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Reconstructing the Past: Historical Imagination in Chinese Theater during the 1980s

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Theater Studies

by

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June 2010

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Actor
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Studio Theater, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2007

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Center Stage Theater, Santa Barbara, 2004

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ABSTRACT

Reconstructing the Past: Historical Imagination in Chinese Theater during the 1980s

by

Xiao Che

While historical writing has always been an important part of Chinese cultural tradition, history was reconstructed and reexamined in Chinese theater during the 1980s as part of the dynamic cultural discussions of the decade. This dissertation provides detailed analysis of three representative theater works from the 1980s, situating these plays within China's historical, social, political, cultural, and artistic context, as well as the tremendous social changes and enthusiastic intellectual pursuits of that decade. The dissertation examines how these plays imagine China's twentieth century through the themes, plots, characters, languages, and structures of dramatic texts, as well as through theatrical signs such as space, set, costume, acting, sound, and lighting. The previous social taboos, hidden histories, and dispersed stories are presented in these plays in order to search for the root of historical traumas and provide lessons for the nation's ongoing modernization project. These plays creatively utilize a variety of performing arts and theatrical styles in order to reflect the changes in history.

The Introduction delineates the origin, development, function, and significance of Chinese historical writings and historical dramas in order to demonstrate how history is presented differently in these plays as a result of social changes of the period. Chapter Two analyzes *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana* (1986) as a dramatization of China's complex modernization process between the 1940s and the1980s and its impact upon generations of Chinese peasants. *Sangshuping Chronicles* (1988), the focus of Chapter Three, deconstructs the sacred icons of Chinese culture and Maoist revolution as causing national disasters and historical stagnation. Chapter Four delineates how *The World's Top Restaurant* (1988) critically evaluates the privileges and diseases within Chinese tradition in order to explore ways to creatively transform China into a prosperous modern country. The Conclusion summarizes how these three plays manifest the coexistence of Chinese tradition, Maoist legacy, Western modernity, and postmodern sentiments in the intellectual scene of the 1980s.

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I. Introduction

This dissertation investigates how the Chinese theater reconstructed and re-imagined China's past during the latter half of the 1980s, a crucial decade after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) that ended dramatically in the government's suppression of the student movement on Tian'anmen Square in 1989. Upon first opening its door to the West after forty years of enclosure during the Maoist Era (1949-1976), the influx of modern cultural values, economic measures, and political thoughts from the West produced profound changes in all aspects of social life. The dynamic intellectual quest of this decade led the Chinese to re-evaluate China's historical past and Maoist legacy from new perspectives—formulating the root-searching movement of the late 1980s.[1] As an influential artistic medium that always

[1] From the mid-1980s onward, as an outcome of people's utopian spirit in the nation's reform program, root-searching literature came into being among the heated Cultural Fever [*wenhua re*] (also called the "Great Cultural Discussion") that unfolded in Chinese cities during the mid-and-late-1980s. This enthusiastic avalanche of cultural debate produced a massive amount of speeches and publications that represented diverse competing intellectual trends of the discussion, such as Futurologist School, Chinese Culturalist School, Root-searching School, a rethinking of Marxism, and Hermeneutic School. The Cultural Fever not only revisited the entire modern Chinese intellectual history, but also reflected the contemporary cultural, social, and political experiences of the New Era. Root-searching School represented the trend to recreate and redefine Chinese cultural roots from the perspective of Western modernity. For root-searching writers, modernity meant to make and maintain a productive liaison with cultural traditions. Since the major concern of root-searchers was how to construct China's cultural subjectivity at the intersection of past, present, and future, China and the World, implanted within root-searchers' immersion into the past and the local were the perspective and consciousness that looked into the future and the world. Recognizing the alienation of human beings by successive political movements, root-searchers made genuine inquiry into the themes of the problematic self, alienated subjectivity, psychic split,

carried important social, political, and educational purpose, Chinese theater actively participated in the cultural discussion and historical examination of this decade. Through revisiting China's past on the stage, dramatists tried to comment on the tumultuous changes in the present and find the right direction to construct the nation's future.

After experiencing tremendous historical traumas during the chaotic twentieth-century, no official interpretation of history remained unchallenged in people's mind during the 1980s.[2] Through literary and artistic creations, intellectuals reconstructed history from diverse perspectives in order to serve diverse interests of the present: on the one hand, they redefined China's cultural icons and political myths, searched for the root of national disasters, and criticized the pernicious diseases imbedded within Chinese traditions that hindered China from becoming a

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metamorphoses between victims and victimizers, as well as the monolithic political structure's restraints upon human creativity and autonomy.

[2] China's 20th-century was full of national crises and revolutionary movements, including the Allied Army's invasion into China in 1900 and Boxer Rebellion in 1900, collapse of the Qing imperial system in 1911, establishment of the Republic of China in 1912, Yuan Shikai's unsuccessful restoration of the monarchy system in 1915, Japan's attempt to subject China through Twenty-one Demands in 1915, May Fourth Movement in 1919, warlord wars between 1916-1928, establishment of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1921, repeated civil war between the CCP and the Nationalist Party (KMT) between 1927-1949, Sino-Japanese War between 1931-1945, establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, land reform between 1950-1952, agricultural collectivization between 1953-1957, Hundred Flowers Movement between 1956-1957, Anti-rightist Campaign in 1957, Great Leap Forward Movement between 1958-1960, Socialist Education Movement between 1962-1965, The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution between 1966-1976, adoption of economic reform and opening-up policy in 1978, and students movement on Tian'anmen Square in 1989.

strong modernized nation; on the other hand, they tried to restore the lost virtues of Chinese culture, to reconnect with China's long history and establish a cohesive national identity; furthermore, they examined how China's successive modernization projects produced national disasters and human tragedies due to their inability to break away from the restraints of the past.

China has a rich tradition of using history to serve the present political, ideological, and ethical purpose. Historical writing is the most important part of Chinese cultural tradition. China established a well-organized institutional system of historical writing at an early age of its civilization, honoring historiographers with high official positions to record history in large varieties of history books. Historiographers thus enjoyed great intellectual authority and political esteem. China's first dynasty Yin (1600 BC — 1027 BC) was governed by a theocratic system, which explained everything in mythical terms. However, after the Zhou dynasty (11th-century BC – 256 BC) replaced Yin, in order to legitimize its rule, Zhou forsook Yin's god-worshiping customs and transformed them to humanitarian culture. Zhou historicized, politicized, and moralized myths through distilling their religious contents and turning them into historical legends.[3] For instance, Great Yu, the famous legendary king was said to have tamed the disastrous floods of the Yellow River and established China's legendary dynasty Xia (2070 BC-1600 BC). But Great Yu was originally a god in ancient mythology. He was historicized as a

[3] See Sun Shulei's introduction about the early historicization of mythology and the early formulation of historical consciousness in Chinese culture (16-9).

cultural hero during the Eastern Zhou dynasty (770 BC -256 BC), the period when China was coalescing into a nation, in order to establish an ideal model for leaders of the new nation.[4]

Confucius (551 BC – 479 BC), the most influential philosopher in ancient Chinese civilization, lived during the Zhou dynasty. He laid the foundation for China's historical writings by recording myths as historical events that actually took place and interpreting them in terms of human issues and human relationship.[5] Furthermore, according to *Gongyang zhuan*, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* [*Chunqiu*]—an official chronicle of the state of Lu allegedly compiled by Confucius—euphemize the venerable, family relatives, and sages (Wang & Tang 172). By covering up their blemishes, Confucius recorded history in order to propagate Confucian ethics and maintain social order. Embedding his judgment and appraisal within his narrative of historical figures and events, Confucius considered differentiating good from evil, instead of recording objective historical facts, as the main purpose of his historical writing. Since then, Confucian values became the core of Chinese historical writing and greatly influenced the development of Chinese culture, laying the foundation for literature's strong interest in history, ethics, and politics.[6]

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[4] See Gu Jiegang's discussion about Great Yu (130-52).

[5] See Sun Shulei's introduction of Confucius's overall historicization of Chinese mythology (17-9).

[6] See Ge Jianxiong and Zhou Xiaoyun's introduction about the method of historical writing in *Spring and Autumn Annals* [*Chunqiu*] (131-5).

After Confucius, an influential historiographer, Sima Qian (145 BC–90 BC) in Western Han dynasty, wrote *History Record* [*Shiji*]. Following the Confucian tradition of distinguishing the correct from the devious, good from evil, Sima Qian expressed strong personal feelings and subjective judgment when portraying historical figures and events. Turning his historiography into great literary works, Sima Qian seriously compromised the objectivity and authenticity of historical writing. In Northern Song dynasty, historiographer Sima Guang (1019-1086 AD) wrote three hundred and fifty-four volumes of *Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government* [*Zizhi tongjian*] at the request of the emperor. Selecting, portraying, and commenting on the historical behaviors of emperors and ministers according to the criteria of Confucian ethics and social order, Sima Guang emphasized the importance of history to provide lessons for political rulers. Since then, the pan-politicization of historiography was formalized and theorized as a fixed Chinese convention, with catering to the actual need, recognized values, and judgmental criteria of current political rulers as the only purpose of official historical writing.[7]

Since Chinese historiography depended upon autocratic power and historiographers were the central figures of Chinese cultural life and actively cooperated with emperors to regulate social morality, Chinese culture was defined by Fan Wenlan as "historiographer culture," which was non-religious and moralized,

[7] See Ge Jianxiong and Zhou Xiaoyun's introduction of the historical writings of Sima Qian and Sima Guang (135-46).

with a purpose to serve the present life.[8] Gu Zhun understood this "historiographer culture" as honoring political rulers as the supreme authority, from whom culture never acquired independence to explore issues that were beyond contemporary political authority (243-4).[9] This historiographer culture led to not only the historicization, moralization, and politicization of the Chinese social life in ancient times, but also strong historical consciousness among the people and the predominance of historical topics in Chinese literary and artistic creation (Sun 23).

Re-enacting history in intellectual discourse aimed to provide historical lessons to direct social life, which always sought to repeat past experiences. Considering history as a mirror through which the present ethical codes and moral transgressions could be viewed, the literati class used historical writing as an allegory either to flatter or chastise the present imperial court. Imperial rulers' suspicion of the potentially subversive message in historical writings against their supreme power resulted in repeated purges and persecutions in imperial China.[10] The literati class's prioritization of the old over the new, and their absolute confidence in the truth laid down by ancient sages made them not so interested in portraying historical change as in the role of history in the present. As David Der-wei Wang concludes: "Paradoxically enough, the passage of time is usually not the most conspicuous

[8] See Sun Shulei's introduction of traditional Chinese culture as historiographer culture. Fan Wenlan was a famous Chinese historian during the 20th-century.

[9] Gu Zhun was a Chinese economist and essayist during the 20th-century.

[10] See Jonathan Unger's introduction about the function of historical writing in imperial China (1).

factor in classical Chinese historical writings; rather it is the attempt to 'spatialize' or commemorate morally or politically remarkable events and figures that becomes the central concern" (69). Wang's argument points out how in classical Chinese historical writing ancient moral and political figures and events provide core values and eternal standards to evaluate the following ages. The "a-*temporal* significance of moral mechanism … [highlights] a fundamental premise of classical Chinese historiography" (David Wang 70), creating a sense of repetition of the past through the cyclicality of history. Describing human relationship according to the social hierarchy and moral order authorized by ancient sages, classical Chinese historiography propagates that whether people stick to the truth of the past determines the prosperity or decline of the present.

Born from this historiographer cultural tradition, Chinese poetry, epic, legend, essay, novel, folklore, and popular performing arts all emphasize history. Since Chinese drama came into being by drawing from all these art forms, historical stories and legendary tales comprise the major repertory of traditional Chinese theater. The mainstream theater criticism equated dramatic works with the true record of history, as unofficial history propagating, supplementing, supporting, and elaborating official historiography in order to make obscure historiography more accessible to the audience. Dramatic works were usually evaluated as historical works, by their historical reference, their loyalty to historical facts, and their function to promote social morality and safeguard political order. Although some theater critics regarded historical dramas as fables to express the playwrights' feelings and opinions, not as

historical works, they were much less influential than those critics who equated dramatized history with actual history.[11]

This lack of clear differentiation between artistic truth and historical truth was a product of the autocratic society. Mario Vargas Llosa argues that in an open society, literature and history enjoy autonomy respectively, coexisting and supplementing each other. But in an enclosed society, literature and history mix together and replace each other. Power-holders not only control people's language and behavior, but also their imagination, dream, and memory. The past is manipulated as a tool to confirm the present reality, and official history is the only legitimate history (79-80). While Llosa's description of an enclosed society suits China's monarch-centered feudal society, the monotonous version of history was facilitated by the discursive mode of classical Chinese theater, which created monologue, not dialogue, unitary perspective, not heterogeneous perspectives. Its characteristics of melodrama—defined by Michael R. Booth as including standard themes, physical sensation, stereotypical character, absolute values, clearly defined categories, and triumph of virtue over vice (14)—served its social, political, moral, and educational purpose.

After China entered the turbulent twentieth-century, successive national crises again strengthened the historical consciousness of the Chinese. As Ban Wang argues, "The greatest sustaining myth for modern China is, by default, history. For all

[11] See Sun Shulei's introduction about the dramatic criticism in ancient China (237-77, 325-45).

the ruptures and catastrophes in the twentieth century, history, the conscious process of shaping and transforming social reality, is what fuels and empowers cultural production and political reforms" (134). National crises stimulated the patriotic passion to create a brand-new cultural and political history of the nation in the modern world. Since the late Qing (1644-1911 AD), intellectuals like Liang Qichao advocated reforming popular literature into a political tool to renovate society and educate people. As a result of the gradual input of Western modern literature, new historical novels and dramas broke away from the restriction of sticking to historical facts as proper historiography. But they continued to function as metaphors of historical times, propagators of official ideology, and social textbooks to provide historical lessons.[12]

This sociopolitical mission made Chinese literary modernity pro-rationalistic, pro-utilitarian, history-oriented, and human-centered, different from the 20th-century Western literary modernity, which was "anti-rationalistic," "anti-historical," "anti-traditional, anti-utilitarian, and 'anti-humanist' in the sense of seeking artistic 'dehumanization'" (Lee 500). In fact, Chinese literary modernity during the twentieth-century inherited the 19th-century Western "bourgeois" modernity, which included: "the idea of evolutionism and progress, the positivist belief in the forward movement of history, the confidence in the beneficial possibilities of science and technology, and the ideal of freedom and democracy defined within the framework of

[12] See Lu Wenbin's introduction of the revolutionary changes in the writing of historical novels and dramas since the mid-Ming (21-5).

a broad humanism" (Lee 500-1). Importing the linear and teleological view of history promoted by the Enlightenment thoughts, grand historical discourses re-evaluated history and cultural memory in order to advocate evolution, progress, science, technology, rationality, liberty, democracy, and modernity. The May Fourth Movement of 1919 started China's first widespread pursuit of modern liberation in politics, society, and culture.[13] Its anti-feudal, anti-traditional spirit stimulated those reform-minded Chinese intellectuals to severely criticize Chinese cultural values as the fundamental reason for the nation's backwardness in modern times.

To seek a clean rupture from the past and a fresh beginning pushed many theater artists to break away from Chinese traditional theater, considering it as propagating pernicious feudal ideas among the broad masses. In the early twentieth-century, many intellectuals—such as Wang Guowei, Jiang Guanyun, Hu Shi, and Lu Xun—criticized the mystifications, illusions, melodramatic format, wish-fulfillment, and spectacular visual effect of traditional Chinese theater, which signified the weakness and shabbiness of Chinese national character in avoiding direct confrontation with the traumatic historical reality. Importing the style of modern Western drama, some theater artists wrote realistic-style plays by following Ibsen and

[13] May Fourth movement refers to the cultural upheaval that spread throughout China after the student demonstrations that took place in Beijing on May 4, 1919 to protest against China's signing of the Versailles Treaty. As Peter Zarrow summarizes, "The May Fourth movement is inextricably associated with political, social, and cultural liberation. Heir to the New Culture movement, it has stood for such conflicting zeitgeists as the rise of communism, the heyday of liberalism, rationality and modernity, science and democracy, national unity, the awakening of young China, labor, and the rejection of tradition. Patriotism, individualism, egalitarianism, and feminism were its watchwords" (149).

Shaw[14]—such as Ouyang Yuqian and Hu Shi, who wrote *Pan Jinlian* and *The Greatest Event in Life* respectively by modeling upon Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. This theatrical realism reinforced the pursuit of "historical truth" through dramatization of history, either the truth of historical facts, or the truth of historical spirit or essence.

The mission of national salvation also stimulated theater to strengthen its role to educate the masses. Li Liangcai (1860-1932), a political activist, historian, and theater artist, advocated the abandonment of those "historically untrue" (126) plays in order to teach correct historical knowledge to the people, since only 1-2 percent of them could read, but everyone knew theater.

> The illiterate common people do not read books, and what meager little they know about the world all comes from the theater. It is already a great pity that they cannot see the whole picture of history; how can we allow what they do see to be false? If you are teaching the masses, you might as well give them correct information. There are many versions of history plays; let us get rid of the erroneous ones. (126)

Li's argument points out how theater's educational mission required it to remain loyal to "historical truth" in order to propel sociocultural transformation and national regeneration during a time when China suffered from semi-feudalistic exploitation, corrupt political regime, and imperialist colonization.

[14] See Ban Wang's analysis of the emergence of a critical historical consciousness and a tragic vision of history in Chinese intellectual discourse during the early twentieth-century (58-90).

Theater's educational and political function became even more important after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war during the late 1930s, when theater gradually became the propaganda tool of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Designating theater as a powerful cultural weapon, Mao Zedong emphasized its effectiveness in propagating the CCP ideology and carrying out its political task of mobilizing the masses. Lin Qingxin argues that "the turn to the Left since the 1930s signaled the successful formulation of a new monolithic, unified and systematic knowledge that would tolerate no heterogeneous thoughts" (13). This Leftist discourse is symptomatic of the paradox imbedded within Mao's revolution, which sought social liberation but at the same time imposed a new homogeneity. During the late 1940s, the civil war between the CCP and the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) again escalated the theater's political role. Ever since Mao's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" (1942) was canonized as the single most important ideological guide for the CCP cultural creation, new historical dramas were written in Yan'an—the CCP's political, military, economic, and cultural base at the time.[15]

Classical Chinese theater, of which historical dramas constitute the bulk, underwent radical reform as an important way to transform people's ideology and world-view. The first classical theater form to be updated was Peking opera, due to

[15] "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and the Arts" was delivered by Mao Zedong in 1942 as part of the Yan'an Rectification Movement (1942-1944), designed to create ideological unity within the CCP. The talks effectively dictated the legitimate style for literary and art creations during the Maoist era and called upon writers, artists, and dramatists to transform themselves into different people by immersing themselves in the ordinary life of the masses.

its prestige, popularity, and influence among the people. Among the many reformed historical plays, *Driven to Join the Liang Mountain Rebels* [*Bishang liangshan*], created collectively by an amateur art group at the Central Party School in Yan'an in 1943, is very famous due to Mao's eulogy of it in a letter to its creators after viewing the performance twice in 1944:

> I saw your play; you have done a great job. I thank you, and please tell the actors I thank them! History is created by the people, but on the stage of the old traditional theater (in the literature and arts that have been separated from the people) the people have been turned into the dregs of society, while the Masters, Madames, Young Masters, and Young Misses have dominated the stage. This reversal of history has now been reversed again by you; you have restored history to its true face, and you have given the old traditional theater a new beginning. For this I congratulate you. … What you have begun is an epoch-making beginning of revolutionizing old traditional theater. (142)

As a milestone in the development of modern music drama, the play had a lasting influence upon the revolutionizing of traditional theater during the Cultural Revolution. A comparison between this Peking opera and its original sources reveals the process through which the past was reinvented to serve the present.

