of performing skills – in fact, experienced performers in traditional Chinese theatre usually prefer to rely on their own skills in solving artistic disputes in plays. In other words, Geng's intervention-free approach actually favored the free interpretation of these performers. On the other hand, Ying and Hu work with students, who generally lack experience and are normally much more malleable to directorial instructions. Hence, hand-to-hand coaching was inevitable during rehearsals. From

³⁷² Ye 2008: 357.

³⁷³ "Prospectus for Undergraduate and Post-Secondary Programmes: 2015/16." Hong Kong: the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts.

³⁷⁴ Ying engages in the courses full-time, while Hu's engagement is on a visiting basis.

³⁷⁵ Boaz Chow (email correspondence, 6 June 2016).

this perspective, Ying's and Hu's backgrounds greatly contributed to the "Peking-ization" of performing style in these productions.

7.3.2 The big picture

Given the leading status of the School in Cantonese Opera training in Hong Kong, its programme design and teaching method directly impact the development of Cantonese Opera in contemporary Hong Kong. In this sense, I suggest that the integration of Peking Opera components into the School's study programmes and stage productions hints at two recent phenomena in the field. Firstly, it reflects a next stage within the long practice of drawing on Peking Opera by Cantonese Opera performers. According to Li Juhua and He Jiayao, this practice used to occur on an irregular basis. They sought help from their fellow "martial arts masters" only when they needed to perform a particular move in a play. But now, with the study of a different genre being integrated into the core curriculum of a recognized institution in the field, adoptions from Peking Opera have become an essential element in Cantonese Opera training. To a certain extent, this represents the institutional legitimization and canonization of Peking Opera in Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong.

Secondly, such canonization raises questions in regard to the artistic boundary between the two genres. On the one hand, the manner in which the School introduces Peking Opera influence in its courses is implicit. Even though it permeates learning, the genre has never been labeled explicitly as a study component. In my view, this implicit manner has been adopted intentionally by the school. I interpret this as a gesture for the School to downplay the differences between the two genres and, hence, blur the artistic boundary. On the other hand, the boundary seems to be still well maintained within the Cantonese Opera circles. Terms like *beipai* and *jingluogu* are still widely used, and practices of these outside devices grab attention of drama critics. For example, Frederic Mao mentioned that some of the School's productions were criticized as being "too *beipai* in style."³⁷⁶ In my view, this hints to an ideological disagreement within Cantonese Opera circles in regard to the adoption of another traditional Chinese theatrical genre.

7.4 Conclusion

Alternative Chinese Opera operates within a specific mindset. In a nutshell, it is alternative to whatever is regarded as "orthodox" Chinese opera, that is, a tradition that has putatively remained unchanged since antiquity and that is putatively held as the cultural property of Chinese everywhere – but as the political property of China proper.³⁷⁷

Daphne Lei's notion of Alternative Chinese Opera offers a good entry point for discussing attempts to present a traditional Chinese theatrical genre in a different form than the conventional settings in a given time and place. From this perspective, repackaged Cantonese Opera by Yeung Ming can also be viewed as alternative, because it is a trans-genre

³⁷⁶ Fredric Mao (interview, 10 December 2015).

³⁷⁷ Lei 2011: 11.

presentation, and it is incomplete: Peking Opera in actions, Cantonese Opera in language. This makes it ambiguous to categorize these plays into one definitive genre. However, this ambiguity offers, at the same time, a space for interpretation. It depends on the perspective we use to look at this endeavor, just like the double meaning of repackaging that I have discussed.

In the same light, if we view the Peking-ization of Cantonese Opera since the early twentieth century as an alternative to the genre's conventions, the attempt by the School to conventionalize this practice into the foundation of Cantonese Opera training should be analyzed also as a conventionalization of the alternative. This process raises contestation: while the School is trying to blur the artistic boundary between the two genres in question, it is still firmly maintained in the minds of performers and critics. While this ideological contestation may influence the future development of Cantonese Opera, local spectators appear to be less bothered by it than one might expect. As Mao said when he responded to the criticisms to the School's productions as being too *beipai*, "then again, spectators are not picky on this issue. The only thing that matters to them is if they are entertained by the play."³⁷⁸

Indeed. Amid the ever-changing conventions, inter-genre interactions, intertactions with other art forms, and political dynamics through time, traditional Chinese theatre remains entertainment before anything else.

³⁷⁸ Fredric Mao (interview, 10 December 2015).

Chapter Eight / Conclusion

When he first proposed the idea of Cultural Biography in his 1986 article, Kopytoff gave a house-related example from one of his focus groups, the Suku of Zaire. He observed that there is a typical biography of a Suku hut that shows its expected functional changes in its “life expectancy”.³⁷⁹ Throughout previous chapters I have shown that the biography of Peking Opera in Hong Kong is characterized by the reacquisitions of cultural, social and political meanings across time, especially when it moved along various cultural forms. In Kopytoffian terms, Peking Opera repeatedly experienced recommodification – and hence functional changes – when it travelled along different “spheres of exchange” during its life. What, then, does this biography tell us about Peking Opera itself, and its relation to various social agents in Hong Kong? Moreover, what message does this biography convey when we compare it with its “expected” biography on the Chinese mainland?

8.1 A house of curiosities

Everything started with the nationalization of Peking Opera, as used in reference to the process that transferred Peking Opera’s status from that of a regional theatrical genre to that of a representative icon of the modern nation of China, which happened on the Chinese mainland in the first few decades of the twentieth century. The combined effort of Qi Rushan and Mei Lanfang among others to select Peking Opera from hundreds of traditional Chinese theatrical genres, and to lift it up to a national level comparable to that of Western theatre, as the Chinese “national drama”, fundamentally changed the fate of the genre. At this level, it was not mere entertainment anymore, but a refined high art that with a sense of entitlement to worldwide recognition. This moment also set the core background for many of my discussions in this project, especially with respect to identity and politics. This nationalization process is so significant that it has created a contextual framework: scholars have no way to neglect the impact made by the genre’s national status when they discuss Peking Opera in modern times.

As for my study, one early and major impact made by the nationalization of Peking Opera is that it brought the genre to Hong Kong, first through Mei Lanfang’s tour in 1922. This moment marks the beginning of my cultural biography of Peking Opera in Hong Kong. This was not just another ordinary tour by a star performer, but rather a stop on a grand diplomatic tour of the reformed Peking Opera throughout the world, through Mei’s presentation. This can be seen from the choice of repertoire to the strategy of publicity; from Mei’s feminine impersonation on stage to his diplomatic interactions with the British colonial officials off stage. In the meantime, the success of this tour was facilitated by the simultaneous dual sense of “familiar yet exotic” that was shared among local spectators. On the one hand, Peking Opera’s artistic similarities with the local genre of Cantonese Opera

³⁷⁹ Kopytoff 1986: 67.

motivated local spectators to go for something that was (more or less) comprehensible. On the other hand, the northern origin of Peking Opera intrigued them to reach for something new. The sense of “familiar yet exotic” was at work in the creation of a unique spectacle of the incoming genre for the local community.