The major source of this adaptation comes from a story in the historical novel *Water Margin* [Shuihu], written by Shi Nai'an (1296-1372 AD) to fictionalize the outlaw rebellion led by Song Jiang in 1121 during the mid-Song dynasty. There were

several classical plays based on this story, among which the earliest is *Legend of a Precious Sword* [*Baojian ji*], written by Li Kaixian in 1547 during the mid-Ming dynasty. The play represents how classical Chinese theater dramatized history in order to propagate Confucian ethics. Hero Lin Chong is a loyal, upright, and patriotic military officer of a low rank. He is demoted and incriminated by a treacherous high-ranking official Gao Qiu. Lin Chong is driven to join a group of righteous outlaws at the Liang Mountain. His wife, desired by Gao Qiu's son, escapes to a temple and becomes a nun. Her waiting maid commits suicide for her mistress. The outlaws attack the capital. The imperial court offers amnesty and official positions to them. The outlaws accept the amnesty to serve the court. Lin Chong carries out revenge and reunites with his wife.[16] The play fulfills the moral mission of classical theater by criticizing corrupt officials as destroying social justice and eulogizing upright rebels as safeguarding moral righteousness. The play does not object to the imperial system and feudal ethics and ends happily in achieving causal retribution. History is presented as cyclical, going through the formula of order-disorder-restored order. Religion is portrayed in a positive light as offering asylum and salvation to Lin Zhong's chaste wife.

The story of the Liangshan rebels served the CCP ideology of military uprising, violent revolution, and class struggle. However, the feudal ethics within the story must be reformed in order to serve the proletarian revolution. The adapted

[16] See the introduction of the play in item Li Kaixian in *Zhongguo dabaike quanshu, xiququyi* [*China Encyclopedia, Volume of Traditional Opera and Folk Arts*] (197-8).

Peking opera *Driven to Join the Liangshan Rebels* does not focus on the individual vicissitudes of Lin Chong, but on how the broad suffering masses cannot endure the cruel oppression of feudal rulers, so they gather together to rebel against the unjust feudal system. The opera eulogizes the masses' heroism, wisdom, struggle, courage, and function in pushing history forward. Lin Chong is educated and helped by the masses to transform himself from a member of the feudal ruling class to an anti-feudal revolutionary hero. The opera de-emphasizes the personal feelings between Lin Chong and his wife, and gets rid of the outlaws' acceptance of amnesty, religious salvation, and the maid's self-sacrifice as unworthy feudal dregs. The creators of the play argue that only by drastically changing the history previously distorted by the feudal ruling class could historical truth be restored and historical essence revealed.[17]

This adapted play demonstrates how historical writing played a crucial role to legitimate the CCP discourse of Marxism, Leninism, Stalinism, and Maoism, to unify people together and stimulate their revolutionary enthusiasm. Characters are portrayed as the representatives of social classes, political tendencies, and historical times, not as individuals. The masses are eulogized as powerful, honorable, and glorious, as providing protection for individuals who unify with the proletarian collective. Focusing on historical events in public space, not in the private home, the play emphasizes the characters' external behavior, not internal feelings, which are subjugated to common class sentiment. It transforms the original play's cyclical

[17] See the play's major writer Qi Yanming's introduction about the creating process of the play (132-54).

history to the temporal sequence of Marxist historiography, to the advanced, the progressive, and the revolutionary overcoming the backward, the regressive, and the counter-revolutionary. This confidence about the proletarian revolution's role in pushing history forward glorifies violence as facilitating the birth of the new and the destruction of the old. The play has obvious references to Mao's revolution in 1927, when he led the remnants of a CCP military force to Jinggang Mountain, after being defeated by the KMT army, to unite with the local bandits and recruit peasant vagabonds. The play also had obvious contemporary reference in 1943, when the KMT government escalated its suppression of the CCP forces but slacked its resistance against the invading Japanese.

In addition to reforming classical theater, Stalinist writings rapidly gained ground and "tended to present reality in a prejudged form. Literature had, as a result, become not much more than political propaganda. This line of literary creation, in its drive for a fixed and stable representation of history or reality, resorted to rationalized geometrics of narrative space and the freezing of narrative time" (Lin 14). Interpreting historical development as inevitably progressing forward through primitive society, slave society, feudal society, capitalist society, socialist society, and communist society, this authoritarian presentation of historical reality is facilitated by the rationalized, objective time and space in Western realistic theatrical style, which is the opposite of the imaginative, subjective, symbolic, and shifting time and space in classical Chinese theater.

The Gorky-style socialist realism, practiced in USSR with a Stalinist color, combined the exaggeration and enhancement of revolutionary realism with revolutionary romanticism in order to renovate thought with socialist spirit and educate the working class. After it was imported into China during the May Fourth Movement, it pushed Chinese modern literature from the influence of Western Enlightenment culture, which promoted humanism, humanitarianism, individualism, liberation, and freedom, to the influence of Soviet revolutionary nationalism, which promoted class struggle and proletarian revolution.[18] Marston Anderson thus summarizes the formula of socialist realism:

> Literature was to be the subjective expression of the masses' class interest but was also to be an active force in organizing the masses and in systematizing their worldview. Literature was to stand at the level of the masses but was at the same time to raise their cultural level. Literature was to constitute the author's objective observation of and research into reality but only from the perspective of a correct worldview, specifically that of the workers and peasants. (57)

The contradiction imbedded within this formula of socialist realism—claiming that literary works should truthfully reflect reality and honestly examine history, but at the same time requires historical reality to be presented from a Marxist point of view and serve the political purpose of the communist party—is emblematic of the impossibility of fulfilling the ideals of socialist revolution.

[18] See Su Wei's introduction of the logics of socialist realism (65-6).

After the founding of the PRC in 1949, socialist realism became the sole legitimate style for literary creation. Premier Zhou Enlai thus defined socialist realism in his political report delivered in 1953 at the Second National Writers' Congress: "Our idealism should be a realistic idealism, and our realism is an idealistic realism. When revolutionary realism and revolutionary idealism combine, that is socialist realism" (qtd. in Su 68).[19] Dominated by this style, traditional realism's adherence to faithfully reflect reality, humanity, and subjectivity was criticized as manifesting the decadent bourgeois ideology. As Mao Zedong and Jiang Qing declared in "Summary of the Symposium on Armed Forces Cultural Workers," delivered in 1966 on the eve of the Cultural Revolution, not only the culture of the thousands of years of human civilization were the fruits of "feudalism, capitalism, revisionism," even the Chinese leftist literature and art from the 1930s until 1966 were products of "the dictatorship of the black revisionist line in the arts," due to their advocacy of "a broader path for realism," "a deeper realism," "middle characters," "opposition to assigned subject matter," "the convergence of spirits of the ages," "opposition to gunpowder-smell," "writing the real," and "diverging from the classics and going against the Way" (qtd. in Su 70).[20]

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[19] Su Wei quoted this talk from Ministry of Education Editorial Committee, *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue shi* [*History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*]. V1. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1980.

[20] This summary was published in *People's Daily* [*Renmin ribao*] in May 1966, later published as a pamphlet by Renmin chubanshe.

Among those criticized as revisionist works, one historical play, *Hairui Dismissed from the Office* [*Hairui baguan*], was especially important since the severe attack upon it served as one of the reasons for the Cultural Revolution. As Jonathan Unger argues, in addition to the imperial tradition of policing historical writings, the Leninist/Stalinist doctrine of the communist party's need to shape intellectual discourse and social sentiment reinforced the CCP's determination to control historical writings, to be alert to any message of dissent or opposition imbedded in historical allegory (2). But some conscientious intellectuals and politicians, taking the censorial role in imperial tradition, continued to resort to history to indirectly comment on contemporary leaders, policies, factions, and intrigues. In political conflicts over Mao's successive extreme-leftist movements, especially the hotly disputed Great Leap Forward Campaign of 1958-1960,[21] the theatrical stage became a battlefield on which various political factions utilized historical plays to convey political views, recruit allies, and attack enemies. Some high-ranking CCP politicians and culture leaders, being either authors or supporters of these new historical dramas, were punished, imprisoned, or persecuted by supporters of Mao on the charge of implicitly criticizing Mao and his policies

[21] The Great Leap Forward Campaign of 1958-1960 was in part the Maoists' effort to redress the evil consequences of urban industrialization, which they believed moved China further away from the goal of a socialist and communist utopia. Through industrializing the countryside through rural communes, the Maoists tried to meet the needs of modern economic development, while at the same time made China leap forward towards a communist future. The campaign began as a drive for workers and peasants to produce "more, faster, better, and cheaper" in both industry and agriculture with little bureaucratic administration. See Maurice Meisner's introduction to the movement (191, 216).

through historical discourse. Written to participate in political and ideological debates, different historical dramas cast the same characters—emperors, prime ministers, and masses—into different character-types—heroes or villains—in order to convey their different opinions about present figures and events.[22]

Adapted from a short story written in 1959 by Wu Han, the vice-mayor of Beijing at the time, *Hairui Dismissed from the Office* is set in the last years of Emperor Wanli (1573-1620 AD) during the Ming Dynasty, when the nation was struggling with economic hardship, widespread misery, and natural calamities. However, Emperor Wanli, a tyrannical, capricious, and insensitive ruler, imposes heavy tax and corvee duties upon the peasants in order to conduct a series of ambitious large-scale public projects. Small self-cultivating farmers have to desert their land, and the gentry begin to annex land through illegal means. A growing concentration of land in the hands of the ruling class reduces independent farmers to tenant farmers or temporary labors. Hai Rui, a conscientious, upright official, directly confronts the emperor at the court. Speaking on behalf of the peasants, Hai Rui urges Emperor Wanli to drastically change his harmful policy. But the emperor refuses to follow his advice and ousters him from his official position.[23]

The annexation of land dramatized in the play has obvious parallel with the People's Commune Movement during the Great Leap Forward Campaign, when

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[22] See Rudolf G. Wagner's introduction to the historical background surrounding the creation of historical dramas between 1958-1966 (236-46, 319-23).

[23] See Lin Chen's introduction of the play (31-2).

peasants were forced to give up their private lands to join the People's Commune, so that the nation could leap forward into an industrialized communist society. It was easy to connect the play with the great policy debate at Lushan Plenum held in August, 1959. At this plenum, Marshall Peng Dehuai, comparing himself to Hai Rui, severely criticized Mao's responsibility in launching the disastrous Great Leap Forward and Mao's obliviousness to its huge damage to the nation and the people. Peng was criticized, toppled, and imprisoned after the plenum. Wu Han, a historian and high-ranking official, was a sympathizer of Peng and an accomplice of the pragmatic reformers led by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping.[24] Wu Han wrote a short story about Hai Rui and turned it into a play as a political protest and a remonstration on behalf of the people. The performance of the play was stopped by Jiang Qing, Mao's wife, who perceived the play to be a political conspiracy. The political struggle and criticism about the play instigated the Cultural Revolution, which derived its name from the initial attack against author Wu Han and his allies. Wu Han was arrested and died in prison whereas his close colleagues were toppled. The themes of the play—advocating restoration of peasants' private plots, protesting against grievances brought by unjust political movements, calling for change of

[24] Liu Shaoqi (1989-1969) was the Chairman of the PRC from 1949-1968, during which he implemented policies of economic reconstruction in China. He fell out of favor in the later 1960s due to his "right-wing" viewpoints and alleged threat to Mao's supreme power. In 1968, he was labeled China's premier "capitalist-roader" and a traitor. After dying in prison in 1969, he was posthumously rehabilitated by Deng Xiaoping's government in 1980.

economic policy and state leadership—were reenacted in Chinese drama after 1978, when Deng Xiaoping, a good friend of Wu Han, came to power.[25]

Starting from 1963, the government's call for revolutionizing traditional theater escalated. A large number of classical plays with historical topics were denounced as backward, superstitious, and feudal, whereas the creation of music dramas with contemporary and revolutionary themes was encouraged. By the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, eight model theater works [*yangbanxi*] became the solely legitimate theater performances. Later, several other works and their regional versions were added to the repertoire. These model plays memorialize the CCP revolutionary history in order to serve the socialist present and establish a national theater and identity. Ban Wang's description of the official aesthetics of the sublime explains the context for the creation of revolutionary model works:

> In the official notion of the sublime, history becomes a mythical epic advancing toward a utopian future. History is turned into faith and theology, and the individual has to turn saintly and superhuman. The solemn aura imbued with a sense of a grand mission of making history that suffused the age of Mao reached its climax in the Cultural Revolution. It was an age of religious frenzy and fanaticism, of hero and hero worship, of epoch-making campaigns and world-shaking events. (230-1)

[25] See Rudolf G. Wagner's introduction of the play (258-63, 289-302) and Lin Chen's essay (30-47).

While revolutionary model plays embody the sublime ideals of the myth-making Maoist era, they cover up too many disasters, predicaments, and paradoxes in the CCP revolution. As Joseph Roach argues, "the practices of memory … also entail a rigorous and highly specialized process of forgetting" (75). What one remembers depends on what one forgets. The "ongoing forgetfulness at the heart of China's official memory" (Schwarcz 56) was enforced through "technologies of amnesia" (57)—ideological education, coercive measures, political criticism, and class struggle. The threatening possibility for the surrogated power-holders to come back and seek restoration made it even more urgent to contain them by forgetting. The forced amnesia during the Cultural Revolution accounts for the emergence of a large amount of theater works in the 1980s that reverse the imagined history in model theater works.

After the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, China entered the New Era [*xinshiqi*] (1976-1989), when the reform and opening-up policy brought intellectual liberation and cultural diversity to an unprecedented stage in the PRC history.[26] Open

[26] The New Era refers to the period after 1978 when China adopted the policy of reform and opening up. The goal of the reform was the modernization of China's economy and society. For Deng Xiaoping, the leader of the New Era, "modernization meant more industrialization, greater use of more advanced technology throughout society—including the countryside and the military—more rapid economic development and a higher standard of living for as many people as possible. It also meant a transformation of the people's attitude, leading them to want to move away from the stereotypes of the Cultural Revolution period and from the bonds of the traditional feudal past, and toward a society more open to the outside world" (Mackerras, Taneja, and Young 1-2). This modernization also means "a formal legal system before which everyone would be equal … guided by 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'" (2). "Modernization meant democracy in the sense that people would be freer to learn new ways and ideas and discard the 'mass line' of the Maoist

to the world after a long period of enclosure and isolation, the Chinese were shocked to realize how far the country lagged behind the rest of the world. Although the reform was mainly in economic field, not in political or ideological area, the influx of modern Western culture stimulated profound changes in all aspects of social and cultural life. While orthodox Confucian morality and Maoist ideology had lost hold in people's minds, a new ideological system was not yet established. The ideological crisis pushed the Chinese to urgently examine national history and cultural heritage in order to find the best way to construct the nation's present.

Since the grand national "History"[27] could no longer monopolize the view of historical process, various histories[28] were constructed in order to serve diverse purposes. Reading between the lines of previous official histories, Chinese

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era, but it certainly did not mean the Western style in which rival parties would compete for political power" (Ibid.). Open-door policy means China's opening its door to the outside world and becoming a more active part in the world economy. Starting from 1978, China gradually participated in foreign trade and international finances, and established Special Economic Zones (SEZs) [*jingji tequ*] in coastal areas.

[27] History, also called "Historicism," refers to the Enlightenment view of human history as developing according to certain laws and experiencing certain phases. According to this view, history progresses forward with innate coherence, serving a certain purpose or design. Resorting to reason, human beings can understand and describe historical progress and even predict mankind's future. Hegel's and Marx's historical philosophies are typical examples of this History (Wang Qingjia & Gu Weiying, 71-7).

[28] Histories refer to the various versions of history based on personal interpretations. Different from the monolithic History, histories present diverse dispersed others.

intellectuals tried to discover dispersed, hidden, and heterogeneous discourses.[29] Although intellectuals basically supported the state's project of Four Modernizations, they broke away from the restriction that intellectual discourse must serve as the state's political tool.[30] Instead, they interpreted and reconstructed history based on their own view, memory, and imagination. A large amount of literary and artistic works were created in order to counter the orthodox interpretation of history during the Maoist era. The wholesome proletarian heroes in revolutionary model plays were replaced by spiritually tormented intellectuals, morally sick workers, ignorant peasants, corrupt cadres, incompetent patriarchs, and frustrated reformers. Dramatizing Mao's extreme leftist movements, especially the Cultural Revolution, as unmitigated disasters, theater of the 1980s explored the tension between the promise and reality, aspiration and restraint, of the Maoist era. Even in theater works that dramatized Chinese history before the Maoist era, the intention to find the

[29] Presenjit Duara's "bifurcated" history explains this process of surrogation. "Bifurcated" history means that "the past is not only transmitted forward in a linear fashion, its meanings are also dispersed in space and time. Bifurcation points to the process whereby, in transmitting the past, Historical narratives and language appropriate dispersed histories according to present needs, thus revealing how the present shapes the past. At the same time, by attending to the very process of appropriating, bifurcation allows us to recover a historicity beyond the appropriating discourse" (Duara 5). In this way, historicity can be salvaged from the "repressive teleologies of linear and simple, causal histories" (Ibid).

[30] Four Modernizations were first proposed by Premier Zhou Enlai, at the suggestion of Mao Zedong, in 1964 as China's goals. They referred to the modernizations of agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology. In 1979, Deng Xiaoping declared the concrete steps to achieve Four Modernizations.

fundamental reason for the Cultural Revolution in China's traditional cultural root underlies their thematic concern.

These transformations in the production of history can be explained by Foucault's argument about the intricate relationship between power and knowledge. According to Foucault, "power produces knowledge. Power bends discourse to its needs and so revises our conceptions of the past. … Discourse molds knowledge and in the process crowds out alternative formulations. It therefore raises issues not only about the ideas it frames but also about those it excludes" (Hutton 113, 111). Together with the surrogation of the social symbolic order, Chinese theater artists of the 1980s made efforts to delve up dispersed histories that had been marginalized, concealed, or excluded by previous official histories. If Confucian, Hegelian, Marxist, and Maoist histories all construct absolute truths, the plays of the 1980s continue to propagate some of the transmitted values but deconstruct those absolute truths as problematic, relative, or false. They testify to Foucault's definition of truth as no more than "the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true" (1980, 132). Dramatizing how sacred official discourses are used by power-holders to seek self-interest and maintain social hierarchy, these plays deconstruct the social symbolic orders of previous historical eras as hypocritical, deceptive, or exaggerated.

In his discussion of the formation of discourse, Foucault argues that "the formation of enunciative modalities," which refers to "the law operating behind all these diverse statements, and the place from which they come" (1972, 50), influences

how the discourse is made. It can be analyzed in three aspects: who is speaking, the institutional sites from which the discourse is made, and the position of the subject in relation to the various domains or groups of objects (1972, 51-5). Seen in light of Foucault's argument, since the discourse-makers during the 1980s were those politicians, intellectuals, and entrepreneurs who were oppressed, criticized, and sent down to the countryside to be reeducated during the Cultural Revolution, their personal stake is one of the reasons for their overall negation of the Cultural Revolution. As Meisner argues, "Those in post-Maoist China who are free to speak and write about the Cultural Revolution are for the most part those who were the political and sometimes physical victims of the time, and their political and emotional stake in portraying the cultural revolution decade as an unmitigated disaster is no less compelling than the political stake Maoists once had in portraying it as the most glorious of revolutionary triumphs" (292). Meisner's argument reminds us that, while the intellectuals of the 1980s presented the Cultural Revolution as the intensified eruption of pernicious feudal legacies, when we interpret these constructed histories, we need to take into consideration the creators' limited points of view instead of blankly accepting them as unmitigated historical truths.