Meanwhile, it also set the stage for the inter-genre interaction between Cantonese Opera and Peking Opera in the first few decades of the twentieth century. The urbanization of Cantonese Opera had created a consumer-centred market of the genre. In no time, practitioners were thrust into the arena of market competition. In order to survive, they continuously needed something new to dazzle spectators but, at the same time, whatever they did needed to be incorporated into the genre organically without fundamentally distorting its form – after all, people were paying to see a Cantonese Opera performance and not something else. This was where the “familiar yet exotic” effect of Peking Opera came in and why Cantonese Opera performers were inspired to draw on it. Several articulations of the artistic adoption were observed: some were “copy and paste” types of borrowing that offered spectators one-off amusement, such as particular martial arts moves, and the scenes from which they originated. Some were adapted into Cantonese Opera and became a stylistic option of the genre, such as the *beipai* martial arts style and the percussion-set of *jingluogu*. As noted, these examples even replaced the traditional options in Cantonese Opera and became the conventional choice of practitioners. There were also a few adoptions drawn from Peking Opera that had become organically integrated into Cantonese Opera. Such adoptions were so seamless that their northern origins have been largely forgotten. The singing mode of *liantan* is a good example of this kind of incorporation.

8.2 A refugee shelter

The life of Peking Opera in Hong Kong became challenging soon after its triumphant start. The “exotic” power of Peking Opera faded across time, as the local community gradually got used to the genre due to substantial visits by mainland performers and its appropriated representation in Cantonese Opera. After all, that it was not performed in Cantonese was a huge disadvantage in its attempt to win favour from an audience in the local entertainment market. The “hero to zero” story of Ma Lianliang’s stay in Hong Kong in the late 1940s illustrates convincingly the cold reception given to Peking Opera by local society.

However, despite the lack of attention from locals, Peking Opera managed to stay in the local cultural scene, supported by the growth of a community of mainland immigrants. This community provided both supply and demand, which formed something of a stable habitat for the genre. The formation of this community took place from the 1930s to the 1950s with a large-scale emigration from the war-torn Chinese mainland. Given the cultural background of the majority of these immigrants, for whom Peking Opera was part of their life, the community itself created a sizeable audience base for the genre. Although their cultural background might undermine the exotic power of Peking Opera, at the same time the genre served them well as a site of nostalgia. Attending Peking Opera performances gave them an opportunity to satisfy their longing for the familiar – the entertainment they grew up with, as well as the accompaniment of fellow clansmen.

In addition to an audience base, within this community of mainland immigrants there were also practitioners of Peking Opera, who had to earn their living by continuing their profession in their new home. Their pragmatic career decisions led to the establishment of four local Peking Opera training schools in the mid-twentieth century. This marked the period between the late 1950s and the early 1970s as the heyday of Peking Opera in Hong Kong. Offering free boarding and career training, these schools successfully recruited young talents from local families. These training schools were also able to sustain themselves by capturing substantial opportunities for conventional performances and, in the case of the China Drama Academy, the chance to spin off acrobatic shows. Moreover, these schools had a social impact. Their operational basis offered local families a way to survive in the challenging economy of mid-twentieth century Hong Kong. It was only in the late 1960s that Peking Opera began to lose its battle for popularity against other modern entertainment forms such as public television broadcast and movies. Also, improved living standards gradually downplayed the attractiveness of the financial and career incentives created by these schools. These pressures forced Peking Opera deep into the background of the local cultural scene.

Nevertheless, the dwindling of Peking Opera opened up another avenue for graduates from these local training schools, when they made an unexpected and substantial impact on the industry of local martial arts movies. Working as stuntmen, martial arts choreographers, actors and directors, they brought extremely competitive acrobatic skills to their new field, even though they had originally been equipped with these skills for an entirely different profession. More significantly, after the death of Bruce Lee, they filled a void in the industry with new aesthetic energy. As such, their choreographed actions, distinctive sense of rhythm, harmonious unison of action and comedy, and appealing filming technique of stunt sequences had a major impact on the industry.

Meanwhile, one could also find aesthetic engagement between Peking Opera and martial arts movies exemplified in the *wuxia* movie productions by King Hu and Zhang Che in the 1960s. Especially in the case of Hu, the insight here is that the engagement was not a mere borrowing from one art form to another. Instead, Hu's vision was far more radical: he wanted to test the limits of Peking Opera, regarding its presentational capacity, by reproducing it in cinematic settings and with cinematic language.

At this point I want to stress a main argument of my project, which concerns the nature of Peking Opera in Hong Kong. Its existence has not always and invariably been understood as a stand-alone art form; rather, it has been intertwined with other performing arts. As shown in my summary above, Peking Opera has had an appreciable influence on Cantonese Opera and local martial art movies. Many, however, would have initially overlooked this. Jackie Chan's success as a movie actor, for instance, has overshadowed his previous Peking Opera background, which in fact clearly was a major contribution to his later fame in the movie industry. The same is true for King Hu, as his radical idea on Peking Opera has been obstructed from view by his general success as a *wuxia* movie director.

8.3 A laboratory of performing arts

While the first half of my biography of Peking Opera in Hong Kong was centred on the duad of “familiar and exotic,” its development in post-1997 Hong Kong was charged with that of “national and local.” I develop this argument from an emerging discourse on how Chinese-speaking communities in different social settings have sought, interpreted or invented Chinese-ness through their practice of traditional Chinese theatre. Examples include Nancy Guy’s study of the fate of Peking Opera on Taiwan (2005) and Lee Tong Soon’s article on Cantonese Opera in Liverpool, U.K. (2009). In my study, both the local authorities and Peking Opera performers have their own visions of Chinese-ness, and their own ways of identity-building, which affect their stance toward, and their practice of, Peking Opera in Hong Kong.

The British Colonial government, for example, had an obvious identity as a colonizer. The change of governing philosophy by the British imperial regime at the turn of the twentieth century, which was to facilitate collaborative governance with the colonized population, led to the local government’s adoption of a more tolerant attitude toward the Chinese community in Hong Kong. Practically, the government maintained a minimal interference policy toward traditional Chinese culture. This stance passively provided a space for Peking Opera to survive. The urge for more means of public access to cultural activities in the 1960s, and then the preparation of sovereignty handover since the mid-1980s, led to more input from financial and infrastructural resources. Again, traditional Chinese theatre benefitted from these, and a revival of Peking Opera in Hong Kong occurred through the establishments of several troupes.

The HKSAR government after 1997 would have led one to expect to have a clear identity as part of the Chinese national sphere. Interestingly, in practice, the government has tried to consider both sides of the duad, and has created a “national yet local” identity for itself. On the one hand, it subscribes to the national discourse on Peking Opera that was developed on the Chinese mainland in the first decades of the twentieth century, and perceives the genre as the “national drama,” a cultural symbol of a reemerging, tradition-based Chinese nation. This political stance directly informs its booming financial and institutional support for Peking Opera. On the other hand, it attempts to claim localness by differentiating Hong Kong from the Chinese mainland and, hence, carefully positioning the city in the pan-China atlas of traditional Chinese theatre.

As for the three representative Peking Opera performers in contemporary Hong Kong, while they all share the same nationalist vision of the genre (with “nationalist” used in the sense developed for this study), they have diversified interpretations of their own identities, which in turn have led them to undertake different artistic endeavours. Liang Hanyong may be viewed as a pure national player. He takes the nationalist vision fully and in its purest form – something is worth doing because it represents the nation. This motivates him to utilize the increasing official resources, which are distributed by various cultural administrative institutions through direct funding and audience-building programmes, to cultivate the small Peking Opera habitat in Hong Kong. He manages to survive by utilizing various cost-reducing measures such as the one-man troupe setting, as well as his focus of small scale,

straightforward community performances.

Sharing a nationalist vision of Peking Opera, and benefitting from official support in a similar way to Liang, Tang Yuen-ha has taken another path by expressing a strong local identity. Her artistic taste, which was largely nourished by her cosmopolitan background, leads her to deviate from the mainland presentational trend of Peking Opera. With a vision to represent the genre in a form that best suits locals' taste and knowledge, she has developed the practice of "guided demonstration". In other words, she creates something that is produced both *by* the locals and *for* the locals. This innovation not only contributes to establishing Tang's status as the leading figure of Peking Opera in Hong Kong, but also makes a reverse impact on the "home" of the genre, causing her mainland counterparts to rethink how Peking Opera should be carried on and popularized in the twenty-first century.

Meanwhile, Yeung Ming articulates yet another interpretation of a "national yet local" identity. Among the three contemporary performers I have studied, he shows the most vigorous national sentiment regarding the genre – indeed he admitted to a certain amount of disparagement toward other regional genres of traditional Chinese theatre. Despite this, he chose to represent the "national drama" through the local genre of Cantonese Opera. He "repackages" Cantonese Opera plays with references to Peking Opera, and draws on artistic devices from the latter extensively. On the one hand, such repackaged plays serve as a good example to prove that interaction between these two genres is still strong in present-day Hong Kong. On the other hand, these repackaged plays also raise interesting questions. How should we identify them? Are they Cantonese Opera plays in a strong Peking Opera style, or Peking Opera plays that are performed in Cantonese and by Cantonese Opera performers? If we also consider the "national-ness" and "localness" that these two genres represented, this question of identification also leads to a fascinating question on Yeung's role in this saga. Does he nationalize a local genre, or localize a national genre? I would suggest, at this point, that what he does has created a double image, an ambiguity.

In addition to Yeung Ming, the School of Chinese Opera at HKAPA also carries the inter-genre interaction forward in present-day Hong Kong. The addition of Peking Opera performers into the School's faculty and their involvement in teaching and directing ensure that Peking Opera has a voice in the institutionalized training of Cantonese Opera performers. I further suggest that the "Peking Opera effect" is further legitimized and canonized because of the School's leading status in Cantonese Opera training in recent decades. Here the cases of Yeung and the School form a contrast regarding the effect of their engagements in this inter-genre interaction. While Yeung has created a fascinating ambiguity, the School has given a clear signal regarding its standpoint: the future of Cantonese Opera should lie in a more vigorous interaction with other traditional Chinese theatrical genres, and possibly other theatrical and performing art forms.

8.4 Peking Opera in Taiwan and Singapore: a comparison

Zooming out from Hong Kong, transmissions of Peking Opera from the Chinese mainland to other areas in Asia also entail noteworthy stories. Here, drawing on previous research by others, I will briefly consider the cases of Taiwan and in Singapore. The respective

similarities that they share with Hong Kong – an already mature local theatrical tradition in Taiwan (*gezaixi* 歌仔戲), and a British colonial background in Singapore – offer good starting points for comparison. In this light, a discussion of the developments of Peking Opera in these two places will enrich our understanding of how the genre situates itself in different social, cultural and political settings, and at the same time provide comparative insight into any unique features of the case of Hong Kong.

8.4.1 Peking Opera in Taiwan

After the first verifiable Peking Opera performance on the island in 1891, which was performed by a troupe from Shanghai in a private event, the genre gained popularity during the Japanese colonization period between 1895 and 1945.³⁸⁰ According to Wang Anqi, this vibrant Peking Opera environment was mainly facilitated by frequent visits of troupes from Shanghai and other coastal cities in the southeast of the mainland.³⁸¹ Meanwhile, a sizable audience base of the genre that could sustain such an environment was maintained by the desire of the colonized to tie in with Chinese culture. As Nancy Guy writes: “In the face of foreign domination, the Taiwanese, particularly the literati, sought to strengthen cultural ties with China, which in turn affirmed their identity as Chinese.”³⁸² This coheres with a similar desire to connect to the Chinese mainland identity found among mainland immigrants in mid-twentieth century Hong Kong, when they turned to Peking Opera as a site of nostalgia. Also similar was the minimal control over local cultural practices by the colonizers. For the first four decades of the Japanese colonial period, little governmental intervention in the arena of traditional theatres was found.³⁸³ According to Zeng Yongyi, the Japanese government was more interested in studying these practices so as to better understand their colonized subjects.³⁸⁴ Thus, both Peking Opera and indigenous Taiwanese theatrical genres were given space to develop on the island. It was only after the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 that everything associated with China, including traditional theatre, was restricted until the end of colonization in 1945.

Another similarity between Peking Opera in Hong Kong and Taiwan was the struggle for survival in the private sector during the 1940s and 1950s. While the situation in Hong Kong was demonstrated by Ma Lianliang’s, Zhang Junqiu’s and Yu Zhenfei’s failure to sustain their enterprise, it was illustrated on Taiwan by Gu Zhengqiu 顧正秋, a renowned female role performer who was trained in Shanghai and was a private student of Mei Lanfang. She and her troupe were invited to Taiwan by the Eternal Happiness Theatre (*Yongle Xiyuan* 永樂戲院) for an engagement of a month at the end of 1948, and she extended her stay after an initial success. However, this extension also made the tour conclude at the peak of political unrest on the mainland, which in turn prevented the whole troupe from traveling back. So they decided to stay and continue their regular commercial performances at the Eternal Happiness

³⁸⁰ Guy 2005: 15; Wang 2002: 25.

³⁸¹ Wang 2002: 26.

³⁸² Guy 2005: 15.

³⁸³ *ibid.* 21.

³⁸⁴ Zeng 1988: 63.

Theatre. More fortunate than Ma's ill-fated career in Hong Kong, Gu enjoyed five years of successful business in Taiwan before financial problems led to the disbandment of the troupe in 1953.³⁸⁵ Nevertheless, no other Peking Opera troupe at the time shared Gu's success, and none – even those with strong casts of performers – survived for more than a few months.³⁸⁶ The reasons for the unreceptive environment toward Peking Opera were once again familiar: a struggling post-war economy, the emergence of other, modern forms of entertainment, and the locals' active alienation from mainland-imported culture. Particularly in Taiwan, the alienation was greatly attributed to tension and, later on, violent conflicts between “in-province” (*bensheng* 本省) Taiwanese and mainland Chinese immigrants or “out-provincers” (*waishengren* 外省人) during that period. In this sense, Peking Opera as a mainland import was inevitably associated with the mainlanders, and became the subject of indigenous alienation.³⁸⁷

In spite of the similarly struggling private market of both places in the mid-twentieth century, Peking Opera was actually experienced a rise in Taiwan in the 1950s and reached its peak in the 1960s and 1970s, while its activity was still limited in Hong Kong at the time. This can be attributed to support by the Nationalist government soon after they moved their base from the Chinese mainland to Taiwan in 1949. From the early 1950s, troupes of various scales were established under the administration of the Ministry of Defense.³⁸⁸ Later on in the 1960s, the Ministry also set up training schools affiliated with these troupes. This state support through military-owned troupes and training schools also makes the history of Peking Opera in Taiwan very distinctive in studies of the genre at large.