Intellectuals of the 1980s were in a liminal decade when Confucian tradition, Maoist heritage, Enlightenment values, and postmodern sentiments interacted with each other. No matter what personal tendencies they had, no one could escape from the complicated network of all these influences. Advocating emancipation, democracy, humanism, rationality, science, and technology, they were dissatisfied

with the state's delay in conducting political reform and granting ideological freedom. Nevertheless, since all theater companies in the 1980s were state-owned and state-sponsored, their productions must pass state censorship. Promising not to intervene in artistic creation any more, the CCP authority at the same time imposed limitations over what kind of liberation intellectuals could have. In 1979, Deng Xiaoping proposed the four cardinal principles to adhere to: socialist road; Marxism-Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought; dictatorship of the proletariats; leadership of the CCP (10-1). Included in the preface to the revised Chinese Constitution in 1982, these principles held sway over intellectual creation, although the party authority agreed that literature and art were not political tools. The tug-of-war between party direction and intellectual freedom intensified during the five political campaigns in the New Era: the anti-pro-democracy movement in 1979, the anti-bourgeois-liberation campaign in 1981, the anti-spiritual-pollution campaign in 1983, second anti-bourgeois-liberation campaign in 1987, and the suppression of students' movement in 1989. This conflict led Chinese theater artists to tactfully convey their criticisms of the current political system through dramatizing historical traumas caused by previous dictatorship, in order to alert the audience about the urgency to conduct further reforms so that the nation can get out of the vicious historical cycle.

While China's successive modernization projects of the twentieth-century all pursued decisive progress by breaking away from the past, the three plays I analyze in my dissertation—*Uncle Doggie's Nirvana*, *Sangshuping Chronicles*, and *The World's Top Restaurant*—dramatize tradition's uncanny return or stubborn

persistence in the modern age. Disguised in modern faces, the restraint of the past functions as an important reason for the failures, paradoxes, and complexities of China's modernization projects. Despite the state-sanctioned revolutionary measures to erase backward cultural memory from the ongoing history, decadent but persistent traditions transmitted from the previous ages manifest and articulate themselves through various sites of memory in order not to be forgotten. The pernicious traditions dramatized as destroying the nation's modernization efforts include not only feudal remains—such as political autocracy, patriarchal mentality, moral degeneration, and habitual customs—but also Maoist heritage—such as absolute egalitarianism, severe asceticism, class struggle, and intellectual homogeneity.

Presenting history not as a linear progress with a predestined bright future, the theatrical works of the 1980s returned to Chinese traditional concepts of time and history as cyclical. Specific, limited spaces are presented as metaphors of historical stagnation and the repetitive cycle that severely restrain people's lives and the nation's development. Corruption, degeneration, and ruin fill in these spaces, countering national historical projects that pursue progress. *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana* dramatizes how the CCP's successive modernization movements, in radically transforming rural area, conflict with generations of peasants' bondage with their familiar world. In *Sangshuping Chronicles*, the decadent Loess Plateau confines Chinese peasants to repeat the same brutal struggle for physical survival for millennia. Even the most radical Cultural Revolution fails to lead the nation out of its tragic historical cycle. *The World's Top Restaurant* dramatizes how China's imperial

tradition hinders the development of economic enterprise in modern age. Although the collapse of the imperial system signifies historical progress, various practices of the past are re-enacted in the present to frustrate all efforts of reform.

At the same time, these plays construct some traditions as the sustaining power for the Chinese community to counteract the disasters of modern time. Dramatizing how these traditions have been degraded or lost through historical progression, these plays try to establish cultural continuity with the imagined golden age of Chinese history. These constructed exceptional traditions include not only the sage kings during the founding period of Chinese civilization, but also Chinese cultural ideals as embodied by Confucian ethics, culinary arts, military strategy, and performing arts. Common people's perseverance, diligence, and endurance are also eulogized as preserving the nation's lineage through historical vicissitudes. Celebrated as the immortal core of the nation, these cultural memories provide a sense of belonging to a coherent national identity and orient social performances in the present and the future.

Dramatizing how past and present are closely related with each other, these plays present tradition and modernity as mutually penetrative and constitutive, and emphasize the fallacy of getting rid of Chinese traditions to establish a complete Western version of modernity in China. Western industrial and commercial modernity is questioned in *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana* by dramatizing how rapid historical surrogations ruthlessly forsake generations of peasants as being unable to catch up with the nation's progressive trend. *Sangshuping Chronicles* presents how

peasants continue to rely on traditional culture to fulfill their needs and desires, ignoring the state's revolutionary effort to drastically change their minds. *The World's Top Restaurant* dramatizes how characters renovate various aspects of Chinese traditions in order to construct their identities in the modern age. China's long history determines its modernity to be based on its historical patterns. At the same time, the demands of modernity also require people to creatively transform Chinese traditions by catering to the present need.

In order to present the failures, tragedies, contradictions, paradoxes, and ambiguities imbedded within China's modernization process, these plays dramatize the dispersed histories of those neglected groups. These marginal figures include not only the insane and the rebellious who remain outside the regular social orders, obscure peasants in isolated area, but also the entrepreneurs and businessmen denigrated by orthodox Confucian values and Maoist ideology. These dispersed histories offer counter-witnesses to the symbolic orders of their respective times: in traditional China, it is the orthodox Confucian morality that propagates filial piety, loyalty, and chastity in order to safeguard social hierarchy; in the Maoist era, it is the definition of power, growth, and development as coming from proletarian revolution and class struggle, as well as the Maoist taboo against self-interest and material benefits; in the New Era, it is the adoration of money-pursuit, industrialization, and commercialization, as well as the collapse of collective values and ethical concern.

These personal histories of marginal figures provide alternative versions of history outside the monolithic order of both feudal society and socialist society. As

Lin Qingxin argues, "The pursuit of personal rather than collective history shows first of all a negative response to the monopolistic appropriation of the past by the monophonic historical discourse for the imposition of cultural and political order" (32). Dramatizing how historical events affect the lives of individuals, whose interests might be different from the unified interest of the nation, these plays reflect the re-emergence of individualism during the 1980s—a modern value advocated during the May Fourth Movement but suppressed due to the urgency of national salvation and collective liberation. In *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana*, an ordinary peasant's traumatic experiences of modernization call attention to national historical projects' ruthless sacrifice of individuals. *Sangshuping Chronicles* evaluates historical events by the physical well-being and spiritual fulfillment of individuals, not by the prolongation of patriarchal clan or the maintenance of socialist project. *The World's Top Restaurant* dramatizes how China's transformation from an imperial period to a modern period affects different individuals in different ways.

Devoting each chapter to the detailed analysis of each play, I examine how these spoken dramas imagine and evaluate Chinese history through the themes, plots, characters, languages, and structures of the dramatic texts, as well as through theatrical signs such as space, set, costume, acting, sound, and lighting. Viewed together with historical discourse, social agenda, and intellectual heritage, these plays provide an efficient and intriguing entry point to understand the past and present of China, a country that is exercising an increasing influence in today's world. Although these plays have been translated and published in English, I attach their synopses at

the end of the dissertation. I hope that my project will help readers appreciate the profound intellectual exploration and multifaceted artistic achievement of Chinese theater artists during the 1980s.

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II. Witness against History: History and Memory in *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana*

In 1986, the prestigious Beijing People's Art Theater (BPAT) premiered its resident playwright Jinyun's play *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana*.[31] Co-directed by BPAT's esteemed senior directors and actors Diao Guangtan and Lin Zhaohua, the performance made an immediate hit and became part of the canon of modern Chinese theater. Centering on the vicissitudes of a traditional Chinese peasant nicknamed Uncle Doggie, the play dramatizes how China's modernization process from 1940s-1980s affected the life of the Chinese peasantry. Stubbornly pursuing his lifelong dream of becoming a landlord, Uncle Doggie struggles to maintain a peasant's traditional way of life. His personal memory conflicts with the nation's historical project of modernization, which is dramatized as full of bloody ruptures and unresolved contradictions between the past and the present. The play presents the national drive for progress as frequent radical breakings from the past that victimize successive generations of Chinese peasants who are caught up in the vortex of history.

[31] The DVD of this premier production is the source of my analysis of the play's performance. The DVD was produced in 1997 by Beijing TV Art Audio-Visual Publishing House. Jinyun's original name is Liu Jinyun. Born in 1968, he became BPAT's professional playwright in 1982 and its president from 1997-2003. Besides *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana*, his another play, *Boundless Love*, was a huge box hit when produced at BPAT in 2000.

The irresolvable conflicts between traditional peasants' personal memories and the national modernization projects are dramatized as rooted in their different conceptions of time and space. Perceiving time as circular and history as cyclical in the habitual Chinese way, Uncle Doggie carries the past within the present, unable to adapt to the Enlightenment concepts of linear time and progressive history imported from Europe for the nation to pursue development, change, and the new. In the same way, Uncle Doggie's conception of space is finite, confined by the land he cultivates, harvests, owns, or experiences. Nevertheless, modern national historical discourse adopts the Western concept of infinite space, which stimulated European imperialism, commercialization, and industrialization. In order to transform space according to the universal standard of modern time, the nation carries out various modernization projects to break through spatial barriers and impose a modern order. If the nation coercively enforces an anti-traditional, change-driven historical consciousness and repeatedly changes social life, thus negating individuals' emotional linkage with their familiar land, Uncle Doggie stubbornly adheres to traditional peasants' cultural memory and agricultural ideal. His traumatic experience of modernity offers a divergent personal history that testifies against the progressive, teleological national history.

This modernization process is also presented as depriving peasants of their cultural identity formulated by premodern historical conditions. Uncle Doggie constructs his personal identity through identifying and competing with landlord Qi Yongnian—the richest landlord in the neighborhood. While Uncle Doggie initially

succeeds in acquiring some of Qi's family property with the help of the CCP liberation, his dream of becoming a landlord is eventually shattered by the land collectivization movement during the Mao Zedong era. After Qi gets killed during the Cultural Revolution and the narcissistic desire to pursue self-interest as represented by him becomes taboo and suppressed into social unconscious, only Uncle Doggie continues to see and talk with Qi's ghost. The play externalizes Uncle Doggie's shattered psyche and emotional conflict through displaying on stage how his battered ego struggles to negotiate between the conflicting demands of his impulsive id and the superego of social symbolic orders. The similarities between Uncle Doggie and landlord Qi deconstruct the Maoist discourse of class struggle and socialist utopia. Although self-interest is re-legitimated during the New Era, Uncle Doggie's landlord dream is permanently lost when industrialization and commercialization urbanize and globalize the rural area. The play ends with Uncle Doggie's helpless resignation of his worldly pursuits to go back to nature.

The play's dramatization of China's historical events' impact upon Uncle Doggie's psyche can be analyzed through the lens of Slavoj Zizek's interpretation of Lacan's psychoanalytical theory, including the complex interconnection and differentiation between "the symbolic" and "the real," as well as the relationship between human psyche and political ideology. According to Zizek, "the symbolic" is both different from and includes "the real" at its heart as an antagonistic force that breaks down the fixed meaning and smooth operation of "the symbolic" (Porter 52). Seen in this light, the insane Uncle Doggie and Qi's ghost reside in the realm of "the

real," which constantly interrogates, disturbs, undermines, and challenges "the symbolic" of the political discourse and the order in social life. At the same time, as Zizek argues, "the symbolic" always retains traces of "the real." There is "a 'central antagonism' at the heart of all political discourses to the degree that they are 'doomed to fail' in their pursuit of imposing meaning and order on 'the social'" (Porter 66). In this play, the desire for pursuing self-interest—either in wealth, authority, or women—also possesses the power-holders of various historical times. This is why Qi's ghost—"the real"—can never be truly oppressed by "the symbolic." The "central antagonism" over the struggle of self-interest causes disharmony and disunity during various historical periods. In a sense, this play exactly dramatizes the process through which "the symbolic" fields of various historical times are broken down by "the real" of social antagonism.

Zizek also argues that ideology circulates within "the symbolic" and constructs the images of "social reality" through fantasy (Porter 52). Zizek's theory explains how the power-holders of different historical times in this play invest their ideologies into constructing ideal social images in order to legitimize their monopolies of power and formulate their policies. Thus, Zizek problematizes rationality—an Enlightenment value adored during China's modernization process—as being supported, conditioned, and affected by fantasy, which shapes one's desire and constitutes one's subjectivity (Porter 54). As Zizek observes, "being a subject, or having subjectivity, necessarily or always involves the 'misrecognition' of state authority as 'really' justified rather than seeing it as simply 'imaginary'" (Porter 60).

The ideology-plagued fantasy determines "the libidinal economy of subjects who are captured or … 'interpellated' by it" (Porter 72). Zizek's argument explains why the desires and passions of the characters in this play come from identifying with the fantasies in the social symbolic order. When they recognize the authoritative symbolic as justified, instead of problematizing it as fantastic, they are what Zizek calls "the policed subject," which "is subjugated to, or circumscribed within, the norms, codes and conventions of the established social order" (Porter 62). Their responsibility to the established ethical norms is thus driven by the motivations of power-holders. But when they become alienated from the current symbolic and function "to challenge, and antagonize, the smooth running of the state apparatus" (Porter 61), they become what Zizek defines as "the politicized subject," which "attempts to establish a new order as such, a change in the public sphere that accommodates a hitherto marginalized voice" (Porter 62). The successive surrogations of social symbolic orders in this play leave characters to transform between "the policed subject" and "the politicized subject."

The problem for Uncle Doggie is that, for most of the time he remains a politicized subject, a dissenting voice that questions the established social order and demands an opening up in the public sphere to accommodate his needs. By alienating himself from the current symbolic—the familiar, shared moral network such as obedience to authority, conformity to the collective, and advancing with history—Uncle Doggie is able to transform his circumstances. His effort to establish certain autonomy from the subjugating state renders him "a democratizing subject" (Porter

62). At the same time, as Zizek argues, "such a supposedly 'radical' anti-statism can paradoxically imply a type of conservatism" (Porter 62). Uncle Doggie's outspoken protest against the transforming social symbolic orders does not prove his progressiveness, but his conservativeness in stubbornly adhering to his habitual way of life. "The real" in which he resides is connected to the ideology and "the symbolic" of the feudal society. By freeing himself from the current hegemonic authority and social network, Uncle Doggie has to go through certain "subjective destitution" (Porter 63) by being expelled from rational society and normal human life.

The play conducts in-depth exploration of the first forty years of the PRC history through utilizing the dramaturgical techniques of classical Chinese theater and Brechtian epic theater, such as episodic structure, subjective time, heterogeneous space, stylized movement, structured acting, expressionistic lighting, symbolic set, and narrative style. These methods help to present psychological complexity, moral ambiguity, shattered memory, traumatic history, multiple views, diverse experiences, and paradox of modernity. These characteristics counter the theatrical style of socialist realism—the dominant style during the Maoist era. Reflecting the ideological openness and cultural diversity of the 1980s, the play signifies the collapse of the previous unified social order and the urgent necessity to establish new symbolic expressions.

A. Time and Space: National History and Personal Memory

The concept of linear, progressive, and irreversible time—a legacy of the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment movement—has been adopted by China's national historical discourse since the early twentieth century, together with the rapid import of Western modernity into China.[32] Since the mid-nineteenth century, anxiety over China's perceived backwardness has created a strong impetus for the nation to have dynamic development and accelerated progress. The international pressure to modernize led the Chinese to import and adopt those values promoted by Western modernity—the present, the new, the future, evolution, development, change, action, emancipation, democracy, rationality, science, and technology. It was believed that these sacred values would guide the nation toward a bright future as a powerful modern country in step with contemporary global development. The concept of future-oriented historical time is ideological in nature and was at work in the successive social revolutions of twentieth-century China. It advocates persistent breaking away from familiar historical patterns in order to create a novel future and to enable China to participate in the universal time that measures the world modernization process. This abstract, theoretical, objective, and

[32] As Prasenjit Duara points out, "The historian Liang Qichao was perhaps the first to write the history of China in the narrative of the Enlightenment. He made it clear that a people could not become a nation without a History in the linear mode. … Liang's narrative represents a total repudiation of traditional Chinese historiography as being unable to give meaning to the Chinese national experience" (33).

mathematical concept of progressive time is a product of the Western intellectual tradition of philosophical and metaphysical learning.[33]

Influenced by the Darwinian theory of evolution and the universal law of change, the modern concept of homogeneous time generalizes world history into a single linear progress for all societies to go through. As Xiaobing Tang argues, "History in the form of temporal unfolding now moves in the same direction as the dynamic process of making new, which effects at once an overcoming of the historical past and a claiming of the future" (26). Past, present, and future, as well as old and new become contradictory and separable entities. This view of history as breaking away from the past to progress into a new future influenced Marx to formulate his theory of measuring historical progression according to differing modes of production. As Nick Knight points out, Marx did not propose a fixed order of production modes and social stages, but insisted on the contingency of each nation's specific historical environment. Nevertheless, Lenin and Stalin dogmatized Marxist historical philosophy into a regular formula of uni-linear progression of five fixed stages for all societies categorized by five types of production relations—primitive communal, slave, feudal, capitalist, and socialist—and their corresponding class structures. Every country is supposed to go through these stages successively

[33] As Kuang-Ming Wu argues, "*typically* in the Western intellectual pursuit, we have a philosophical sort of knowing which is trans-physical, that is, abstract, theoretical, and comprehensive, knowing for knowing's sake. From this meta-physical angle, time is not a particular object that is pragmatically known, but known from above the world, as theoria, as 'pure intuition,' as a sort of principle for all. … It is this pure theoretical rationality that typifies the Western intellectual pursuit, which is nowhere to be found in China" (19).

until they evolve into the final stage: a communist country of social equality, economic abundance, and eternal harmony. This orthodox Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist periodization of historical development guided Chinese communists in their conduct of China's modernization projects (Knight 124-42).

Uncle Doggie's Nirvana dramatizes how between the 1940s and the 1980s the CCP made persistent efforts to upgrade China's production relations and class structures in order to push the nation to accelerate forward through these five historical stages. This consciousness of modern time is voiced by village-head Li Wanjiang and Uncle Doggie's son Chen Dahu, who respectively follow the social symbolic orders of the Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping eras. In Scene Seven, Wanjiang persuades Uncle Doggie to give up his private land and horse to join the collective, thereby transforming himself from an old-fashioned petit-peasant to a new man under the socialist regime. Nevertheless, Uncle Doggie soon regrets his decision and asks for his private property back. Wanjiang reprimands him: "we can't turn back now, Brother" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 116). From the perspective of Wanjiang, regressing from socialist to capitalist or feudal production relations goes against the progressive trend of modern history. In a similar way, Uncle Doggie's son Dahu, who established a factory during the New Era, criticizes Uncle Doggie as having his eyes in the back of his head, meaning that he always looks backward to the past instead of forward to the bright future.