According to Wang Anqi, there was a practical reason for the Nationalist armed forces in Taiwan to set up and support their own troupes. As Peking Opera remained a major public entertainment on the mainland in the first half of the twentieth century, there already existed a practice in the Nationalist regime to arrange Peking Opera performances for the armed forces as entertainment before their 1949 relocation to Taiwan. Understandably this practice continued after the relocation, and oral records of performers testify to the vibrant scene of such performances at the time. For example, Zhou Zhengrong 周正榮 recalled that he had participated in 339 performances in 1951; Li Huanchun 李環春 also recalled an experience of giving three performances at three military zones on the island in a single day.³⁸⁹ Given the dwindling private market, it was logical for the Nationalist government to maintain the “supply” with its own resources.

³⁸⁵ Wang 2002: 32-33.

³⁸⁶ *ibid.* 43-44.

³⁸⁷ Guy 2005.

³⁸⁸ There were as many as twenty troupes existing at some point of that period. Numerous reorganizations took place, and the final one in 1969 consolidated the four major state-owned troupes: The Great Condor Troupe (*Dapeng Jutuan* 大鵬劇團) of the air forces, the Light of the Land Troupe (*Luguang Jutuan* 陸光劇團) of the army, the Light of the Sea Troupe (*Haiguang Jutuan* 海光劇團) of the navy, and the Light of Camel Troupe (*Mingtuo Jutuan* 明駝劇團) of the Combined Service Forces.

³⁸⁹ Wang 2002: 45-46.

As a matter of fact, the operations of these state-owned troupes did not go well during the first few years, mainly due to the government's poor post-war financial situation. They gradually improved with the recovery of the state's economy and the gradual perfection of the organization of the troupes. Moreover, the difficult early years also compelled these troupes to engage in commercial performances from 1954 onward, with officials for entertainment affairs in the armed forces responsible for arranging such events. In 1965, the Ministry of Defense monopolized the organization of commercial performances of all military-owned troupes, staging them at the China Armed Forces Literature and Art Activities Center (*Guojun Wenyi Zhongxin* 國軍文藝中心), formerly the Kuo-kuang Movie Theatre (*Guoguang Xiyuan* 國光戲院).³⁹⁰

In addition to the practical needs, there were also political factors that contributed to the government support of Peking Opera on Taiwan, in which the genre “was put to work in support of hegemony,” in Guy's words.³⁹¹ As noted in chapter four, a competition for legitimacy was underway between the PRC government on the mainland and the Nationalists on Taiwan. As a strategy the Nationalists spread an ideology that valued traditional Chinese culture over local Taiwanese culture. Hence the “Chinese-ness” Peking Opera symbolized was to them a powerful tool to achieve their political goal. On top of that, Peking Opera was intentionally kept in its traditional form, so as to counterbalance the mainland-Chinese reforms of the genre. As such, the Nationalists were able to imagine and present themselves as safeguarding traditional Chinese culture. This traditionalist cultural strategy was particularly effective when traditional plays were denounced and banned on the mainland during the Cultural Revolution, from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. Consequently, Peking Opera's tradition was kept alive in both Taiwan and Hong Kong, while it was almost wiped out on the mainland during a decade of denunciation and forced silence. Government support of Peking Opera in Taiwan was further increased in 1968, when the Ministry of Education took over the Fu-hsing Drama School (*Fuxing Xixiao* 復興戲校) and became the second major supporter of the genre besides the Ministry of Defense.³⁹²

The state's regulation of repertoire was another political impact on Peking Opera in Taiwan. It is embodied, since its first implementation in 1947, primarily in a list of permitted and banned plays. The list underwent several major revisions throughout the following decades, mainly in response to the changing political environment across the Taiwan Straits. For example, the list was thoroughly revised in 1966, in an attempt to prevent all new plays that flourished during the PRC's drama reform movement in the 1950s from being staged in Taiwan. The ban of post-1949 mainland plays was formally lifted by the Ministry of Education in 1988, after the lifting of martial rule in 1987.

The 1970s was a decade of challenges for Peking Opera both in Taiwan and in Hong Kong. Both places faced the aging of the first generation of immigrants from the Chinese mainland, who formed the core audience base of the genre. Coupled with the failure to

³⁹⁰ *ibid.* 53.

³⁹¹ Guy 2005: 4.

³⁹² *ibid.* 69.

nurture a new generation of spectators, who grew up in a completely different setting of popular culture, rapid shrinking of the audience base was inevitable – and devastating.³⁹³ On Taiwan, scholars ascribe the problem to the government's traditionalist strategy on Peking Opera, with the government's preference for traditional plays, strict censorship of content, and ban of interaction between Taiwan and the mainland resulting in a lack of artistic creativity in the field. As Guy puts it, “artistically speaking, Taiwan's Peking Opera tradition essentially remained frozen in a pre-1949 state” in that period.³⁹⁴

The generational shift within the political leadership on the island also gave rise to indigenous ideology and posted a political challenge to Peking Opera. Voices that urged the government to redirect its focus from the recovery of the Chinese mainland to a focus on Taiwan itself and its own people had been growing louder ever since the 1970s. The rise of opposition political parties, such as the Democratic Progressive Party (established in 1986), further catalyzed this trend. Moreover, the empowerment of new-generation Nationalists in the government also shook the dominant Chinese national ideology from within.³⁹⁵ Eventually a significant shift of cultural policy was made during the first term of Lee Teng-hui's 李登輝 presidency between 1988 and 1990, formally recognizing indigenous discourse.³⁹⁶ Under the new policy, the local genre of *gezaixi* received stronger state support, while Peking Opera no longer held high priority.³⁹⁷ The re-legalization of travel across the Taiwan Strait in 1987 and the lifting of the ban on mainland plays in 1988 also contributed to the downsizing of state support for Peking Opera. As mainland troupes were free to perform in Taiwan, their innovation in repertoire and artistic superiority quickly came to dominate the Peking Opera market over local practitioners. This in turn caused doubts, among the public and within the government, on the rationale behind continuous state support for local troupes, as the shrinking market could easily be accommodated by regular visits by mainland troupes. It was in this context that the three military-owned troupes were dissolved and merged into one, the Guo Guang Opera Company 國光劇團, in 1995. Its shift of administration from the Ministry of Defense to the Ministry of Education also marked the end of the distinctive history of Peking Opera in Taiwan as tied to the military. In all, the downsizing of state support for Peking Opera toward the end of the twentieth century presents a sharp contrast with the case of Hong Kong, which was experiencing an increase of official recognition and sponsorship at the time.

Practitioners in Taiwan responded to these two challenges accordingly. In terms of audience building, they turned to a modernization of Peking Opera in order to accommodate the changing tastes and cultural consumption habits of new generations of Taiwanese. Guo Xiaozhuang's Small Ensemble of Elegant Voices (see chapter five) is a case in point. It drew

³⁹³ Wang 2002: 88-89; Su 2002: 99.

³⁹⁴ Guy 2005: 132.

³⁹⁵ Su 2002: 93; Guy 2005: 151-152.

³⁹⁶ Lee was the first local Taiwanese to become the ROC president. He was hand-picked by Chiang Ching-kuo 蔣經國, his predecessor who first brought up the agenda of democratization and indigenization of the government. (Guy 2005: 152)

³⁹⁷ Su 2002: 133, 139.

on western contemporary theatre extensively. For example, Guo introduced the idea of a director and became the first in Taiwan to appoint a director for a Peking Opera production. It also employed modern stage techniques, and collaborated frequently with practitioners in, for instance, western theatres and Chinese orchestras. Moreover, the troupe adopted modern marketing measures, such as staging its performances in modern theatres, distribution of illustrated programs, and selling of complementary merchandise: T-shirts, mugs, stationery, etc. In Wang Anqi's words, what Guo did was an attempt to transform the image of Peking Opera in Taiwan from a "cultural remnant of the past generation" to a "contemporary, hip, yet refined art" for the younger generation, especially intellectuals.³⁹⁸

Indeed, one may associate Guo's vision of Peking Opera in Taiwan with that on the post-Cultural-Revolution Chinese mainland, which resulted in a gradual domination of reformist, contemporary approaches to the genre; and Taiwan saw some even more radical developments in this respect. Wu Hsing-kuo (see 6.2.2), a martial male role performer who graduated from the Fu-hsing Drama School, formed the Contemporary Legend Theatre in 1986. Most of the troupe's productions were adaptations from Shakespearean plays and Greek tragedies. It also drew substantively on modern art forms, such as contemporary dance, movies and Environmental Theatre, and showed a tendency to retain only thin traces of Peking Opera in its productions. In other words, Wu had created an experimental style of Peking Opera – or nearly turned it into a new theatrical genre, as Wang puts it.³⁹⁹

Meanwhile, a localization of Peking Opera was observed in response to the rise of indigenous discourse. This process was embodied in three facets. Firstly, new plays that were based on Taiwanese stories emerged. One example is the *Taiwan Trilogy* (*Taiwai Sanbuqu* 台灣三部曲), where all three plays within the series – *Mazu* 媽祖 (1998), *Zheng Chenggong and Taiwan* (*Zheng Chenggong Yu Taiwan* 鄭成功與台灣, 1999) and *Liao Tianding* 廖添丁 (1999) – were based on local religion and familiar figures in the history of Taiwan. Secondly, local art forms were drawn on. For example, local tunes were used in the *Taiwan Trilogy*.⁴⁰⁰ Also, when the Peking Opera Troupe of the National Taiwan College of Performing Arts produced a theatrical adaptation of Lu Xun's 魯迅 famous story *The True Story of Ah Q* in 1996, the production team adopted *duma diao* 都馬調, a major singing mode in *gezaixi*, and based a singing passage on the familiar Taiwanese folksong *Grasshopper Teasing a Rooster* (*Caomeng Nong Jigong* 草蜢弄雞公).⁴⁰¹ Thirdly, plays were produced from the Taiwanese perspective, meaning that they reflected a "Taiwanese way" of thinking. To Wang, this is the ultimate embodiment of Peking Opera's localization on the island. This has not been fully achieved yet in Wang's eyes, but some preliminary results on this front were in evidence. For example, the representation of Taiwanese perspectives on the intercultural conflict between

³⁹⁸ Wang 2002: 108-109.

³⁹⁹ *ibid.* 110.

⁴⁰⁰ Lei 2011: 38.

⁴⁰¹ Wang 2002: 134.

the Taiwanese and the Dutch and Japanese in respective colonial periods was found in the latter two of the *Taiwan Trilogy*.⁴⁰²

In the twenty-first century Peking Opera in Taiwan continued its path of thematic innovation, but at the same time demonstrated a process of de-politicization. One example is the redirection of the Guo Guang Opera Company from producing localized plays to focusing on the feminization of plays. The focus was shifted from telling Taiwan's story to, in Daphne Lei's words, "telling women's stories from women's points of view."⁴⁰³ In the meantime, the Small Ensemble of Elegant Voices and the Contemporary Legend Theatre are still enjoying some success, in terms of popularity, with their experimental productions; while the Taipei Li-yuan Peking Opera Theatre (*Taipei Xinjutuan* 台北新劇團), a private professional troupe established in 1992, represents the traditionalist in terms of performing practices and repertoire.

In short, Peking Opera in Taiwan and Hong Kong travelled frequently opposing trajectories, especially from the 1950s onward. Both being impacted by political interventions, Peking Opera in Taiwan experienced a downfall, from being the beneficiary of full-fledged government support to a genre severely affected by indigenous discourse. In the meantime, Peking Opera in Hong Kong rose from being a weak contender in the public entertainment market to the status of "national drama" under the discourse of "cultural return".

8.4.2 Peking Opera in Singapore

The history of Peking Opera in Singapore began around the same time as in Taiwan, with the first verifiable performance in 1893, performed by a visiting troupe from Fuzhou, in Fujian province.⁴⁰⁴ The large proportion of ethnic Chinese in Singapore, which comprised around three quarters of the total population at the time, ensured relatively high visibility for traditional Chinese theatre. Nevertheless, a similar demography of Chinese communities to that in Hong Kong, including Cantonese people and people from Fujian and Chaozhou, meant that Peking Opera was less prominent also in Singapore than the three culturally and linguistically bounded regional genres of Cantonese Opera, Hoklo Drama and Teochew Opera.

In the first four decades of the twentieth century, Peking Opera was staged mainly indoor in theatres, where theatre owners frequently organized temporary troupes by hiring mainland performers, mostly from Fujian and Shanghai.⁴⁰⁵ This presented a contrast with those more prominent genres that were often performed outside on the street or on temporary stages outside temples. Also, performances of Peking Opera usually served as pure entertainment, while those of the more prominent genres were usually linked to traditional Chinese religious activities.⁴⁰⁶ In Singapore, distinct from other cases I have discussed where audience bases were formed mainly by the so-called northern Chinese community, the Fujian

⁴⁰² Lei 2011: 38.

⁴⁰³ *ibid.* 41. Lei also argues that Peking Opera itself was also effeminized with these innovative, feminine plays.

⁴⁰⁴ Wang 2004: 29.

⁴⁰⁵ *ibid.* 36.