Although the purpose of the Enlightenment historical project is to modernize the nation, as Prasenjit Duara points out, "it has also involved totalization and

closure in order to destroy or domesticate the Other" (17). The "Other" victimized by this totalitarian progressive time includes traditional peasants like Uncle Doggie and landlord Qi. Based on the seasonal change that governs agricultural production, the regular movement of celestial stars, and the dynastic cycle of the feudal era, both perceive time as circular and history as cyclical in a typical Chinese way, thus adhering to the customs, values, and traditions transmitted from the past. As Calinescu argues, "Modernity as a notion would be utterly meaningless in a society that has no use for the temporal-sequential concept of history and organizes its time categories according to a mythical and recurrent model" (13). This mythical and recurrent pattern is how Uncle Doggie and landlord Qi view time and history, as reflected in their comment on social change in Scene Thirteen:

> UNCLE DOGGIE Times change, like the weather
>
> QI YONGNIAN Sure, sunshine after a storm. (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 135)

Their interpretation of social transformation as repeating an eternal natural cycle is a habitual Chinese way of thinking, based on "a theory of ahistorical rotation" that "deflates history" (Tang 65). It is totally different from modern historiography, which is "a theory of historical evolution" based on "a cumulative progression" (Ibid.). The sharp difference between the two is a fundamental reason why traditional Chinese peasants like Uncle Doggie and landlord Qi cannot adapt to China's modern development.

This ahistorical pattern is also how they view the CCP's radical social revolutions. While the CCP eliminated the landlord class as an important historical step towards modernization, Uncle Doggie interprets it as reenacting China's repetitive dynastic cycle. In Scene Three, after harvesting landlord Qi's sesame as his own during the civil war, he enters the stage singing a line from *The Grand Ascendance to the Palace*, a local opera that dramatizes the enthronement of Liu Bang, the founding emperor of Han Dynasty (202 BC-220 BC). Originally a peasant, Liu Bang acquired supreme ruler-ship through China's first peasant uprisings that overthrew the tyrannical Qin Dynasty—a cycle of order-chaos-order repeated throughout feudal history. This consciousness of cyclical history also undermines the authority of dynasty. That is why the deposed landlord Qi gloats over Uncle Doggie's loss of land during the CCP's agricultural collectivization movement as another repetition of the universal cycle: "Rivers change courses and the sun never stays at noon forever. Look, you had hardly three days of a good time, and there was trouble everywhere" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 113). His surrogator's trouble gives him the hope that he might come back some day, through "the third world war" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 111)—a war expected to be staged by the world capitalist forces to eliminate communists. So he keeps his name seal—one of the few remaining signs of his previous master status—in case he might "need it some day" (ibid.).

This consciousness of circular time and history exemplifies an inherent quality of Chinese thinking that "concretely moves from the familiar here to the strange there" and "moves in the context of history, moving between past and future,

back and forth" (Huang and Zürcher 4-5). This type of thinking determines that their memory of the past and vision for the future are based upon their concrete, specific, and familiar life experiences at present.[34] This interpretation of the past and the future as an extension of their present situation and familiar selves makes it hard for them to accept the modern historiography's conception of history as persistent overcoming of the past to welcome the new. As Marshall Berman writes, "To be modern, is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world—and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are" (15). Both Mao Zedong era's socialist movement and Deng Xiaoping era's economic reform and opening up promised Chinese peasants adventure into brand-new historical periods, the power of a modern nation, the joy of being masters of society, the growth of material wealth, and the transformation of the countryside. In order to achieve these promises, modern national historical discourse often criticizes "what

[34] As Kuang-Ming Wu points out, in typical Chinese thinking, "History is my understanding of other times. This means that history is my metaphorical reach-out in time. For metaphor is an activity of my understanding the there-then from the now-here—my present situation, my self. The then can be the future as much as the past. The future has, in its metaphorical relation to the now, as much historical connection to the now as the past does. The past is historical; the future is a proleptive, prevenient, history. In any case, if the now is myself here, then the then—future, past—are others for me, the 'others here.' History is my metaphorical understanding of the others here. … History can be described as 'my' future—my not [-yet]-me—comprehended retrospectively; history can then be called the "other here," because the future is myself yet-to-come, the 'other' as uncertain as it is surely myself. As my 'other,' my history is uncertain, but it is not unfamiliar, thanks to my metaphorical reach-out in time from 'here.' In this sense, history is 'my' other in the making, forming the dialectical process of the other for me" (19).

cultural memory has taken for granted as natural, timeless, self-evident" and tries to revise or get rid of the burden of "'obsolete' tradition anchored in cultural memory" in "radical, revolutionary fashion" (Wang, *Illuminations from the Past* 6). National history's anti-tradition, anti-memory revolutionary movements, in pursuing development, progress, and change, victimize various characters in this play, who suffer from the ruthless destruction of their familiar world and selves by modern historical forces.

This contrast between historical consciousness and cultural memory is a common trope in the discourse of modernity. As Ban Wang explains, "It has been a commonplace to define memory as a structure of feeling inherent in traditional communities, as opposed to the accelerative thrust of modernity and the upsurge of historical consciousness" (*Illuminations from the Past* 4). Wang's argument illuminates why this play dramatizes national history's increasingly rapid modernization process as bringing great damage to the traditional peasant community's emotional linkage with the past. Pierre Nora, an influential French historian, defines memory as the warm tradition, mute custom, and ancestral heritage lived unconsciously in the mundane daily life. The entrenched institutions and habitual activities, sustained by memory, ensure culture to be transmitted through generations. Nevertheless, this cultural continuity in traditional community is broken by the upsurge of historical consciousness and the accelerated, change-driven modern history (qtd. in Wang, *Illuminations from the Past* 4).

Pierre Nora's insightful distinction between history and memory explains the historical rupture as experienced by Uncle Doggie in this play. By asserting selective historical understanding, national discourse requires peasants to forsake those cultural memories that do not serve the present modernization project. Unable to adopt official historical understanding, Uncle Doggie's life and identity are sustained by the collective memory descended from ancestral farmers. As a site of memory, the past is embodied, manifested, and articulated through him to counter-critique the forward-looking, change-driven modern history. His memory functions as a medium through which past and present are at strife and the living and the dead speak with each other, so that the message of the supernatural world passes on to the living in order not to be forgotten. The tension between entrenched cultural memory and accelerated modern history in the short span of his life proves too huge a burden for him to carry, causing the fragmentation of his psyche. His battered body and disordered mind register the chaotic warring and un-reconciled strivings between tradition and modernity to become the dominant agent of history.

Being illiterate, the past that Uncle Doggie remembers is a living memory perpetuated and renewed through popular mores, daily manners, and oral traditions. Uncle Doggie's oral narration of memory is filled with emotional impressions, enchanted feelings, mythological imaginations, symbolic details, ages-old idioms, and inherited wisdom—all those folk customs neglected by the objective, analytical, and abstract official written histories. Patrick Hutton describes "the emergence of an historical perspective" as a process whereby "The past of living memory, conceived

as a continuum that recedes from the present toward vague horizons in the past, yielded place to an historical memory that places events of past and present within invented chronologies. In this way, historical understanding began to take possession of memory, and in the process transformed its meaning" (20). Seen in this light, China's national modernization movements, during the process of transforming cultural memory, also require peasants to appropriate and reinterpret the past from the perspective of modern historiography. Uncle Doggie's tragic alienation from the national project comes from his failure to transform his living memory into historical understanding.

The differentiation between Uncle Doggie's living memory and the discourse of national history is also reflected in the two different perceptions of space as dramatized in the play: finite space versus infinite space. As Lin Qingxin explains, until the mid-nineteenth century the Chinese "viewed their nation as the center of the world. … To imagine one's habitat as the center of the world would certainly diminish one's interest in exploring the realm of the border, let alone areas and oceans beyond the borders" (66). Confined within the border of the nation, Chinese peasants were further limited by the small pieces of land on which they maintained a self-sufficient living style with manual labor. This concept of finite space determined that their vision and identity were formulated by the land they could see, feel, and experience. This parochial mentality characterizes Uncle Doggie, whose aspirations do not go beyond owning more land in order to surpass the richest landlord in the neighborhood.

Contrary to the traditional Chinese concept of finite space, the modern vision of infinite space inspired the Europeans to go beyond the boundary of their world to explore unknown land with advanced technology—an important reason for their industrialization, imperialism, and modernization. As David Harvey argues, "progress entails the conquest of space, the tearing down of all spatial barriers, and the ultimate 'annihilation of space over time'" (205). This equation of historical progress with the conquest of space radically transformed the Chinese view of the world at the beginning of the twentieth century, when "global space, as a geographical and political reality" (Tang 2) was introduced into China. "The world as a mappable totality, or rather the concept of a whole world, introduced a sudden spatiotemporal reorientation. … The new world map of modern nation-states, while deflating a local plentitude and contentment, suggested the simultaneous existence of uneven and different national territories and spaces. It visually demonstrated a new world order" (Ibid.). This awareness of different developed spaces outside China, in addition to China's national crises at the time, produced strong nationalist sentiments among the anxiety-ridden Chinese intellectuals. Since "the concept of a totalizing world space" is "the hallmark of modernity" (Ibid.), Chinese nationalists were inspired to take revolutionary actions to transform China according to the standard of modern universal time, making the nation part of modern global space.

The modern ideology of reconfiguring national space according to the progressive time can be called the "temporalization of space," which "lies at the core of a nationalist imagination" (Tang 28, 34). As Xiaobing Tang argues, "If history

could be unified through time, space became a secondary concept relevant only when it was first located and identified in a progressive timetable" (45). Since this progressive timetable is set according to European experiences, the histories and relations in diverse spaces all over the world are evaluated by the same temporal order and standard of modernity. Thus, modern historical consciousness is a "totalizing discourse" (Tang 73) that synthesizes, reduces, and subordinates diverse histories and realities in different places all over the world into the historical categories established by European modernity. This radical transformation of uneven spaces into the same universal order, while pushing the nation forward toward modernization, also annihilates the particularities of each space—an inherent paradox of modernity that is dramatized in this play.

The play presents how successive modernization movements in the Mao Zedong era are characterized by conquering space through eliminating the existing boundary of space. The civil war between the CCP and the GMT from 1946-1949 creates disorder and thus facilitates Uncle Doggie's transgression onto landlord Qi's land to harvest Qi's sesame as his own (Scene 2). Uncle Doggie's appropriation of the private property of the feudal ruling class is legitimated by the CCP's victory in 1949 (Scene 3). Land Reform (1950-2) annihilates the barrier of private land owned by masters of old society. Landlord Qi's family property is confiscated and redistributed to peasants in order to liberate the production force of the masses (Scenes 5-6). During the agricultural collectivization movement of the mid-1950s, the spatial barrier of peasants' family land is again smashed in order to facilitate the

state's unified management of agricultural production and distribution, and to finance urban industrialization (Scene 7). This agricultural collectivization movement intensified during the Great Leap Forward and the People's Commune during the late 1950s (Scenes 8-10) and was reinforced during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) (Scenes 11-12). All these revolutionary movements during the Mao era aimed to transform national space according to the requirement of modernity.

Nevertheless, during the process in which modernity was implemented in China, it underwent a series of transformations that rendered it vastly different from its original meaning in Europe. The difference is synthesized in the contrast between the adoration of the private sphere in the West and the emphasis upon the public sphere in China. As Lydia Liu points out, the brutal invasion of China by Western imperialist forces caused the concept of modernity to be imported into China in close connection with nationalist sentiment, state identity, social consciousness, and revolutionary ideology. The individualism of European modernity was used to criticize traditional ethics and familial values but uphold nationalism, thus it subjugated individuals to state, party, or other social groups. According to Lydia Liu, "the modern self is never quite reducible to national identity. On the contrary, it is the incongruities, tensions, and struggles between the two as well as their mutual implications and complicity that give full meaning to the lived experience of Chinese modernity" (82). The discourse of individualism participated in creating a type of

modern individual who strived for national liberation and revolution at the same time (L. Liu 82-91).

The complex contradictions between nationalism and individualism were neglected by Chinese intellectuals who advocated modern historical consciousness. For Liang Qichao, China's first propagator of new historiography, "[t]he inherent tensions and conflicts between a collective, national identity and the liberal notion of individuality … are overcome by the exciting prospect of action, of making new" (Tang 26). Since modern national historiography values progress and change, the dilemmas and complexities of modernity are neglected, evaded, and overcome by the efforts to create a modern nation and modern citizens—both of which are believed to embody historical development. The Chinese Communist Revolution equated individualism with bourgeoisie ideology, the opposite to socialist ideals, and subjugated selfhood to statehood. The cultural memory of Confucian moral idealism also played a significant role in negating individualism. As Zhou Guangfan points out, the Confucian ideal of communal harmony and collective values made Chinese intellectuals averse to the pursuit of self-interest, private ownership, free competition, social alienation, and class division imbedded in Western modernity, and instead desire a society based on the equal distribution of social wealth (9-10).

Due to the Confucian legacy and communist ideology, Chinese intellectuals were particularly attracted to Marxist-Leninist advocacy to combine communist utopian ideals with modernization. Chinese communists followed the model of modernity as practiced in the Soviet Union. David Hoffmann argues that "the Soviet

system is best understood as one particular response to the ambitions and challenges of the modern era" (186). Soviet modernity developed the qualities of European modernity: the rational design of society according to scientific natural and social laws; the transformation of society with modern science and technology; the strengthened state intervention through bureaucratic procedures; the management of society by experts standing above individual rights; the reform of people's habitual way of thinking, social behavior, and everyday life; the repudiation and reinvention of traditional values and culture; mass politics and mass warfare; large-scale production and distribution; the pursuit of social harmony and organic unity of humanity; and the production of historical trauma by the supposedly scientific social reform (Hoffmann 7-13). Because Mao's modernization movements inherited these qualities, Maoist government's radical transformation of social space came from the inherent requirement of European modernity.

At the same time, Soviet modernity was vastly different from European modernity in some crucial aspects: its anticapitalist state-run economy that prioritized collective progress over individual interest; its advocacy of a productive, rational, socialist new person ready to sacrifice the self for the collective; its violent dispossession of exploitative classes and destruction of class divisions through limitless state intervention; its pursuit of revolutionary social transformation through mass mobilization; its implementation of massive coercive measures to move history forward to the grand telos of communism; and its production of a repressive social system during the process of building a communist utopia (Hoffmann 7-13, 186-90).

All these special qualities of Soviet modernity, which also characterized Mao's modernization project, are the exact opposite of liberal individualism of European modernity. In this way, the conflict inherent in modernity between the individual/private sphere and the collective/public sphere was intensified by socialist movements in the Maoist era.

This conflict between the individual and the collective is dramatized in the play, in which China's pursuit of a modern national identity suppresses the peasant's individual freedom, choice, and willpower. The failure of government management and social engineering leads to the re-legitimization of the private sphere during the New Era through a household responsibility system and the return to private enterprise (Scene 1, 4, 13-16). Though the boundary of private space is reestablished, the spatial barrier is further transcended by the entry of rural economic activities into the global market. This spatial transcendence is manifested in the play in Japanese businessmen and Chen Dahu's factory, which produces "pure white marble" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 144) to be exported to foreign countries. A widespread phenomenon during the 1980s, newly established township enterprises sped up the urbanization of the countryside and the globalization of world economies—thus accelerating toward the goal of universal modernity.

By "prioritiz[ing] temporality in the space-time relationship" (Lin Q. 15), modernity has transformed rural space to such a degree that traditional Chinese peasants are alienated from their familiar homeland, which has lost its efficacy to sustain their lives. Corresponding to this neglect of traditional peasants' concrete

experiences in specific spaces, China's modern national historiography is a type of "temporal narration," in which "the value of space is reduced to a unit of measurement for time, a measurement for the track of progress as time continuously leaves behind it the backwardness of the past and looks to an ever-brighter future" (Lin Q. 102-3). As a contrast, Chinese traditional narrative mode is "spatial narration," which gives priority to space and "tends to 'spatialize time'" (Lin Q. 21). In this mode, time is ambiguous, "minimized by the simultaneity of spaces" (Lin Q. 102). Spatial particularities are emphasized, and different spaces are often juxtaposed at the same time, frequently shifting and fluently flowing into each other. Since this "spatial narration" is suitable to present traditional Chinese peasants' concept of circular history, *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana* utilizes this traditional narrative mode to retrieve an individual peasant's fragmented experience of the modernization process. Uncle Doggie's different experiences of his local spaces at various historical times are contrasted and emphasized.

Dramatizing history from both traditional and modern perspectives, this play presents Uncle Doggie's conception of circular time and shifting space against modern national history's progressive time and rationalized space. By combining "temporal narration" and "spatial narration," the play dramatizes national history and personal memory as "mutually contradictory and complementary in Chinese culture's endeavor to become a modern nation-state" (Wang, *Illuminations from the Past* 3). If "history writing had been crucial to the official discourse in legitimating a hegemonic culture and national identity," an individual peasant's private memory is

explored in this play "as a source of meaning and identity" (Wang, *Illuminations from the Past* 105). The complicated relationship between "temporal narration" and "spatial narration" is reflected in the play's structure. While for the most part the play presents the progressive trend of modern history through a linear plot, it also dramatizes Uncle Doggie's conception of circular time and limited space through "cyclical recurrence" and "multiple periodicity" (Plaks 435).

This "cyclical recurrence" is created by setting several scenes—One, Four, Fifteen, and Sixteen—at one time (one night in the 1980s) and one location (in front of the arch) where Uncle Doggie is preparing to set fire to the arch. "Cyclical recurrence" and "multiple periodicity" are also enacted in the repeated interruptions of Dahu, who speaks from the 1980s to comment on Uncle Doggie's obsession with the past in several scenes set in the past—One, Two, Four, Seven, Fourteen, and Sixteen. This intermingling of the past with the present creates a sense of continuous present—the present at which Uncle Doggie is deserted by an industrial and commercial age brought by the younger generation. By frequently reminding the audience of Uncle Doggie's tragic ending, the play undermines modern national historiography's "temporal narration" that projects a linear path of progress and a predestined happy life, and offers Uncle Doggie's personal memory of the past as a disturbing counter-critique to the progressive trend of national history.

The free shifting and fluent flow of diverse spaces are performed on stage through utilizing the spatial consciousness of classical Chinese theater. In traditional Chinese plays, time and space are not physical or objective but emotional, subjective,

and constructed by language, movement, and symbolic images. Claiming to "transform limited stage into free space" (qtd. in Wu Z. 3), director Lin Zhaohua admits that "classical Chinese theater's spatial consciousness is a topic I am most interested in" (qtd. in Kang 107). A typical use of traditional theater's free space is in the scene when Uncle Doggie and barber Su Lianyu go to propose marriage to Feng Jinhua. They have to walk five miles to get there. This long journey is performed by a conventional movement of "running around the stage" that signifies travelling, with Lianyu saying: "It's only five miles, we can get there in no time" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 103). Then several colorful blossoming trees, painted in an essentialist style, are lowered from above, with Jinhua standing beneath the tree. Shifting time and space in such a subjective and symbolic way not only expresses Uncle Doggie's light-heartedness and earnestness, but also symbolizes that this happy event is a gift from heaven. The episodic structure produced by the frequent shift of subjective spaces vividly presents Uncle Doggie's stream of consciousness. The fragmented history in the play corresponds to Uncle Doggie's disordered mind, shattered memory, and experience of history as ruptured, disorganized, and traumatic.