⁴⁰⁶ Lee 2009: 5.

community formed the core audience of Peking Opera. According to Wang Fang, this may be attributed to the geographical proximity of Fujian and Anhui and, thus, the familiarity and comprehensibility to the Fujianese of Anhui Opera, a predecessor of Peking Opera. Practically, this community, which included many bankers and businessmen, was wealthier and could afford the expensive tickets. To them, it was a site for the accumulation of cultural capital – they went to Peking Opera performances to show off their wealth and taste in traditional Chinese culture.⁴⁰⁷

Singapore being – like Hong Kong – a British colony in Asia, traditional Chinese theatre was also given sufficient space to survive by the colonial government, although such freedom was also very much the result of initial efforts on the part of the Chinese community. According to Gretchen Li, Angelina Phillips and Pitt Kuan-wah, performances of traditional Chinese theatre were somewhat restricted by the government before 1850, probably in order to restrict public assemblies of the Chinese community. It was after a petition submitted by a group of Chinese community leaders in February 1850, a protest by Chinese shopkeepers in January 1857 and a riot in Penang two months later that the government made a decision to loosen its control over traditional Chinese theatre.⁴⁰⁸ Even so, occasional legal interventions in the name of public order occurred, similar to the case of Hong Kong. For example, in 1895 the colonial government passed the Theatre Ordinance, forcing theatres to rearrange their seat layout from teahouse style to modern theatre style, for the sake of public safety and hygiene.⁴⁰⁹ Later in the 1950s, the use of child performers was also banned by the government, which passed a law to prevent those under seventeen years old from being employed as performers unless it was permitted by the labor department.⁴¹⁰

One common theme that is shared among all the locations I have discussed – except the Chinese mainland, because of the PRC government's constant political interference and the massive, nationwide popularity of the genre – is the decline of the genre in the mid-twentieth century. Again, the situation in Singapore may be attributed to similar reasons: a struggling post-World-War-Two economy, the influx of modern entertainment, the aging of the core audience, and lack of interest in traditional Chinese theatre among the younger generations.⁴¹¹ The migrations of performers back to the mainland after the establishment of the PRC in 1949, based on an optimistic vision of the new regime and a wish to contribute to nation-building, further worsened the situation in Singapore.⁴¹²

However, the period from the 1960s to the 1980s marked a revival of traditional Chinese theatre in Singapore. After it declared independence in 1965, the city-state was in search of a national identity, and multiculturalism had become one important notion in this quest, because of Singapore's multiethnic demography. Chinese culture inevitably became a pillar of the multicultural discourse, and traditional Chinese theatre was elevated as a cultural symbol.

⁴⁰⁷ Wang 2004: 66-72.

⁴⁰⁸ Liu & Phillips 1988: 23

⁴⁰⁹ *ibid.* 27-29.

⁴¹⁰ Pitt 1988: 68.

⁴¹¹ Lee 2009: 138.

⁴¹² Wang 2004: 86.

This strategy to uphold traditional Chinese theatre as a means to strengthen the state's Chinese identity was similar to the situation in post-1997 Hong Kong, although the latter was more like a passive political obligation of a "cultural return" to China. Also, the Chinese identity that the Singaporean government tried to build was more heterogeneous. In other words, instead of a single, national Chinese identity that was mainland-based, the Singaporean government was looking for a "multi-Chinese" identity, where it pragmatically echoed the variety of its Chinese communities. In terms of traditional theatre, this meant that Peking Opera was never the jewel in the crown, but had to share the state's re-recognition with other prominent genres, such as Cantonese Opera.

Also noteworthy was that under the epithet of "culture", traditional Chinese theatre in Singapore was "sanitized" of its long-standing commercial and religious functions. Amateur groups replaced professional troupes to be the bearer of the art form. Customary and religious performances, which were traditionally performed by professional troupes, were deemed artistically inferior by the authorities.⁴¹³ On the other hand, the organization of amateur groups fit well into the government's vision of a national culture of Singapore and were privileged. As Lee Tong-soon puts it,

"In this framework, the structure, history, ideology, and performance practices of amateur opera troupes serve as an appropriate model of culture that the state wants Singaporeans to aspire toward: their members are educated, have stable occupations, are versed in a traditional art form and yet innovative, employ creative technologies in their performances, are known locally and abroad, and engage in artistic knowledge and practice as a leisurely and altruistic pursuit."⁴¹⁴

After the 1980s, traditional Chinese theatre continued to be supported in Singapore. Amateur groups were still privileged, now for their outdoor performances as cultural heritage and their indoor performances as a manifestation of a refined art form. Official funding institutions, such as the Chinese Opera Institute (1995), were established, and troupes of various genres enjoyed increasing financial support.⁴¹⁵

To summarize, a distinctive feature of Peking Opera in Singapore was the take-over of the role to preserve the genre by amateur groups in the second half of the twentieth century, while professional troupes were marginalized. The demography of Chinese communities in Singapore also led to the problem of the language barrier, just like in the case of Hong Kong and Taiwan, which restricted Peking Opera's development in Singapore as an entertainment. In this sense, Peking Opera in Singapore was somewhat marginalized by other, more popular genres, and was very much part of a broader, general trajectory of rise and fall of traditional Chinese theatre in the city-state at large.

⁴¹³ Lee 2009: 142.

⁴¹⁴ *ibid.* 12.

⁴¹⁵ Wang 2004: 130-131.

8.4.3 So what is special about Hong Kong?

The above comparison indeed demonstrates some common phenomena between Peking Opera in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. Firstly, together with other local art forms, in all three places Peking Opera was given space to survive and develop by the colonizers. Secondly, these stories are evidence of a decline of Peking Opera in East and Southeast Asia in the mid-twentieth century. At the same time, some distinct features about Peking Opera in Hong Kong emerge as well. First of all, there is the claim of local identity, by Hong Kong practitioners, as part of their practice of this “national” drama form. On the one hand, both Taiwanese and Hong Kong practitioners made this claim by distinguishing themselves from the mainland. On the other hand, the situations in Taiwan and Hong Kong show different perspectives. While the Taiwanese emphasized cultural roots by putting forth local-themed stories and local perspectives on playwriting, their Hong Kong counterparts looked into the issue from a perspective of the “preservation / modernization” dichotomy, and sided against the contemporary, reformist approaches to Peking Opera on the mainland.

Secondly, there is the issue of audience-building, with practitioners in various places bringing diverging interpretations of being “innovative” to the table. To practitioners on the Chinese mainland and in Taiwan, innovations are mostly technical and outward-looking – by which I mean Peking Opera’s interactions with theatrical forms of other cultures – so that Peking Opera would be enabled to accommodate new generations. In the meantime, instead of re-molding the genre for the audience, practitioners in Hong Kong did things the other way around. With their representational innovation of, for instance, guided demonstration, they attempted to re-educate the audience in order to accommodate traditional Peking Opera, from the belief that this tradition bears some artistic values that are attractive regardless of generational differences. To a certain extent, this resembles Qi Rushan’s vision, almost a century ago, to achieve Chinese modernity through the affirmation and theorization of traditions.