Uncle Doggie's concrete experience of the eternity, materiality, and fecundity of particular spaces questions the temporal logic of national history that propagates progress, temporality, and ideology. In the first scene of the play, the old, devastated Uncle Doggie is "in rapt reminiscence" of his feelings of exhilaration and fulfillment when he transgressed onto landlord Qi's field forty years ago during the civil war to harvest sesame as his own: "All that was left was this endless expanse of a golden

harvest, ripe with grain—it made my heart glad, my eyes open, and it was ready for my hands! Now, who was there to take it? I was! It belonged to Uncle Doggie! Oh that life was a life worth living! Ha Ha!" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 95). Uncle Doggie's exhilarated tone manifests that this memory is more a sentimentalized nostalgia for a golden age than a rational record of historical event. Since that experience marks the beginning of his relatively wealthy period of life, the play's performance externalizes his elation through creating a dream-like utopian world. With "Sound of distant gunfire interspersed occasionally with near shots" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 96), several huge expanses of beautiful golden harvest are lowered down, like colorful clouds descending from heaven. Shadows of blue mountains are dimly visible in the distance, and a hexagon moon hangs in the sky. The whole scene is crafted in the style of Chinese water-color painting, expressing Uncle Doggie's hazy nostalgia for his most proud experience of wish-fulfillment. When he starts to tell his adventure, he suddenly releases great energy and vitality. While just now he was still prostrating listlessly on the ground, desperate, agonized, and battered, now he gradually stands up, with his dull eyes shining an excited light.

While this episode presents his ecstasy, energy, and sense of achievement as coming from harvesting land, in Scene Two, he elaborates upon his especially intimate relationship with land. Prioritizing land as a more reliable, loyal, obedient, and profitable companion than a wife, he says:

> The good earth is not like a wife, it never throws tantrums, it doesn't go to the fairs and temple gatherings, and it's never cross. … Now,

> the good earth is always so yielding, so soft, anyone could plant it, reap from it. When the big guns started firing, my wife took our child and ran off, as though her tail was on fire. The rich ran off, too, as well as the poor. But the good earth did not run off; it kept me company. Such a harvest! And there was only me left, and a little cricket that didn't fear death. … (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 96)

Here, Uncle Doggie tells the audience that he would rather not run off from war to protect himself and his family, but instead to feel the fulfillment of life in harvesting crops. While he embraces good earth as his home, he loses his wife in a bombing.

Uncle Doggie's sense of being in space is also communicated by his heightened attention to, and recollection of, the particular qualities of each space. Although he harvested landlord Qi's sesame almost four decades ago, he still vividly remembers the specific details of that harvest and reenacts movement of harvesting:

> Well, shouldn't I have reaped the harvest? To let such a ripe and heavy crop go to waste is a sin that has to be answered for on the day of reckoning! Look at it! Such lovely cereal! And such good stock. *[Indicating the field]* "Top-heavy Gold," "Drumsticks," "Phoenix's Nest," "White-of-the-Eye," and, ho ho, a shortie, but what huge spikes—that's the "Pig-lifting-her-Leg." Put it in my basket and it's my meal … Phew! You clodhopper, sorghum ain't good grain, have too much of it and you have trouble shitting. Now, this corn is different, "Golden Queen!" Hey, what have we here? Sesame! Fully

> ripe, ready to burst, long stalks, the "Tyrant's Whip"! This belongs to the Qis. What a stretch of land. At least five hundred yards! When I worked for him it took more than half a day to hoe one furrow. And now all the Qis are gone, vamoosed. Who owns it now? Uncle Doggie! What am I waiting for? *[Hacks down the sesame]* Damn it, this is what I call life. After the sesame we'll dig for the peanuts, and after that the sweet millet—so when New Year comes, we'll have plenty of sweet cakes … *[Sound of cannons]*. (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 96-7)

Uncle Doggie's vivid memory of the particularities of the crop is full of the vitality of natural life, without any political or ideological color. His feeling of strength when harvesting the land—a primitive activity of the peasantry—witnesses against the contemporaneous Maoist definition of power, growth, and development as coming from revolution, class struggle, and modernity. His plan of having good food for his family on New Year's Day is also parochial when evaluated by the grand revolutionary discourse of national liberation.

Uncle Doggie's exhilarated feeling in the harvest demonstrates the importance of land for him. As he explains, "To the farm-hand, land is everything, his roots, his hope. Without land, the farm-hand is no better than a travelling monk, at the mercy of anyone and everyone" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 109). "When you have land, what you don't have you will have. But without land, what you have will go for sure" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 126). Since land determines the peasant's existence and social recognition among the vicissitudes of history, Uncle Doggie's biggest life-

dream is to own land. His very nickname Doggie, which replaces his original name Chen Hexiang, memorializes his father's tragic death in striving to acquire land—eating a puppy alive in a bet just to get 2 hectares of land. This nickname suits him well since his obsessive desire for land resembles the stubbornness of a dog.

Uncle Doggie's desire for land is fulfilled during CCP's Land Reform from 1950-1952, which transformed the feudal landlord ownership that dominated China for three millennia to peasant ownership. Scene Six dramatizes how Uncle Doggie feels elated and liberated in becoming the master of his life. Looking fresh and clean, he comes onto the stage saying: "Beating drums and gongs and dancing *yangge* in distributing house and land, then we have everything."[35] While Uncle Doggie's happiness reflects the euphoric atmosphere of a "peasants' utopia," this "'petty bourgeois' society par excellence" (Meisner 129) was far from the grand goal of socialism pursued by Chinese communists. Instead, Uncle Doggie still maintains his petit-peasantry selfish mentality, as manifested in the episode in which Uncle Doggie angrily curses and drives away those villagers who come to pilfer red dates from his jujube tree, not caring about maintaining a friendly relationship with villagers.

Peasants also increased capitalist activities through land sale, which began a new cycle of land annexation, social inequality, family competition, and class

[35] This sentence was added in the play's premier performance, not written in the published play-script. *Yangge* (Rice Sprout Song) is a celebrative folk dance theater very popular in northern China. Originated in Song Dynasty (960-1279), its performance involves song, dance, and dialogue, accompanied by a music played by drums, gongs, trumpets, and cymbals. The performers usually wear a red silk ribbon around the waist. Some dancers use props like waistdrum, dancing fan, fake donkey, and litter. *Yangge* is performed in different styles in different areas.

division—the opposite of the CCP's communist ideal. This historical phenomenon is dramatized in Scene Six, in which Uncle Doggie buys a piece of land from barber Su Lianyu, with a plan to buy more land the next year. In this land deal, the specific quality and boundary of the land are defined very clearly, in great detail. The land is "half an acre in area," with a well inside, "covering land bordered by the Willow Lane in the east and the Old Official Road in the west" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 110). "The earth is half sandy, half clay, it will stand up to drought or flood, and it's so near the village" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 111). These particular attributes of the land are described from the perspective of benefiting agricultural production and serving self-interest, with nothing to do with the official revolutionary discourse of class unification. In fact, it becomes quite obvious in the next scene that Su Lianyu sells this land to Uncle Doggie at a surprisingly low price precisely because he is well-informed that the collectivization movement will soon begin, so he wants to take the last opportunity to make profit from his neighbor before it becomes a public space.

Besides the increased capitalist activities, the petty-peasantry households lacked sufficient tools, materials, capital, technology, and labor to construct basic infrastructures and improve farming. In order to accelerate modernization, from 1955, Mao Zedong sped up the pace of agricultural collectivization, when industry and technology could not support such large-scale production. Maurice Meisner attributes Mao's voluntarist approach to affecting social change to his populist faith in peasants' enthusiasm for socialism (137-8). Nevertheless, Mao's homogenization and institutionalization of heterogeneous private spaces and personal times in order

to accelerate the nation's progress along the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist historical route inherits the Enlightenment project "to rationalize social orders as well as the private sphere" (Lin Q. 71). However, "[t]o use rationalized configurations to subsume such diversities and richness of temporal and spatial experiences was suspicious of idealization and arbitrariness, which actually contradicted the Enlightenment thinkers' pursuit of scientific objectivity" (Ibid.). The paradox of Mao's modernization project is reflected in the play in the intense conflict between the nation-state and individual peasants, whose habitual world, life-style, and cultural mentality are shattered by the nation's coercive modernization measures.

B. Public Space vs. Private Space: Collective Value vs. Self Interest

The arbitrary process of collectivization is narrated by Uncle Doggie in Scene Seven at his family's ancestral burial ground. In sharp contrast to his elation when buying land in the previous scene, Uncle Doggie staggers onto the stage, accompanied by the cries of several crows—an ominous sign in Chinese culture. The stage is shrouded in gloomy darkness, with a withered tree, a crescent moon, and a few glistening lights scattered in the desolate space. Kneeling at the tomb of his father, Uncle Doggie narrates with a broken heart how he was forced to join the commune. According to his memory, initially cadres at the local level required people to obey the instructions from above: "Village Head Li said, according to instructions from above, the whole village was to turn 'Red All Over.' When everyone else is 'Red,' how can Uncle Doggie remain the 'Black Spot!'" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 113). Using the colors red and black as metaphors, the official

discourse defined joining the collective as revolutionary, progressive, and glorious, while not joining the collective was portrayed as reactionary, backward, and shameful. When Uncle Doggie questioned the rationality of such practice and refused to obey, he was denounced by Li Wanjiang as "a typical money-grabber, an earthworm, the tough nut no one can crack!" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 114). From the perspective of national history, those who refuse to transform themselves according to the progressive trend of modern history stubbornly lag behind. Such definition left Uncle Doggie with no space for argument or choice.

As a faithful implementer of the Maoist order, village head Li Wanjiang described the glorious future of peace and prosperity aspired to by national history: "Just wait, you silly clodhopper. In the blink of an eye, we'll be living in modern buildings, upstairs and downstairs, with electric lights and telephones; we'll be drinking milk and eating biscuits" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 114). This utopian future not only suggests accelerated speed ("in the blink of an eye"), but also a universal modern life-style presumed to be good for everyone. The wine Wanjiang brought signified the intoxication produced by the prospect of equal wealth. In order to swiftly reach such a utopian future, heavily coercive measures were implemented. When Uncle Doggie said he would rather be a "Black Spot" than join the collective, Wanjiang threatened to replace Uncle Doggie's large acres of fertile land with scattered small pieces of poor land on the margins of the village. Wanjiang explained, "If you're a Black Spot, we'd rather have you on our toes than on our chest, right?" (Ibid.). Narrating this collectivization process from the single perspective of Uncle

Doggie, this dramatic episode presents how the overwhelming monopoly and extreme-leftist policies in the Mao era violate individual rights and self-interest—an opinion held by majority of people during the 1980s.

Collectivization is also supported by Uncle Doggie's second wife Jinhua—who married Uncle Doggie at the age of nineteen because of the sesame Uncle Doggie harvested from landlord Qi's private field. In the scene of marriage proposal, match-maker Lianyu points out the importance of Uncle Doggie's family property to win Jinhua's agreement: "I told them that Mr. Chen lost his wife in the prime of his life. An affluent man. He has two, maybe three huge vats of pure sesame oil. When the pretty young widow heard that, she beamed from ear to ear!" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 102-3). Nevertheless, later Jinhua plays an active role in pushing Uncle Doggie to join the collective, arguing that one should not break community harmony: "We farm-hands, peasants, we've always gone with the trend. We never try to be different, to be the odd bird, to stick our necks out! Brother Wanjiang here is running back and forth, day and night, isn't it all for us? Let me tell you—and I don't care if you don't like it—if you refuse to join the collective, we'll go our separate ways; Dahu and me, we'll join in. We won't be the 'Black Spot' along with you" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 114).

While Jinhua's reasoning manifests that she tries to follow the trend, her active role in making family decisions reflects the effectiveness of the CCP's liberation of women. Formerly considered a family property and a source of domestic labor, Jinhua was used by Uncle Doggie "like a donkey" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 107),

with no say in family land decisions. Now she becomes an individual with her own voice and property rights—a sign of the modernization of the domestic sphere. Kay Ann Johnson explains that in traditional Chinese society, "Women lacked all rights of property ownership and management and carried no formal independent decision-making authority in matters affecting the family and clan" (9). The abolition of traditional patriarchal prerogatives started with the CCP's marriage reform and land reform in the early 1950s, which gave women and children equal property rights (Johnson 102). Advocating that women should shoulder half the sky, the CCP undertook a series of socialization measures to liberate women from the confinement of the domestic sphere.

When Uncle Doggie proposed marriage to Jinhua before the CCP liberation, Jinhua expresses her wish to enjoy a comfortable life at home, not laboring in the field: "I do have sensitive skin, I get boils all over if I'm exposed to the sun" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 104). Their plan for the family life follows the traditional Confucian pattern of "men rule outside, women rule inside"—men labor in the field and women stay at home to take care of the family. Nevertheless, Chinese communists believed in Friedrich Engels' argument that gender inequality is rooted in women's lack of economic independence due to their exclusion from profitable economic activities outside the home (Johnson 15). Thus, the CCP's "abolition of private property and the socialization of the means of production were supposed to lessen the family's role as the economic unit of production," and to "facilitate the mobilization of women's labor outside the private domestic realm alongside men" (Johnson 157).

This prospect of economic profit and gender equality mobilized women to play an active role in implementing the collectivization movement, as reflected in Uncle Doggie's complaint that "the women have had their meetings too" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 114). Uncle Doggie's loss of authoritative control over his family also results from modern national history's transformation of space according to the requirement of modern time.

Uncle Doggie is unwilling to join the collective because he is relatively well off, with the property acquired at the cost of his father's life and his own hard work. In regretting that his family's efforts and sacrifices to get land have come to nothing, Uncle Doggie's disordered language and shattered state mark the beginning of his alienation from the nation's glorious modernist discourse. From the comments made by his son Dahu, we know that during the intervening thirty years, Uncle Doggie has narrated this traumatic memory over and over again. His obsession with this memory can be explained by Cathy Caruth's description of "trauma as a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or set of events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors" (Kaplan and Wang 5). The delayed effect of trauma reinforces Uncle Doggie's anachronistic time, making it even more difficult for him to live with the progressive trend of modern history. His obsession with this traumatic memory is symptomatic of both his battered

psychological unconscious and the unpredictable modern history.[36] Uncle Doggie's desperate and fervent attempt to understand and grasp this traumatic event through remembrance proves his failure to fully experience it when it occurred and get rid of it after it ended.[37]

Since Uncle Doggie understands everything from a pragmatic, concrete, and rational perspective, not in national historiography's philosophical, abstract, and ideological terms, he questions the practicality of a homogeneous space wherein everyone has to labor under a unified direction. He asks Li Wanjiang: "but now, all of a sudden, everything, the land, the animals, the men, are to be 'collectivized'? You think it'll work? You think you are a god reincarnated? You going to give orders to hundreds of farm-hands? Will it work? Don't forget, even blood brothers have beaten each other's brains out over a tiny strip of land!" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 113-4). Uncle Doggie's living memory of peasants' obsession with self-interest makes it hard for him to believe in a unified order guided by the sublime socialist ideology and morality. Uncle Doggie's question points to an inherent contradiction of Mao's agrarian radicalism: "Although it was to be based on local spontaneity and

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[36] According to Cathy Caruth, if trauma "must be understood as a pathological symptom, then it is not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history. The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess" (5).

[37] As Ban Wang argues, "To be possessed by trauma also means being unable to possess or grasp it: the traumatic scenario remains unknown to consciousness or inadequately understood by its victims, although it was registered as unconscious memory. … Yet the less the trauma is understood the more desperate and fervent the attempt to make sense in remembrance" (*Illuminations from the Past* 147, 115).

local self-reliance … the radicals favored centrally controlled 'spontaneity'" (Zweig 64-5). Such central control is reflected in the play in the political authority's collectivization of production resources, means, and distribution, which negates peasants' spontaneous pursuit of self-interest. Countering the state's monopoly, peasants' stubborn efforts to establish private spaces in this play testify to the description of the petit-peasantry class as "a pan of loose sand"—a major attribute used in China's modernist discourse to define Chinese peasants.

With the state's successive movements to make China leap forward, peasants' private space becomes smaller and smaller. The perplexed Uncle Doggie asks Wanjiang: "We've torn down our kitchens, cut down all the trees. Didn't you tell us we could only keep our wives and our smoking pipes, and everything else was to go to the collective?" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 117). Uncle Doggie's question points to two important historical movements—the communal dining hall and the "backyard" furnaces. The establishment of communal dining hall in People's Commune was "celebrated as the 'socialization of household work'" (Meisner 222). The widespread "backyard" furnaces, established during the Great Leap Forward movement to produce steel and iron, aimed to accelerate China's industrial production to surpass the United States and the Great Britain. Modernity's radical transformation of the world disrupts Uncle Doggie's accustomed way of thinking—a pattern that "occurs traumatically in the very experience of modernity" (Newmark 519). By forcibly taking away his substantial identity as the owner, laborer, and

beneficiary of his family land and private property, Mao's modernization project leaves him with an empty self, a shattered psyche, and a fragmented consciousness.

Uncle Doggie's insanity is deepened by his traumatic encounter with the historical reality unaccounted for by the social symbolic order. The lack of stimulation of self-interest leads to the desolation of communal land. Atomized by the avalanching modernization process, Uncle Doggie loses his previous sense of being a master in private land. He is shocked to see the ruin of his local farmland: "*[laughing foolishly and talking to himself]* Such good land! Stretch after stretch, that's Heaven's bounty to you poor mortals, and is this the way you treat it? Shame on you! Just look at the weeds growing wild! Bales of it, smothering the crop. You scoundrels, how can you face your peasant ancestors? When the day of reckoning comes, you'll answer for it" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 117). This public land is also presented on stage as lacking the dreamy, euphoric atmosphere that permeates landlord Qi's private land in Uncle Doggie's memory. What Uncle Doggie protests against is not only the waste of land, but also the peasant's loss of ancestral heritage and active agency in making history.

Uncle Doggie's criticism of the maltreatment of his horse "Blue Chrysanthemum," after it becomes communal property, reflects the work overload and improper management within the People's Commune. He protests to the Communal stockman: "You work her too hard, not enough feed, and you're not treating her right. How can she not lose weight? No one cares. I care! Here's your feed, all prepared. It's what I saved from my rations, roasted over a gentle fire"

(Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 123). However, his effort to take special care of his previous horse does not work, since all farming beasts eat from one big trough. While official discourse celebrates the collectivization of work and life as marking China's progress into a communist utopia, Uncle Doggie points out the impracticality of such collective measures: "This idea of eating from the same big pot, or the same big trough, it doesn't work—not for beasts and not for men. Skin and bones, that's how they all end up!" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 125). Uncle Doggie's reasoning comes from his living memory of selfish human nature, which makes the requirement for peasants to adopt the utopian communal ideology too idealistic to be fulfilled.

In this way, the public land of the People's Commune, instead of being a commonwealth of prosperity, peace, and harmony, is dramatized in the play as an alienating space wherein people suffer hunger, disappointment, and apathy. Furthermore, it does not elevate but corrupt people's morality. According to David Zweig, the result of Mao's agrarian radicalism "impoverished the collective sector and forced peasants to rely on marginal and surreptitious efforts to expand the private sector as a meager supplement to the low collective incomes" (65). This secret history is presented in the play through the peasants' surreptitiously turning the dominant public space into private space. In Scene Eight, Su Lianyu—the former barber but now the deputy leader of the production brigade—not only secretly distributes a sack of peas to Jinhua, Uncle Doggie's wife, but also encourages her to steal from the brigade harvest at night.

FENG JINHUA I've never stolen anything in my life. What if I get

caught?

SU LIANYU This ain't stealing! As the higher-ups say, this is at most "pilfering," a minor offence. If you get caught, just laugh it off. With what we are up against, everyone will turn a blind eye, except perhaps our leader Li Wanjiang, that pigheaded slave-driver! (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 119)

Su Lianyu's reasoning reveals how both villagers and cadres create this "hidden transcript" (Scott 66) of pursuing self-interest in the interstices of the public space of the communal land. This "hidden transcript" flourishes precisely because of the severe dominance of public space.[38] As Maurice Meisner describes, "peasants on communes were organized in battalions marching off to labor in the fields in step, with martial music blaring from loudspeakers" (226). Such militarization and disciplining of communal life are reflected in the play through the bell tolled by Wanjiang to call for communal members to work. As a traditional symbol of the emperors' supreme order, the bell is used here to signify the monopoly of Maoist discourse. Nevertheless, if during the day the communal land is public space, at night it is surreptitiously turned into private space. When Jinhua does get caught by Wanjiang when stealing corns from the brigade land, she is already the seventh stealer caught that night.

[38] As James C. Scott argues, "The practice of dominance, then, creates the hidden transcript. … If dominance is particularly severe, it is likely to produce a hidden transcript of corresponding richness" (66).

When Wanjiang catches Jinhua stealing corn, he speaks as a stern implementer of the social symbolic order and a loyal safeguard of the absolute public space, ordering her to return the stolen corn and confess her crime at a public meeting. As representative of the authoritative institution, he does not speak or act for himself but for the big transcendent symbolic order that speaks and acts through him. Participating in people's militia since age sixteen to fight against the Japanese and the landlords, Wanjiang was a benefactor to peasants like Uncle Doggie until the collectivization movement. Jinhua praises Wanjiang as a morally upright and altruist cadre: "Brother Wanjiang is a decent person. Always fair, never scheming for himself, never selfish where money is involved. If you leaders were all like him, there'd be hope for us" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 118). Jinhua's positive evaluation of Wanjiang presents him as an ideal socialist cadre without selfish individualism and devoted to the welfare of the collective. Since "To Chinese peasants, the state and cadres were one and the same" (A. Liu 50), Wanjiang's moral incorruptibility illustrates that it is the state's utopianism that causes it to be blind to the actual needs of the peasants.

Wanjiang himself is a victim of such utopianism. His strict adherence to the social symbolic order makes his personal life a total shamble. Lianyu disagrees with Jinhua's commendation of Wanjiang:

> SU LIANYU Like Him? Making a virtue of suffering? And suffering more than everyone else? Pulling a long donkey face whenever he meets any of the brigade members? And look at

> the way he lives, his hut! All that he has—the roof, the mattress, even the curtain that serves as the door—are nothing but straw! Call that a home? He's well over thirty now, but still without a wife, and after a day of back-breaking labour, he has to kneel with his arse pointing to heaven, to light the fire and cook himself a meal! He's a model all right, but a model of miseries. … As I said before, if all leaders behaved like him, everyone in the brigade would starve to death. (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 118-9)

The huge discrepancy between Wanjiang's honorable public role and miserable private life suggests that the state policy causes intense conflict between public interest and private interest. The dilemma that one can only be gained at the cost of the other puts people in an impossible situation.

To a certain extent, this conflict between the public and the private is a dilemma for all representatives of authority. As an embodiment of patriarchal authority, Wanjiang's identification with the "'dead letter' of the symbolic mandate" means that he must in a way "die alive" (Zizek 259) as an individual human being, not fully himself, without a personal life.[39] According to Slavoj Zizek, "This would be how the father pays the price for his authority, precisely by this castration as the gap between his empirical existence and his symbolic place" (84). Viewed in this

[39] According to Slavoj Zizek, "*if the real father is to exert paternal symbolic authority, he must in a way die alive* – it is his identification with the 'dead letter' of the symbolic mandate that bestows authority on his person" (259).

light, the way to fill in this gap between his "empirical existence" as a human being and his "symbolic place" as an officer of public policy would be to restore his phallic activity. This is just what Jinhua does by luring him out of his stern symbolic role to develop a romance with her. The irony that Wanjiang betrays his selfless persona right in the public space of the brigade land points to the impossibility of a communist cause based on the denial of self-interest. After having a private family with Jinhua, Wanjiang also loses his previous impartiality in implementing the state policy. He later makes a special allowance for the insane Uncle Doggie to cultivate private land on Windy Slope beyond the boundary of the village.

That marginal private land functions as a site of connection to the past that restores and asserts the traditional peasant's living memory. In that peaceful and idiosyncratic hermit world, nature, land, crops, animals, gods, and ghosts all form a harmonious whole, communicating and interacting with each other:

> UNCLE DOGGIE The god from the underworld told me I shouldn't eat up all the oil in this jug, so I didn't. I fed the oil by the spoonful to each and every root of corn. All living things are greedy, take it from me. With the oil, the young corn started stretching their muscles. I could hear them at night, competing with each other in growing tall. Crack! Crack! Look at them now, the corncobs opening up like trumpets, the tassels peeping out. … But there was a time when it looked like there would be a serious drought. Never mind. I prayed to the gods.

> Sure enough, the clouds came running over, the rain came down, not a downpour, but a gentle drizzle, every drop sucked into the earth. That's why the stalks are so tough. You know what? I didn't use up the half jugful of oil on the corn. No one can blame me for being wasteful. But the rats got to it, and finished it all! They'll answer for it to the god of the underworld. (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 131)

Uncle Doggie's narration of his exhilarated experience in that heavenly world is accompanied by the idyllic space constructed on stage: a thatched shed, waving cornstalks, floating clouds, faraway mountains, chirping cicadas, and orange light—all these create a natural world without ideological or political color.

Here, Uncle Doggie's close connection with earth, underworld, nature, agriculture, emotion, and instinct—qualities believed to be the *yin* aspect of Daoist cosmology—forms a sharp contrast with the state's pursuit of industrialization, modernization, progress, intellect, rationality, and uniformity—qualities believed to be the *yang* aspect of Daoist cosmology.[40] As Chung-Ying Cheng argues, "*Yin* is

[40] Daoism is China's most ancient indigenous philosophic-religious tradition that has developed and transformed for over two millennia. Dao means "way" or "path," "the energizing process that permeates and animates all of reality to move in its ongoing process" (Littlejohn 1). Dao is conceived "as operating through the interaction of *yin* and *yang*, the one negative, passive, female; the other positive, active, male" (Blofeld 4). As "the spiritual tradition at the root of Chinese civilization" (Ibid.), many Daoist beliefs have become part of folk religion. Some of Uncle Doggie's religious beliefs, such as cyclical change, god of prosperity, and god of earth, are Daoist concepts. Nevertheless, as John Blofeld points out, "Traditionally, most Chinese have been simultaneously Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist and followers

always the phase of difference, and *yang* always the phase of identity in the process of change (*yin*)" (177). Seen in this light, Uncle Doggie's close connection with *yin* determines that he will always deviate from the unified *yang* order stipulated by the state. Just as he challenged landlord Qi's authority before the CCP liberation, now he becomes a nonconformist to the homogeneous order of the Maoist state. Although Daoist philosophy upholds perfect balance between *yin* and *yang* in producing harmony, in social reality, "*yang* generally appears to be superior to *yin*" (Fowler 55). The Chinese ancient text, *Ch'eng/Cheng,* refers to politically insignificant states as *yin* and politically important states as *yang* (Graham 27-8). Thus, modern China took many measures to strengthen its *yang* qualities in order to become a politically strong nation-state, at the cost of weakening its *yin* qualities. As dramatized in this play, it is exactly this national historical project that causes trauma to traditional peasants like Uncle Doggie.

Uncle Doggie's obsession with *yin* (the feminine quality) not only alienates him from the social symbolic order that emphasizes *yang* (the masculine quality), but also weakens his patriarchal authority within the family. Failing to embody "a transcendent symbolic agency" (Zizek 286) in socialist society,[41] Uncle Doggie loses his authority not only over his son but also over his wife. His reaction to her after he loses private land and horse—which means castration to him—tells again that deep

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of the ancient folk religion that never achieved a name of its own" (90). Uncle Doggie's language and behavior manifest the influence of various religions.

in his heart, he still sees his wife as an appendage to family property, despite the CCP's women's liberation movement. He remembers in great detail everything related to land and farming, but could not recognize his wife at all, nor is able to have sex with her. Instead, he imagines that Jinhua must have been attracted to the rural fair—the accumulating place of material wealth—or to "pray at the temple" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 125). His loss of masculinity epitomizes the total collapse of his master status in the human world.

Uncle Doggie's lifetime worship of the supernatural world—"the god of prosperity," "the gods in heaven," "the god of the underworld," and "the gods of wealth" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 113, 126, 133)—is illegitimated as feudalistic superstition in both Mao Zedong era and Deng Xiaoping era. As Jeaneane and Merv Fowler discuss, a common theme of Chinese popular religion "is the acceptance of the supernatural world that is beyond ordinary existence yet inextricably involved with it. The reciprocal needs of deities and ancestors on the one hand, and the basic needs of the living on the other, lie at the root of all Chinese popular religion. If the deities, ancestors, ghosts do not get their correct attention they can wreak havoc" (225). Viewed in this light, the state's enforcement of modern scientific rationality and abolishment of traditional religious practices interrupt this reciprocal spiritual exchange between humans and nature, past and present, dead and living. Uncle Doggie's strong belief in gods and spirits of the supernatural world from his hermit-

[41] According to Zizek, "a real father exerts authority only insofar as he posits himself as the embodiment of a transcendent symbolic agency, insofar as he accepts that it is not himself, but the big Other who speaks through him, in his words" (286).

like reclusion, while carrying the living memory of folk society, counteracts the homogeneous political order of the public sphere.

Jinhua's divorce of him is also a direct result of the Maoist state's modernization of the domestic sphere. Traditionally Chinese women had no right to divorce, but the CCP stipulated the freedom of marriage and divorce in its marriage laws—making it possible for Jinhua to take the initiative to pursue the man she admires and divorce the man who cannot function as a husband. Jinhua married Uncle Doggie in secret, immediately after their first date, due to the Confucian ethics' stipulation against widows remarrying.[42] By contrast, Jinhua's divorce of Uncle Doggie is approved by Commune authorities, and her wedding with Li is held openly, attended by other villagers. Jinhua even interferes with Li's faithful implementation of unreasonable state policies, urging Wanjiang not to "hang on to that miserable official hat," to "[d]rop it once and for all, and your conscience will be clear!" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 135). Through Jinhua's acquisition of self-confidence, strength, and masculinity, the play dramatizes the transformation of traditional gender roles brought about by the nation's modernization movement.

[42] As dramatized in the play, Uncle Doggie and matchmaker Su Lianyu have to go to "snatch her" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 103) from an area not liberated by the CCP yet, because the Confucian norms prescribe a widow "to remain faithful to her dead husband, his family and ancestors for life" (Johnson 14). As Su Lianyu tells Uncle Doggie: "It's still enemy held territory over there, and they don't go in for that 'Women's Liberation' business. Over there, if a widow wants to remarry, she's not respectable and therefore open game for any bachelor who can snatch her. Brides have even been kidnapped on their way to their weddings" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 103).

During the New Era, the household responsibility system recognizes the right, interest, creativity, and self-determination of the individual. Social space is no longer dominated by homogeneous monopoly, but disintegrates into democratic heterotopias. Coming back from a visit to the city, Qi Xiaomeng—Uncle Doggie's daughter-in-law—is impressed by urban people's "scanty clothes" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 141) and intimate behavior in public space. Dahu defines that open life style as "progress" and asks her to imitate the urban people rather than appear "feudal" (Ibid.). Here, historical progress again leads to the abolishment of the barrier between the public and the private—which become more integrated and congruent, not in intense conflict as during the Maoist era.

The pursuit of diverse self-interests leads to the loss of community unity. Wanjiang expresses his worries about the class differentiation, communal split, moral degradation, and damaged order during the New Era: "Now there is no bell toll, no communal meeting. In evenings before, how lively and warm was our communal headquarter! But now, the headquarter is empty and desolate. It makes my heart cold!"[43] Wanjiang's nostalgia for the close bondage of communal life results from modern history's breaking of the individual's emotional attachment to the community. As Wang argues, "As symptoms of real history, nostalgia also expressed an urgent desire for the intimacy of social relations when the individual was left on his or her fragile self, without trustworthy communal connections and support" (*Illuminations from the Past,* 120). The rapid commercialization of social

relationships leaves everyone reliant on themselves, without ensured safety and support. Chen Dahu's ambition to compete with other township enterprises reflects the intensified competition brought by business activities, which will deepen alienation among the community.

The political dominance and ideological control of the Maoist era also become things of the past. Wanjiang complains about the pathetic loss of his leadership: "As things stand now, nobody can tell anybody what to do anymore. The couple of hundred people in this village, everyone of them is a genius; each is into private enterprise. I'm the only idiot" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 146). As a carrier of the outmoded communist ideals, Li becomes awkward and ridiculous in the eyes of the young generation, as proved by the ditty composed by the kids in the village: "Uncle Wanjiang sits on a stool, he loves to be poor, says the fool. Give him an ingot made of gold, he'd rather starve than have it sold" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 140). This ditty points to the sharp difference between the restriction on the pursuit of money during the Mao era and the adoration of money during the New Era. Only those who are "open to new ideas" will "never lose out" (Ibid.)—like Lianyu, who is always quick to follow the frequently shifting historical trends.

As another victim of the progressive modern history, Li is shocked by history's abrupt change: "What a world! Things stay the same for decades, and then, over night, all is changed. You wake up one morning and you don't know where you

[43] These sentences were added in the play's premier production, not written in the published play-script.

are. It's weird" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 136). This abrupt change is a product of the nation's pursuit of accelerated progress. Wanjiang is also confused by history's regression and repetition: he not only has to return the horse and land to Uncle Doggie, what he has fought against throughout his life has suddenly regained legitimacy. This irony is described by Marx as: "all of a sudden, the amazed revolutionaries perceive that they were vanishing mediators whose 'historical role' was to prepare the terrain for the old masters to take over in new guises" (Zizek 269-70). This is exactly what Wanjiang encounters after forty-four years of devotion to the communist revolution: landlord Qi, if alive now, would be treated as an equal; capitalist practices and ideologies all have become fashions of the day; the Japanese return with commodities and investment capital and are welcomed by the state. These historical reversals effectively make his lifetime revolutionary career amount to nothing. Wanjiang's resignation as village leader testifies to the way modern history ruptures the present from its immediate past.

With self interest restored, even glorified, the traditional cultural memory of building up a family fortune is revived. Dahu says to his wife Xiaomeng the same idioms Uncle Doggie said to Jinhua thirty years ago: "My job is to earn the money, and you are the box I keep it in. My safe box!" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 95).[44] Dramatizing how these two generations are guided by the same pursuits, despite sharp differences, the play presents the amazing persistence of living memory, which

[44] In the marriage proposal in Scene Five, Uncle Doggie says to Jinhua: "In a family, the man should be the plough and the woman the money box" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 104).

"continued to provide a sense of continuity, sympathy, and identity with the past" (Hutton 8). After Mao's thirty-year campaign to establish the brand-new socialist ideology, the living memory of accumulating family fortune reconnects the New Era with China's long past.

Nevertheless, father and son build up family fortune through totally different means. Their conflict over the use of space registers a dramatic change in the countryside during the New Era. After getting his land and horse back, Uncle Doggie is invigorated to fulfill his old dream of becoming a landlord—"I'll own all the land there is around here" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 139). He plans to transmit his farming skill to his descendents: "I still have my son and grandson! I'll teach them how to plough, till, hoe, loosen the soil, sieve, winnow, and gather it all in. Only when you have mastered all that can you call yourself a man of the soil. Yes, I'll teach them myself all the tricks of the trade. Why, even with animals, you have to train them before they can be harnessed" (Ibid.). From this we can see that Uncle Doggie's dream is still tied to cultivating the earth with manual labor. Planning to build a family courtyard exactly like landlord Qi's, he asks his daughter in-law, Qi Xiaomeng, to remember her family's "courtyard in the old days" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 142). She recollects: "Inside the arch there was a screen wall, and as you went further in, on one side there were lilac trees, and on the other side the vats for the lotus. ... In front of you would be the main hall, and on the sides were the rooms" (Ibid.). The layout of this courtyard epitomizes the idyllic, ordered, and enclosed life-style led and transmitted through generations of Chinese peasants by living memory.

Contrary to Uncle Doggie's conception of limited space, Chen Dahu's vision of space is limitless, broadened and temporalized by the accelerated progress of modernity:

> CHEN DAHU *[with infinite patience]* Dad, look around you, what an ideal place we have! A highway in front, and the rock slope right behind. Look at the slope, it's pure white marble. A treasure trove. In foreign countries, when they build those huge buildings, they need this stuff. They want every bit we can produce. It's an easy job, we'll just quarry and cut it to size, and, see, the rock becomes hard cash! We can't just stare at the old arch and go on scraping for a living out of the earth. (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 144)

Chen Dahu's vision of life is to pursue speed, openness, efficiency, and profit. Industry and trade further transcend the spatial barrier, going beyond the boundary of family, countryside, and nation. The traditional peasant's close bond with the agricultural land is broken by the capitalist mode of industrial production, with the hardness of stone and the efficiency of machines replacing the softness of earth and the slowness of manual labor. David Harvey describes the capitalist mode of production as being "characterized by speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us" (240). This "time-space compression" (Ibid.) is dramatized in the play through

modernity's rapid invasion and transformation of agricultural space and the subsequent collapse of the traditional rural world.

From the perspective of Uncle Doggie, by forgetting that "Gold comes from the land" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 144), peasants risk losing not only their sustenance but their social identity as well. As Lin Qingxin points out, "It is in the tyranny of time that the moderns suffer from the loss of cultural identity caused by the destruction of premodern historical conditions" (74). Modernity's destruction of primitive agricultural society totally overthrows the traditional social hierarchy that prioritizes peasants over craftsmen and merchants. Uncle Doggie's farming skill loses its value in an age dominated by industry and commerce. By working in the reception office of his son's factory and receiving double pay and bonuses, he could enjoy a comfortable life of wealth and leisure, but he would lose the esteem enjoyed by an old patriarch in traditional rural society. By slapping his son and calling him a traitor, Uncle Doggie desperately tries to stop the changes brought about through progressive modern history.

C. Uncle Doggie and Landlord Qi: Blurring Boundaries

Uncle Doggie's dilemma of being both beneficiary and victim of China's modernization project is dramatized through his complex relationship with landlord Qi—the most prominent landlord in the neighborhood. Since landlord Qi is a power-holder in China's traditional agricultural society, replacing Qi becomes Uncle Doggie's biggest dream in life. Identifying with landlord Qi as his ideal other, who fills his void self, embodies his desire, and provides his life with meaning and

purpose, Uncle Doggie admires and envies Qi throughout his life. At the same time, though, landlord Qi is Uncle Doggie's lifelong enemy, whom he hates, competes with, and repels all the time. Their mutually frustrating and supportive relationship can be explained by the Lacanian logic of "negation of negation" (Zizek 156).[45] Uncle Doggie's ego "emerges in the process of imaginary identification with its mirror double who is at the same time its rival, its potential paranoid persecutor" (Ibid.). Although the wealth, power, and hostility of landlord Qi frustrate Uncle Doggie's desire to replace him, this frustration is at the same time constitutive and supportive of his ego. As he imagines his life in the future: "When the time comes you are going to be Mr. Chen, Esquire! Just like Qi Yongnian. Look at him, all year round dressed in his silk gown and brocade jacket, clean shoes and socks, never lifting a finger to do any work, always riding a donkey when he goes out and feasting on salted turnips dipped in sesame oil every damned day" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 98). Idealizing landlord Qi's life as comfortable and genteel, Uncle Doggie has a goal to strive for and a model to follow.