Thirdly, this comparison shows how Peking Opera was appropriated in different social and political settings in Asia. For example, the pragmatic notion of a multi-Chinese identity in Singapore means that instead of being given an outstanding status of Chinese symbolization, Peking Opera was only part of the cultural heritage of traditional Chinese theatre, which had to be shared with other genres. And this cultural heritage was in turn only part of the whole, multi-cultural, national identity of Singapore. In Taiwan, the indigenous discourse even directly suppressed Peking Opera’s development on the island. Meanwhile, Peking Opera in Hong Kong has been experiencing a noticeable rise from the turn of the twenty-first century, as the genre was appropriated as a tool by the government to serve its cultural nationalism agenda after the sovereignty handover in 1997.

8.5 What next?

As Michael Billig says:

In many academic books, the conclusion provides the place for authors to be optimistic. After chapters of hard travelling, buffeted between theory and doubt, an author can now settle back and tell readers why the journey has been so worthwhile.⁴¹⁶

So far, this has been indeed a fascinating journey – not only for a traditional Chinese theatrical genre that has borne the “national” name since the early twentieth century, but also for me as the storyteller. This journey has provoked many intellectual exercises and has cultivated my fondness for this beautiful art form. I have enjoyed every moment I have had to talk with performers, to learn in classes, to perform – even just as a sidekick soldier standing still – and to witness all the physical and artistic spectacles of the performances.

Moreover, my fondness for Peking Opera has stimulated my thinking about its future in Hong Kong. Fortunately, there are optimistic signs. The Hong Kong government is still supporting the genre strategically, and the two active troupes are still benefitting from various sources of funding and performing platforms. Thanks to these, Peking Opera is indeed more in the foreground of the local cultural scene than it has been for some time.

There is also an appreciable increase of locals’ enthusiasm for learning Peking Opera. For example, the years Tang Yuen-ha and Geng Tianyuan have invested in training local performers have paid off. In 2015, they staged a performance with the entire line-up made up of their students. In fact, Tang has hinted in various pieces of publicity that she intends to produce more productions featuring local talents. Moreover, some of Tang and Geng’s students have shown professional dedication. For example, there are two female apprentices who have been trained intensively for several years under Tang and Geng, and they are seriously looking for careers in Peking Opera. In addition to these two, a young male apprentice also appears constantly in the YCOC’s productions. Rather than receiving training from Liang Hanyong at the troupe, he has been attending a training school in Beijing, where he receives more systematic and vigorous training. Either way, these young talents all show great potential. Through my conversations with Tang, Geng and Liang, I have a strong sense that they indeed regard these talents as their successors, who may help to write the next chapter of the life of Peking Opera in Hong Kong.

⁴¹⁶ Billig 2013: 206.

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Samenvatting

Waaruit bestaat een “Hongkongse identiteit”? Wat is het verband tussen de veranderlijke sociaal-politieke omgeving in Hong Kong – inclusief de verhouding met het Chinese vasteland – en de uitvinding en het onderhoud van die identiteit? Sinds de late jaren 1970, toen de Soevereiniteits-Overdracht van Hong Kong door het Verenigd Koninkrijk aan de Volksrepubliek die in 1997 zou plaatsvinden in zicht kwam, hebben wetenschappers gesproken over heterogene culturele manifestaties van een Hongkongse identiteit. Deze discussies zijn de afgelopen jaren opnieuw op gang gekomen, aangejaagd door politiek geladen stemmen die aandacht vragen voor *plaatselijke* identiteit.

De zoektocht naar plaatselijke identiteit zoals die wordt belichaamd in culturele vormen als film en populaire muziek heeft rijke wetenschap opgeleverd. Zo schrijft Stephen Teo uitgebreid over vechtfilms en actiefilms in Hong Kong, en in het bijzonder hoe die het plaatselijke articuleren via filmtechnieken en cinematische talen. Wetenschappers als Wong Chi-wah en Chu Yiu-wai hebben een aantal boeken geproduceerd die ingaan op “plaatselijkheid” in liedteksten in Cantopop. Maar er is betrekkelijk weinig onderzoek gewijd aan de bestudering van plaatselijke identiteit zoals die zich manifesteert in traditionele kunstvormen zoals Chinees theater.

Het is zeker niet zo dat de wetenschap geen aandacht heeft geschonken aan traditioneel Chinees theater in Hong Kong. Er is een reeks werken die zich richten op dit veld, vooral op de Cantonese Opera, vanuit artistieke, culturele en maatschappelijke invalshoeken. De bestudering van identiteit blijft hierin echter marginaal, terwijl Chinees theater nog altijd een belangrijke component van het culturele spectrum in Hong Kong is. Het beeld van identiteitsvorming op cultureel gebied blijft aldus onvolledig. Het is mijn doel bij te dragen aan de aanpak van dit probleem, door te onderzoeken hoe een “Hongkongse identiteit” wordt uitgevonden, begrepen, onderhouden en uitgedaagd door traditioneel Chinees theater in Hong Kong. Maar in plaats van te schrijven over de Cantonese Opera heb ik gekozen voor de Peking Opera in Hong Kong, omdat ik geïntrigeerd ben door de dualiteit van zijn aanwezigheid op het Chinese vasteland én in Hong Kong. Wat gebeurt er als het “nationale” genre dat de Peking Opera is naar Hong Kong reist, waar er binnen de cultuurscene ogenschijnlijk geen plek voor is?

Bovenal dient dit proefschrift als de eerste overzichtsgeschiedenis van de Peking Opera in Hong Kong. Met behulp van een cultuur-biografische benadering en een *actor-network* model identificeer ik verschillende actoren binnen de Peking Opera in Hong Kong door de jaren heen, analyseer ik hoe zij evolueren en interageren binnen hun respectievelijke netwerken, en onderzoek ik hoe zij Peking Opera zien en waarderen. Dit ligt ten grondslag aan de verkenning van de ontwikkeling van Peking Opera in Hong Kong vanaf de vroege twintigste eeuw die dit proefschrift behelst. De beperkte wetenschappelijke aandacht voor het onderwerp tot op heden miskent dat de Peking Opera in Hong Kong zichtbaarder en belangrijker is dan men zich in het algemeen realiseert, een belangrijke gevolgtrekking uit mijn onderzoek. Verder verdient nadrukkelijk vermelding dat de Peking Opera in Hong Kong

niet alleenstaat, maar nauw verweven is met andere plaatselijke uitvoerende kunsten zoals de Cantonese Opera en vechtfilms, en die beïnvloedt.

Vanuit mijn onderzoeksinteresse in de articulering van een “Hongkongse identiteit” in het traditionele Chinese theater beoogt dit proefschrift meer dan alleen een reconstructie van de geschiedenis van deze kunstvorm in Hong Kong. Ik betoog, bijvoorbeeld, dat verschillende individuele en institutionele belanghebbenden hun beelden van Chinese identiteiten vormgeven en belichamen via de praktijk van de Peking Opera in Hong Kong. Specifiek laat ik zien hoe de Peking Opera een ruimte is geworden waarbinnen de autoriteiten en de opera-spelers in Hong Kong omgaan met hun identiteiten, tussen het “plaatselijke” (Hong Kong) en het “nationale” (de Volksrepubliek China), sinds de Overdracht in 1997. Enerzijds scharen ze zich achter het nationale discours rond de Peking Opera en zien ze die als een “nationale toneelvorm” die moet worden voorgesteld aan een Hongkongs publiek, als symbool van een homogene “Chinese cultuur”; anderzijds maken ze aanspraak op een zekere mate van plaatselijkheid door zich te onderscheiden van het Chinese vasteland, en aldus zorgvuldig positie te kiezen in een pan-Chinese atlas van het traditionele Chinese theater. Dit proces van identiteitsvorming heeft vervolgens zijn invloed op manier waarop de autoriteiten zich opstellen ten aanzien van de Peking Opera, en de manier waarop de spelers die uitvoeren. Bovendien hebben deze identiteit-gedreven ontwikkelingen op hun beurt weer invloed op de conventies waarmee de Peking Opera op het Chinese vasteland wordt gepresenteerd. Met andere woorden, ik neem ook een “omgekeerde invloed” waar, van de “periferie” op het “thuis” van het genre.