Striving to imitate landlord Qi step by step, Uncle Doggie tells his wife Jinhua that he is not content to be a humble farm-hand but is ambitious to acquire more land and hire farm-hands: "Why not? Why should I always be the hired one?"

[45] Zizek thus summarizes Lacanian logic of "negation of negation": "insofar as the ego emerges in the process of imaginary identification with its mirror double who is at the same time its rival, its potential paranoid persecutor, the frustration on the part of the mirror double is constitutive of the ego. … What first appears as an external hindrance frustrating the ego's striving for satisfaction is thereupon experienced as the ultimate support of its being" (156).

(Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 105). His diligence and farming skill make it possible for him to replace Qi, a possibility produced by "the lack in the Other" (Zizek 5)—the fact that the other also lacks being and cannot achieve full identity by himself. As Zizek points out, "It is in this hole within the substantial Other that the subject must recognize its place: the subject is interior to the substantial Other insofar as it is identified with an obstruction in the Other, with the impossibility of achieving its identity by means of self-closure" (51). Even within the feudal system, landlord Qi cannot achieve his identity fully by himself. Instead, he must depend upon poor peasants like Uncle Doggie to till his land. Uncle Doggie brags about landlord Qi's reliance on his labor in order to demonstrate his importance—just as in Hegel's analysis, the slave is more independent and free than the master instead of vice versa.[46] Uncle Doggie's actual strength over landlord Qi becomes clear during the civil war, when landlord Qi runs away to preserve his life, leaving a lack—a huge amount of ripe crops uncared for in the field—for Uncle Doggie to fill. By harvesting landlord Qi's three acres of sesame, Uncle Doggie temporarily "becomes" the ideal other—another voluntary memory that Uncle Doggie is proud to tell.[47]

This lack is created by the civil war between the KMT and the CCP from

[46] See Zhou Xiaoyi's introduction of Hegel's analysis of the dialectical relationship between master and slave (20-1).

[47] According to Benjamin, voluntary memory "consists in the activity of a managerial ego that selectively absorbs external stimuli under the guidance of the intellect." What is opposite to voluntary memory is involuntary memory, which "names the spontaneous upsurge of emotionally charged memories of past events that elude deliberate conscious recall" (Wang, *Illuminations from the Past* 109).

1946-1949. Thus, Uncle Doggie's personal struggle with landlord Qi is closely related with the historical struggle between what Mao described as "the political representative of the big bourgeoisie, big landlords, bankers and *compradores*" (KMT) and the representative of "the industrial proletariat and peasantry" (CCP) (Knight 171). With its victory over the KMT, the CCP government legitimates Uncle Doggie's appropriation of landlord Qi's sesame and allocates Qi's arch to him at his request. Since the arch is not a space to live in but a grand gate that opens to Qi's big family yard, it is only a symbolic signifier of Qi's previous master status. The reason for Uncle Doggie to ask for Qi's arch, rather than his house, comes from his desire to be recognized within the realm most symbolically associated with Qi, which also has occupied "his own field of vision" (Zizek 176). Due to the reason that he was tied to the arch once and severely beaten by Qi, the arch commemorates his miserable life in feudal society and constantly reminds him to revenge. In Scene Three, the old Uncle Doggie remembers his traumatic experience of being physically abused by landlord Qi many years ago:

> I was hired to work on your land. You never gave me any rest. You never gave the poor beast any rest either, and it became so tortured with thirst it threw itself into the well! For that, you hoisted me up on the Qi family arch and had me whipped with ropes, ropes soaked in water. My skin and flesh healed and grew again. But I couldn't get over the way you ruined my brand new jacket, of handwoven cloth,

> fresh from the loom. My beating paid for the mule, but you still owe me my jacket! Pay me back! (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 99-100)

When Uncle Doggie narrates this memory with a sense of comic humor, landlord Qi, decently dressed and with a whip in hand, enters the stage to pantomime the movement of whipping ferociously. His vicious look and brutal behavior resemble the stereotypical image of landlords as fierce exploiters and cruel oppressors in literary and artistic works of the Maoist era. This voluntary memory conforms to the historical understanding dictated by Mao's ideological decree: "recalling bitterness of the past to think of the sweetness of the present" [*yiku sitian*]—a ritualistic practice that justifies the new society's replacement of the old society and legitimates the establishment of a new social hierarchy. The arch is also physically repaired to signify the coming of a bright new age: "The stage is fully lit, even a little dazzling. The grey arch has been repaired and looks brand new" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 106). This renovated arch registers Uncle Doggie's transformation from a slave to a master, achieved through the CCP's effort to bridge the gap between Imaginary—landlord Qi—and Real—Uncle Doggie's narcissistic desire to gain social esteem.

Uncle Doggie celebrates the long-sought revenge achieved by this historical reversal of power:

> UNCLE DOGGIE … *[Looking up at the arch and talking to himself]* Ha! The lights in the Qis' house have been snuffed out, the Qis are finished! What an arch, such fine workmanship, the

> pride of the community for miles around—it now bears the name of Chen! I walk past it several times a day and I feel so pleased even if I'm hungry! Now, you Qis—suppose one of these days I should hoist one of you up on this arch and let you swing a bit? Ha! Uncle Doggie has the power to do that? Oh yeah! Who gave me the power? Our government! (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 107-8)

Uncle Doggie's happiness shows how progressive national history's radical transformation of society at this stage fulfills the Chinese peasant's fundamental desire for liberation and pursuit of self-interest. Ban Wang explains the "strong, passionate, and authentic" love for love-objects as deriving "from a tenacious emotional source in unconscious libidinal drives. Its power comes from the love of one's self, which extends with the same force and intensity to significant other persons and grand objects in one's cultural environment" (*The Sublime Figure of History* 203). Seen in this light, Uncle Doggie's love for the arch comes from his narcissistic love of himself, with the arch mirroring his ideal self. That is the reason why he maintains blind, obsessive love for the arch throughout the play, no matter how much the arch becomes dilapidated and outdated when history progresses forward.

Although Uncle Doggie outspokenly celebrates his replacement of landlord Qi, his claim that "I feel so pleased even if I'm hungry" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 108) betrays the problem with this power reversal. The arch originally was a facade of

Qi's big family yard, but since Qi's houses were distributed to different peasants, who demolished them to build houses elsewhere, the yard does not exist any more. Thus, the arch has lost its concrete function and remains only an empty signifier. In Joseph Roach's words, although Uncle Doggie "fills by means of surrogation a vacancy created by the absence of an original" (36), the signifier and the signified do not correspond in this case. The true meaning of the arch as a signifier of family wealth is now absent, revealing the distance between the thing and its symbolic function, "the distinction between the object within the symbolic order and that empty place for which it stands in" (Zizek 362). This distinction becomes more obvious in Qi's personal seal, which Uncle Doggie fails to get even after Qi's death.

The first time Uncle Doggie gets a glimpse of Qi's personal seal is when he buys "The Great Triangle" from barber Lianyu—a piece of land that "used to belong to the Qi family" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 109) but was allocated to Su during the Land Reform. Ironically, since the deposed Qi is "the only one who can read and write" (Ibid.) in the village, Su has to invite him to be a scribe to prepare the document of sale, justifying to Uncle Doggie that "we're using his hands, so to speak. It's time he did us some service" (Ibid.). When everyone has to sign the statement, only Qi has a personal seal to print on the paper, but Uncle Doggie and Su Lianyu could only put their thumb prints. Although it is a triumph for Uncle Doggie to buy land that originally belonged to Qi, he perceives some fundamental difference between them, with the seal as a lingering reminder of Qi's superiority.

Since Uncle Doggie cannot read what is written on the seal, the seal becomes even more attractive to him. In Lacanian terms, the seal is an *objet petit a*: "Lacan baptized this paradoxical uncanny object that stands for what in the perceived positive, empirical object necessarily eludes my gaze and as such serves as the driving force of my desiring it, *objet petit a*, the object-cause of desire" (Zizek 291). Because the seal is beyond his understanding, he becomes "fascinated" and "disconsolate" with it (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 111). Asking Qi to sell the seal to him, Uncle Doggie offers to rub off Qi's name to engrave his own name there, justifying his request by saying that "You have no use for them anymore" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 112). But Qi refuses, arguing that it is his sole personal possession left: "[Y]ou people have denounced me and taken away all you were supposed to take. This is the only thing I still have. I'd like to keep it, maybe I'll need it some day" (Ibid.). Although Qi's argument betrays the surrogated double's desire to reverse the surrogation and return to power, Uncle Doggie's failure to aquire the seal signifies the irremediable gap between reality and the ideal symbolic, the inevitable failure of the surrogator to fill the symbolic void left by the surrogated. Even after Qi's death, his ghost fights with Uncle Doggie over the seal and, thus, over who masters the social symbolic order. Qi's personal seal, as an eternal signifier of Qi, is one of the dead remains of the past that refuse to go along with history's progression.

The deposed landlord Qi in the scene of land sale between Uncle Doggie and Lianyu physically manifests the way that history moves forward at the cost of sacrificing certain groups of people. Forming a sharp contrast with his previous

dignity and ferocity, Qi is quite downcast and humble in this scene. Lowering his head, speaking politely and moving cautiously, he is ready to serve and plead for benevolence. Jinhua comments, "How people change with the change of times! Remember the airs he used to put on? And look at him now, a dried-up shrimp! Give him a break, he's really down and out" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 112). Qi's dramatic downfall is a result of the class struggle in the Mao era. Believing "the existence of classes and class struggle to be a fundamental and omnipresent feature of all human societies except the most 'primitive'" (Knight 176), Mao considered class struggle as one of the social conflicts that pushed history forward.[48] In a speech delivered on August 14, 1949, just before the establishment of the PRC, Mao further equalized class struggle with history: "Class struggle—some classes win and some classes are eliminated—this is history. This is civil history over thousands of years. Interpreting history from this view is historical materialism, from the opposite view is historical idealism" (*The Selected Works* 1491). Guided by this view, the Mao era was full of escalated class struggle. After the Land Reform, the landlord class was condemned as a parasitic class and eliminated after ruling over China for more than two millennia.

This orthodox view of class struggle was challenged by people like Liang Shuming, a famous Confucian scholar of the twentieth-century. As early as 1949,

[48] In "On Conflicts," an article published in 1942, Mao writes: "social change mainly comes from the development of conflicts within the society, the conflicts between production force and production relationship, between classes, between the new and the old. The development of these conflicts pushes society forward and pushes the super-session of old society by new society" (*The Selected Works* 290).

Liang argued that, different from European feudal society, class did not exist in traditional Chinese society because a large percentage of people were engaged in independent production. Furthermore, land and capital were dispersed, frequently flowing and shifting to different people, never monopolized by any single group. Political opportunity was also open to the common people through the Imperial Examination (Liang 159). Liang's argument about traditional China's lack of social classes was criticized by Mao but is verified by this play's dramatization of the artificiality of class designation. Uncle Doggie and landlord Qi's quarrel in Scene Three reveals that originally the Qi family were as poor as Doggie's family. Qi's father became a landlord only because he accidentally mistook "a bag of coriander seeds for the usual wheat husks" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 99) when plastering roof-tops with mud. When summer came, a big flood drowned every plant, but two-foot high corianders sprouted out on the roof of Qi's house. Selling corianders to big restaurants at an incredibly high price, Qi's family got rich and bought fifty acres of land. Aspiring for the same fortune, the next year Uncle Doggie's father also mixed various seeds with wheat husks to plaster the roof-top, hoping that the same miracle would happen to him too. Nevertheless, there was no single drop of rain for forty-nine days no matter how the family "made offerings to the god of fortune" (Ibid.). Qi family's accidental fortune and Doggie family's accidental misfortune all point to the randomness and contingency of historical events, instead of the certainty and determinacy of historical route and class definition in the social symbolic order.

Landlord Qi and Uncle Doggie's power reversal also exemplifies the instability of people's status under the manipulation of the mischievous force of history.

Zizek's argument can explain why there was intense class struggle in the reality of the Maoist era:

> "class struggle" designates the very antagonism that prevents the objective (social) reality from constituting itself as a self-enclosed whole. In other words, we might say that class struggle is merely the name for that underlying split between positively constituted ideological entities and the void from which they are enunciated … an internal limit that is structurally necessary to the realization of the social itself. (358)

Viewed in this light, the positive constitution of the peasantry as new masters of the unified socialist country depends upon subordinating and expelling the previous master, the landlords, as the other and the enemy. This new social reality—a country for the masses—could not constitute itself without an antagonist class, a new power hierarchy that is necessary to structure the society. As Joseph Roach argues, in the process of historical surrogation, "the myth of coherence at the center requires a constantly visible yet constantly receding perimeter of difference" (39). China's coherent new society was produced by utilizing class status as "the threatening mark of difference" (Roach 279-80), to assert who was at the social center and who was at the social periphery. In this way, landlords were "distanced from the community in order to participate sacrificially in its reaffirmation" (Roach 280). By sacrificing a

privileged few, socialist society was affirmed as serving the oppressed and dispossessed masses and history as taking a big step forward along the predetermined historical route.

Furthermore, peasants and landlords were defined as two antagonistic social classes who have totally different natures. In "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and the Arts" delivered in 1942, the most important ideological guide for arts and literature of the Mao era, Mao declares that "In a class society there is only human nature that bears the stamp of a class but no human nature transcending classes" (137). By equalizing human nature with class nature, Mao actually denies that people of different socio-economic status can share any common aspiration, thought, or feeling. Mao's ideological guidance accounts for the stereotypical portrayal of landlords as vicious counterrevolutionary villains, and peasants as kind-hearted victims of feudalistic oppression or "high, big, complete" [*gao, da, quan*] revolutionary heroes transformed by the CCP ideology. They are mostly generalized, formulaic embodiments of class notion, without individuality or subjectivity. Lois Wheeler Snow, an American actress who visited China during the Cultural Revolution, explains the reason for such characterization: "From the proletarian point of view, villains … can only be portrayed from the class hatred of the workers, peasants and soldiers to relentlessly expose and criticize the ugly, cruel and insidious class nature of … reactionaries, in order to bring the brilliant images of the proletarian heroes into bold relief" (254). These dogmatic class images are also reflected in Uncle Doggie's voluntary memory of landlord Qi's cruel exploitation of

him before the CCP liberation. The frequent reinforcement and perpetuation of class struggle based on these stereotypes result in Qi's being beaten to death by revolutionary youths during the Cultural Revolution.

In this way, Qi is what "must be primordially repressed" "in order for social symbolic reality to establish itself" (Zizek 85). Here, Zizek's explanation of the Nazists' logic for eliminating the Jews can be used to analyze the necessity for socialist power-holders to eliminate the landlord class, although these two historical events were guided by different moral concerns. According to Zizek, the Nazists claimed that the Jews "threaten[ed] the fabric of society" and precipitated "the corrosion and corruption of the core values of the organic social bond," thus were "a disease debilitating the social body, and must be removed from it" (Porter 55). This anti-Semitic paranoia led to the suppression or occlusion of antagonism based on a fantastic image of society as an organic whole, which "implie[d] a form of political power, authority and, ultimately, order that [was] not split by antagonistic struggle, social upheaval, competition, or any kind of political unrest" (Ibid.). In the same way, the underlying reason for Mao's successive socialist revolutions to eliminate the landlord class and the bourgeoisie class was to ensure that the political power, authority, order, and harmony established by the proletarian masses would not be challenged by antagonistic classes. Zizek argues that the Jew in the Nazist discourse is a fantasy creation or scapegoat onto which the social antagonism—power struggle and competition for scarce resources—is displaced "as the source of social strife and unrest" (Porter 55-6). Zizek's argument parallels this play's dramatization of the

antagonism between the peasant class and the landlord class as coming from their struggle for material possession and ambition for superior status. The evils produced by "the real" of social antagonism based on the conflict of self-interest are blamed on the landlord class so that the fantasy of socialist harmony and coherence will be maintained. Uncle Doggie and landlord Qi's personal tragedies testify that both this fantasy image of the landlord as the arch enemy and the rationality of class struggle are "politically dangerous and morally problematic" (Porter 57).

If fantasy projects the landlord class as a scapegoat and removes them from social reality, it also allows them to return as ghosts. As Zizek argues, "Something cannot be symbolized, and the spectral apparition emerges to fill up the gap of what cannot be symbolized. So, again, the spectre conceals not social reality but what must be primordially repressed in order for social reality to emerge" (Ibid.). If the old feudal symbolic must be repressed in order for the new socialist reality to emerge, Qi's ghost constantly returns to disrupt the fiction of the constructed reality, showing that "reality itself is never fully constituted" (Zizek 86) and repression is never fully successful. As "the traumatic void against which the process of signification articulates," Qi's ghost is "the traumatic 'bone in the throat' that contaminates every identity of the symbolic, rendering it contingent and inconsistent" (Zizek 27, 350). While the new symbolic articulates itself through traumatically eliminating the landlord class, Qi's ghost's frequent haunting of the realm of the living contaminates every constructed identity of that symbolic. His laugh at the new disorder, at Uncle

Doggie's fictitious and transient master status, makes it hard for Uncle Doggie to claim his victory over Qi.

One of the reasons why Qi's ghost frequently roams in the realm of the living is the violent death he suffered and the lack of mourning paid to him. As Watson points out, "Untimely death, especially violent death, required extraordinary ritual attention. The 'restless ghosts' that violence produced had to be acknowledged so that they could be settled, or at least managed" (65). Seen in this light, Qi's ghost could not be settled or managed because he is not acknowledged. Uncle Doggie's seeing and talking with him, although hostile on the surface, pays acknowledgment, respect, and tribute to him. As the ghost complains to Uncle Doggie: "I never spent money on food or pleasure, I saved and scraped to buy land. Never even enjoyed a whole cucumber, and now, at the end of it all, I've got no one to offer incense in remembrance of me. I can't stand that lonely feeling, so I came to you" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 128). Qi's description of his frugal, ascetic, and hard life, which is similar to Uncle Doggie's, counters the Maoist description of the landlord class as parasites indulging in luxury and carnal desire. This again presents landlord and peasant as sharing similar misgivings, aspirations, and feelings. Thus, landlord Qi only "acts as the personification of an irreal, fictitious agency" (Zizek 258) within the social symbolic order, a stand-in for the conceptual landlord as a product of the official discourse, not as his true self.

The social symbolic order of the Mao era also requires people to forget the feudal landlord class' exploitative ideology. As Zizek points out, "Ideology is always

a gesture of denouncing another position as being naive ideology" (64). Progressive modern history is marked by successive surrogation of ideologies based on later ideology's claimed superiority over the previous one. According to Joseph Roach, "the practices of memory … also entail a rigorous and highly specialized process of forgetting" (75). National discourse's practices of historical memory require the forgetting of feudal and petit-bourgeoisie ideologies. This "ongoing forgetfulness at the heart of China's official memory" is enforced through "technologies of amnesia" (Schwarcz 56, 57)—political criticism, ideological education, coercive measures, and class struggle. The threatening possibility of the surrogated masters' coming back to seek restoration makes it even more urgent to contain them by forgetting. As Milan Kundera states, "The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting" (3). Qi's omnipresence in Uncle Doggie's personal memory, against the state-sanctioned amnesia that erases him, is his struggle against progressive national history's negation of the previous ruling class.

The fantasy of Qi's ghost poses a challenge to the legitimate reality sanctioned by the social symbolic order. "If reality is defined as a bound set of perceptions signifiable in words and communicable in the signifying chain of the symbolic order," the fantastic is "predicted on the category of the 'real.' It stands in a 'negative' relation to the dominant cultural frame of reference that functions to construct and legitimate what is real" (Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History* 248, 234). If the dominant socialist discourse constructs and legitimates love for the collective as social reality, Qi's ghost signifies the "real" as human love for the self.