Aldus ligt de wetenschappelijke bijdrage van dit onderzoek er onder andere in dat het licht werpt op het concept van “multi-Chineesheid” in het debat over Chinese identiteit, en met het voorbeeld van de Peking Opera aantoont hoe een plaatselijke “Hongkongse” identiteit gesitueerd kan worden in een nationaal-Chinees kader, en daarmee verbonden kan worden. Het onderzoek schept nieuwe perspectieven op Hong Kong als een belangrijke speler in het netwerk van Chinese cultuuroverdracht, en verfijnt ons begrip van de positie van Hong Kong in een groter cultureel-Chinees referentiekader.

Een theoretische implicatie van dit proefschrift is de toevoeging van een nieuwe dimensie aan Igor Kopytoffs cultureel-biografische benadering. Door de Peking Opera te behandelen als een samengesteld geheel en zijn toekenning van maatschappelijke betekenis vanuit verschillende hoeken te bestuderen, stimuleert dit proefschrift de toepassing van de cultureel-biografische benadering op immateriële uitvoerende kunsten. Tegelijk introduceert de aldus verder ontwikkelde benadering nieuw gereedschap voor het veld van de Peking Opera studies, als aanvulling op paradigma's die primair of exclusief gericht zijn op de opera-spelers.

Het verhaal van mijn proefschrift is opgebouwd via de levensverhalen van zes individuen die van belang zijn voor het onderwerp, in verschillende perioden en in verschillende opzichten. Na een historisch-inleidend eerste hoofdstuk behandelt Hoofdstuk Twee de legendarische Mei Lanfang 梅蘭芳 (1894-1961). Zijn carrière in de jaren 1910 en 1920 werpt licht op de “nationalisering” van de Peking Opera – dat wil zeggen, het proces waarin Peking Opera gepresenteerd werd als een nationale vorm van theater. Mei's

tournee van 1922 bracht het genre letterlijk naar Hong Kong. Hoofdstuk Drie gaat over Chen Feinong 陳非儂 (1899-1984), een vermaard Canontees Opera-speler uit de vroege twintigste eeuw. Samen met met verschillende andere kunstenaars droeg Chen eraan bij dat de Cantonese Opera in de jaren 1930s allerlei artistieke middelen overnam uit de Peking Opera. Hoofdstuk Vier richt zich op Jackie Chan (1954), de filmster. In combinatie met de verhalen van spelers die afkomstig waren van het Chinese vasteland maakt het verhaal van Chans opleiding in een plaatselijke Peking Opera-school in de jaren 1950 en 1960 veel duidelijk over de situatie in het midden van de twintigste eeuw. Chans overstap vanuit de Peking Opera naar het vak van stuntman en daarna filmacteur laat bovendien zien dat de Peking Opera in Hong Kong verweven was met plaatselijke culturele vormen, en daar invloed op uitoefende.

Hoofdstukken Vijf, Zes en Zeven gaan over de periode sinds de Overdracht in 1997. In Hoofdstuk Vijf laat ik via het levensverhaal van Liang Hanyong 梁漢勇 (1960) als *case study* zien hoe de Hongkongse overheid de Peking Opera sinds 1997 heeft gesteund als een instrument van culturele nationalisering, en hoe plaatselijke opera-groepen daarbij baat hebben gehad. In Hoofdstuk Zes bekijk ik hoe Tang Yuen-ha 鄧宛霞, een in Hong Kong geboren opera-speler, stappen heeft gezet in de richting van een “Hongkongse aanpak” om de plaatselijke receptie van de Peking Opera te bespoedigen, met haar uitvinding van een onconventionele, interactieve uitvoeringspraktijk. Ik bespreek verder hoe deze uitvinding op haar beurt ook weer spelers op het Chinese vasteland heeft beïnvloed, en hen ertoe heeft aangezet om te heroverwegen hoe ze de receptie van Peking Opera door jonge mensen in China willen bespoedigen. Hoofdstuk Zeven vertelt het verhaal van Yeung Ming 楊明 (1941), die Cantonese Opera-stukken herschikt met uitgebreide inzet van middelen uit de Peking Opera, en in de vroege eenentwintigste eeuw een intrigerende artistieke ambiguïteit heeft geschapen door in zijn presentatie van Peking Opera de grenzen tussen deze (sub)genres te overschrijden. Als conclusie biedt Hoofdstuk Acht een vergelijking tussen Peking Opera in Hong Kong, Taiwan en Singapore, mede om de unieke kanten van het onderwerp van mijn onderzoek ook in dat perspectief nog eens te belichten.

Er is meer onderzoek nodig naar dit onderwerp. Ik zou, bijvoorbeeld, graag nader willen kijken naar amateurskringen in de Peking Opera in Hong Kong, maar ik heb daarover nog geen data verzameld. Tegelijk is dit proefschrift een belangrijke stap in mijn ontwikkeling als een wetenschapper die zich specialiseert in de vorming en articulering van identiteiten in de Chinese uitvoerende kunsten. Ook kan het inspiratie bieden om andere kunstvormen uit een vergelijkbare hoek te beschouwen, zoals Cantonese Opera en Chinese orkestmuziek. Langs de lijnen die zijn uitgezet door bijvoorbeeld Rey Chow, David Yen-ho Wu, Len Ang en Allen Chun, die vraagtekens plaatsen bij de vermeende homogeniteit van Chinese identiteiten, hoopt dit proefschrift binnen het bredere debat over “multi-Chineesheid” ruimte te scheppen voor de fascinerende praktijk van de Chinese uitvoerende kunsten.

Curriculum Vitae

Joshua P.L. Chan was born in Hong Kong in 1985. He started his music training from the age of seven, and obtained Grade 8 diplomas in percussion and piano from the Associated Board of Royal Schools of Music in the early 2000s. From 2004 to 2007, he was an undergraduate student at the Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU), where he received his Bachelor of Arts in Music. From 2007 to 2010, he pursued graduate studies at the Department of Music at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). After receiving his Master of Philosophy in Ethnomusicology, he worked as a research assistant at the Chinese Music Archive at CUHK, and then at the Department of Music at HKBU. He also worked freelance as a professional Chinese percussionist during those years. From 2013 through 2017 he was affiliated as a PhD student with the Leiden University Institute for Area Studies.