Uncle Doggie's persistent perception of Qi's ghost can be explained by Zizek's interpretation of the Lacanian Real: that "the more my (symbolic) reasoning tells me that X is not possible, the more its spectre haunts me" (258). Although each time Qi's ghost appears, Uncle Doggie rigorously tries to chase him away, calling him "you stinking landlord" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 94), his psychological dependence upon the memory of Qi symbolically locates the marginal at the center. This paradox parallels Zizek's argument that "the more they lose public power and become invisible, the stronger their phantom-like all-presence, their shadowy effective control" (269). Ghost's irresistible penetration into the living world is a major theme in classical Chinese theater, in which the dead frequently return as more powerful agents of wish-fulfillment and justice-upholding.[49]

As an unwanted other suppressed into the unconscious part of the collective consciousness, Qi's ghost breaks away from the control of Uncle Doggie's schizophrenic psyche. According to Michel Foucault, "madness is really a manifestation of the 'soul,' … the unconscious part of the human mind" (viii). Uncle Doggie's insanity displays his unconscious soul that comprehends the suppressed real. According to Freud, "Only the unconscious domain of the psyche … comprehends reality without distortions," whereas "consciousness is far too often

[49] Ghosts are dramatized in many traditional Chinese plays, such as *The Peony Pavilion* by Tang Xianzu and *Qiannu's Spirit Leaving the Body* by Zheng Guangzu in Yuan Dynasty, *The Injustice Done to Tou Ngo* by Guan Hanqing and *The Story of Red Plum* by Zhou Chaojun in Ming Dynasty, and *The Palace of Eternal Life* by Hong Sheng in Qing Dynasty, among others. During the Cultural Revolution, these "ghost plays" were criticized as superstitious feudalistic dregs that must be eliminated from socialist culture.

clouded by its illusions" (Hutton 63). If social consciousness is preoccupied with the illusion of a utopian future, Uncle Doggie's jokes, fantasies, crazy language, and compulsive behavior are "places of memory" that "provide channels into the unconscious," signal "the return of the repressed," and uncover the "real record of the past" (Hutton 65). All of these "places of memory" are revised reconstructions of the irresolvable tension between progressive national history and persistent living memory.

Uncle Doggie goes insane because his ego cannot compromise between the contradictory demands of his unconscious desire and the social symbolic order. According to Freud, when "repressed desires remain unrequited and continue to press the ego for expression," they "can impair, and in extreme cases, paralyze the ego's capacity to sort out the conflicting claims of psychical need" (Hutton 63). When his instinctive impulses and repressed desires break out of the control of his shattered ego, Uncle Doggie engages in unorthodox behavior and violates the taboo of social represssion. While other peasants only secretly transgress the social symbolic order, Uncle Doggie openly tills a private parcel of land beyond the village. When Wanjiang comes to cut his "capitalistic tail," Uncle Doggie strongly protests:

> UNCLE DOGGIE Stop it! You know what I'm thinking? Life today is worse than before the liberation!
>
> LI WANJIANG *[stunned]* What are you saying? How dare you!
>
> UNCLE DOGGIE In those days, when the landlord's militia got too

> tough, we could always run to the Communists. Who can I turn to now? (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 134)

Uncle Doggie's outspoken protest against the overwhelming demand of the current social symbolic order questions national historiography's myth of historical progress. While Mao's uniform order aims to push the nation forward, Uncle Doggie's imaginary identification with his landlord and his symbolic identity as a petit-peasant are negated.

Thus, in Zizek's terms, Uncle Doggie's insanity is the domain "where Imaginary identification, as well as the Symbolic identities attached to it, are all invalidated, so that the excluded Real (pure life drive) can emerge in all its force" (172). The "pure life drive," while unable to be released through direct means, emerges through his disheveled appearance, blank expression, crazy laughter, blasphemous language, indecent behavior, as well as his carnivalesque attitude that interprets the world from an unofficial, personal point of view. According to Bakhtin, carnival's most important quality is to break taboo, to use obscene language, comic gesture, and hilarious remarks to degrade the spiritual, idealistic, and abstract to the level of objects and body.[50] When people come to tear down the arch, claiming that it belongs to the "four olds"—the old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits that should be eliminated from socialist society—Uncle Doggie chases them off with abusive language. Since the phrase "four olds [*sijiu*]" in Chinese is homophonous with phrase "the fourth uncle [*sijiu*]," Uncle Doggie degrades the serious political

[50] See the introduction to Bakhtin's theory of carnivalism in Zhou Guangfan 11.

jargon "four olds" to the level of generic connection, which was subordinated to political ideology during the Cultural Revolution: "Fools are scared of bullies, bullies are scared of the desperate who don't give a damn about life, yours or theirs. So they wanted to pull down my arch. They said it was my 'fourth uncle.' I said I was your mother's brother. Because of my swearing, I did not become an uncle and my nephew also ran away" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 126).[51] Uncle Doggie's misinterpretation consciously debases the sublime official discourse into ridiculous nonsense. He also protects his private land on Windy Slope from being confiscated by reinterpreting the political slogan "Cutting off Capitalist Tails" in terms of the body: "Tails is it? Some real devil must have thought up that idea. All right, I'll show you—now my daughter-in-law, will you excuse us a moment and turn the other way? I'm going to let everybody see whether Uncle Doggie has a tail on his arse!" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 134). Since "capitalist tails" is an official metaphor that refers to people's "bad habits, corrupt ideology, and the like" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 132), Uncle Doggie's equalization of it with biological evolution profanes the progressive national history.

Although Uncle Doggie appears to be insane, he is still decent enough to ask his daughter-in-law to excuse him. This detail betrays the possibility that his insanity is only a strategy of self-care. Foucault argues, "The search for the self generates strategies for self-care in reply to the technologies of domination that shape so much

[51] This translation of mine is a little different from Ying Ruocheng's translation, in order to convey the homophonous effect in the published Chinese version of the play script.

of human behavior and aspiration" (Hutton 114). Insanity makes it possible for him to break out of the oppressive domination of the rational symbolic order, to recede completely into the isolated world of the self, and to delve up his repressed Real and live in the interstices of law. He thus describes himself: "I'm the hedgehog that never dies from a fall. … Because when you throw a hedgehog on to the ground, it rolls up and doesn't get hurt" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 133). Hedgehog's skill of self-protection teaches him to find privilege in his outcast status. His overflowing passion in tilling his private land, unrestrained behavior outside the civil rule, frank talk in uttering social criticism, and carefree revelry in enjoying the embrace of nature—all these function as psychological therapy to survive the effects of trauma. Deserted by the social symbolic order, he is also saved by this desertion.

There are other incidents in the play that imply Uncle Doggie is not really mad. Freud claims that the breakdown of psyche leads to the loss of language (Kaplan and Wang 4), but Uncle Doggie is a fluent speaker who utters lucid, albeit severe, criticism of the extreme-leftist policies of the Mao era. It is clear that playwright Jinyun intends to dramatize him as a spokesman of the historical "truth"—the "truth" banned as taboo in the Mao era but officially sanctioned during the New Era. Mao's attempt to achieve modernization in a morally idealistic way is presented as too idealistic to be rational. As transcribed by Andre Malraux, a French writer and statesman, Mao thus described his revolution: "Revolution is a drama of passion; we did not win the people over by appealing to reason, but by developing hope, trust and fraternity" (360). Mao's definition of his social revolution as a

passionate drama contradicts modernity's prioritization of science and rationality. In this way, Uncle Doggie's madness is meant to be symptomatic of the madness of the times.

By blurring the boundary between sanity and insanity, the play poses a question: "Who is mad?" Director Lin Zhaohua wants the audience to feel that "What is interesting and thoughtful is that every sentence a mad man says is truth" (Jinyun et al. 44). Characterizing fools and madmen as outspoken guardians of forbidden truth derives from the tradition of such works as *In Praise of Folly*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Quiet Flows the Don*, *The Diary of a Madman*, and *The Story of Ah Q*, among others. It also testifies to Pascal's argument that "Men are so necessarily mad, that not to be mad would amount to another form of madness" (qtd. in Foucault, ix). National history's rational homogenization of social order, by neglecting divergent individual desires, can be seen as another form of madness. In tracing the history of insanity, Foucault found that madmen were "once identified in the popular imagination with divine possession," but "were gradually transformed into social outcasts and were treated as a problem for their unreasonable behavior" (Hutton 106). The Enlightenment civilization of the eighteenth century, by adoring rationality, regarded "the crazed, the nonconformist, and the eccentric" as "unwanted burdens" and "privileged the social efficacy of conformist behavior, so dear to modern civilization, over the insight and creativity that sometimes comes with eccentric behavior" (Hutton 106, 107). Seen in the light of Foucault's genealogy of madness, Uncle Doggie's insanity is more a construction of modern discourse than a

pure mental disease. His stubborn refusal to conform to the uniform order of modern society makes him appear unreasonable. His insight into the problems of the modern social order comes precisely from his nonconformist position.

D. Brechtian Theater: Deepening Realism

Dramatizing Uncle Doggie as an eccentric character utilizes Brechtian theater's alienation method—a huge influence on Chinese theater during the 1980s. De-familiarizing Uncle Doggie from contemporary time creates a certain distance for the audience to judge and evaluate the character. Actor Lin Liankun goes beyond just performing Uncle Doggie's insanity.[52] Liankun explains his approach: "What I searched for was not to perform his madness, but the character's abnormal thinking logic and mental state" (4). This acting method aims to explore and externalize the psychological reasons for his insanity. Director Lin Zhaohua instructed actors to do this: "I did not expect actors to play characters purely through experiencing characters. If actors' performance could have an examining attitude that transcends characters, it would open up rational communication with the audience" (Jinyun et al. 44-5). In order for actors to acquire an examining attitude towards their roles, Zhaohua puts into practice the acting theory "the third medium," advocated by Gao

[52] Lin Liankun (1931-2009) was a famous actor of BPAT. Uncle Doggie in *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana* and waiter Chang Gui in *The World's Top Restaurant* were among his best performances.

Xingjian, the 2000 Nobel Prize winner.[53] According to Gao, "the third medium" refers to "the passage between the actor as a social being who is to act and the scripted role that she is to act, a passage whose dynamic constitutes the crux of the Chinese acting" (qtd. in Yan 82-3). Gao argues that "If theater acting focuses on this third medium as a process, fully opens it up, reveals it, shows it, feels it, and lays it bare" (qtd. in Yan 83), acting will be activated as a denaturalizing and defamiliarizing process that brings hidden reality to the surface.

Director Lin Zhaohua thus explains how to utilize this acting process: "We explored multiple layers in acting. During the process from actors to their roles, we discovered, there was a transcendent self that could examine how the actor became the role, just like a puppet-master who manipulated the puppet to perform the role" (qtd. in Lin K. 140). According to Zhaohua, this method develops the acting technique of "jumping in and jumping out" in *pingtan* performance (Tong 73)—a traditional Suzhou-dialect performing art in which one actor tells stories, sings ballads, and enacts multiple characters. In *pingtan* performance, "jumping in" refers to the process through which the actor transforms himself/herself into different characters, and "jumping out" refers to the process in which the actor shifts from character-enactment to perform as a narrator who tells stories or comments. Zhaohua believes that *pingtan* performers' technique of frequent transformation between different characters and neutral narrator can help the actor to maintain a critical

[53] Gao Xingjian's early plays, including *The Bus Stop*, *Absolute Signal*, and *Wild Man* were staged at Beijing People's Art Theater in the early 1980s and directed by Lin Zhaohua.

distance with his role so that the acting process becomes a field wherein the character is analyzed, the actor's critical attitude is conveyed, and the audience formulates their judgment.

Lin Zhaohua's direction for acting evokes Brecht's analysis of the alienation effect in Chinese theatrical acting: "The artist's object is to appear strange and even surprising to the audience. He achieves this by looking strangely at himself and his work," holding "himself remote from the character portrayed" (93). The actor "rejects complete conversion. He limits himself from the start to simply quoting the character played" (94). The purpose of alienation acting, according to Brecht, is "to underline the historical aspect of a specific social condition," to "help us to understand its causes and protest" (98). According to Min Tian, Brecht's critical analysis of Chinese acting mis-interpreted and displaced Chinese theatrical aesthetics to serve his own purpose.[54] Nevertheless, it was adopted by Zhaohua to truthfully

[54] According to Min Tian, Brecht creatively misinterprets and displaces classical Chinese theater in order to "valorize and legitimize Brecht's own theoretical desires, investments, and projections" (57). "Chinese acting in fact does not generate anything identical with, or even similar to, the Brechtian A-effect" (Tian 39). "In the Chinese theater the audience is not alienated from the stage but is invited into the kind of theatrical illusion primarily of poetic and emotional atmosphere and artistic realm (*yijing*) which is based, not on objective verisimilitude in physical form, but on subjective likeness in emotion and spirit (*shensi*). This kind of illusion works on the imagination and emotion of the spectator who relishes his aesthetic and empathetic pleasures and sympathies while enjoying the performance. It has nothing in common with the Brechtian A-effect" (Tian 41). Chinese theatrical acting's highly stylized and aestheticalized theatrical means convey characters' spiritual, emotional, and psychological truth more powerfully than illusionary realistic theater. Chinese theater represents the characters' different emotions which "are generally artistically modified, distilled, refined, and sublimated, or as Brecht observes, 'decorously expressed,' in performance" (Tian 45). "But in Chinese acting, the effect of beautification of gestures and movements, which appeals more to the senses than to

present the character's various emotions—an important convention of classical Chinese theater—and to convey the actors' critical judgment of the characters—a creation by Brecht. In this way, Chinese theater of the 1980s embraced both tradition and modernity.[55]

Actor Lin Liankun's success with this goal was noted by Lin Kehuan, a leading Chinese theater critic:

> You not only feel the creative passion of actor Lin Liankun, but also feel that there is "another self" existing in the actor himself, who soberly examines the actor immersing in intense creative activities. This multi-layered acting expresses not only Uncle Doggie's conceit and rapture, but also his foolishness and bitterness. Through its clear layers, the acting delivers confirmation and criticism, as well as

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the reason, is essentially emotional, perceptual, and aesthetic, devoid of the social gesture that is featured by the Brechtian A-effect. … [T]he Chinese actor identifies himself emotionally and spiritually with the character in varied degrees in his performance" (Tian 46). The ideal of Chinese performance art is the actor's complete conversion into the role and the spectator's equalization of the actor with the character. "It is precisely this aestheticized identification (not superficial but psychological and spiritual) of the performer with the character, not just the performance conventions, that the Chinese performers considered the highest achievement of their art" (Tian 53). "It is through the performer's identification that the spectator is drawn into the dramatic situation emotionally, spiritually, and aesthetically and identifies himself in varied degrees with the character" (Tian 53-4).

[55] As analyzed by Min Tian, the creative misinterpretation and displacement of classical Chinese theater by Western avant-garde theater artists like Brecht, Meyerhold, Artaud, and Grotowsky inspired Chinese theater artists of the 1980s to utilize Chinese traditional theatrical methods to create anti-illusionistic effect, although classical Chinese theater produces an aestheticized illusion of life on stage in a spiritual sense and invokes a more powerful empathy from the audience (177-99).

> sympathy and ridicule of Uncle Doggie. … These multiple layers in acting have been miraculously incorporated by Lin Liankun into a coherent, seamless whole with clearly perceived structures. (140-1)

Kehuan's comment points out that this multi-layered performance effectively presents the character's multiple sides and the actor's multiple attitudes to the character. Emphasizing the complexity of the character's personality and the underlying mechanism of the character's behavior corresponds to the complexity of history as represented in the play.

This multi-layered acting helps to present Uncle Doggie's insanity as a symptom of historical times, a register of social conflict, and a strategy of self-protection. Liankun's controlled performance makes Uncle Doggie's madness appear always purposeful to various degrees, a manufactured product instead of a spontaneous overflow of his passion. This serves to blur the boundary between sanity and insanity, to question who is mad after all. This blurring is effective in Scene Ten, when Uncle Doggie unexpectedly comes to the wedding between his ex-wife Jinhua and village leader Wanjiang. Unable to recognize Jinhua, Uncle Doggie has been assuming that Jinhua must have gone to the fair, not aware that Jinhua has divorced him. Nevertheless, when he unexpectedly sees Jinhua at her wedding, he suddenly stops for a moment, unable to move or speak. Since his posture and facial expression show he is profoundly shocked, the audience cannot help wondering whether he recognizes Jinhua or not. But when Jinhua kneels down to ask for his forgiveness, Uncle Doggie appears to regain self-control and is suddenly unable to recognize who

she is again. He changes his expression from shock into amusement, saying he is going to ask his wife Jinhua for greeting money for the bride. When he sadly exits the stage, in shaky steps, he mumbles, "*[trying to remember]* Went to the fair, didn't she? Or to pray at the temple? Well, a nun might marry a monk any day!" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 125).

Although his mind still seems blurred, his language and behavior betray the possibility that he is aware of what is going on. His ex-wife Jinhua lived exactly like a nun after he became too mad to have sex with her or even recognize her, while Wanjiang, a 38-year-old bachelor, lived exactly like a monk. His denial of mental deficiency—"they call me muddle-headed! It's all clear in my head" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 124)—sounds disturbingly true. As Antony Tatlow argues, "this capacity for visualizing contradictions and externalizing states of repression was the main reason Brecht found East Asian acting so suggestive" (75). Externalizing Uncle Doggie's complex, contradictory emotions and repressed feelings demonstrate the constructed nature of his madness, thus human vulnerability and helplessness in the vicissitudes of history.

Beyond alienation effect in acting, Brecht also borrowed from East Asian theater "a means of getting behind mimetic representational assumptions and revealing the invisible shaping force of social character and the social unconscious" (Tatlow 76). Presenting the invisible ghost of Qi visibly on stage reveals how Uncle Doggie's unconscious narcissistic desire conditions his conscious social behavior. Uncle Doggie's psychological structure and emotional conflicts are externalized on

stage right at the beginning of the play, set "one night in the 1980s" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 93). The play starts with Uncle Doggie in a schizophrenic mental state, quarreling with Qi's ghost who resides in the dark unconscious part of his mind. When curtain rises, we see the stage is shrouded in total darkness, but "the towering outline of an old grey brick arch can be seen" (Ibid.) in the background. The dilapidated arch, with some withered branches hanging on it, gives out a disastrous, gloomy, and ghastly feeling. From pitch darkness, the audience hears Uncle Doggie's mumbled unintelligible words and "the persistent sound of scratching. Then a match flashes, catching fire. In the flash which dies out immediately in the wind, UNCLE DOGGIE can be seen" (Ibid.). Flash reveals Uncle Doggie in his 70s, dressed in shabby clothes, with disheveled snowy hair and a desperate, agonized expression, "doddering, hoary, but seems like a beast at bay, watching, searching, and waiting for his chance" (Ibid.). Crouching on the ground and desperately trying to light a bunch of wood, Uncle Doggie is presented as residing in the realm of the Real, a primal animalist state at the command of his instinctive emotions.

Residing in the realm of the Real enables him to see his repressed unconscious in the form of Qi's ghost. When Uncle Doggie finally lights a bunch of firewood, illuminating his dark unconscious, Qi's ghost appears below the arch behind Uncle Doggie's back, accompanied by some ghastly music. Dressed in a long dark robe and speaking in an echoing high-pitched feminine voice, Qi further betrays his spectral quality through ghost-like laughter and light steps circling around Uncle Doggie. Qi blows Uncle Doggie's fire out several times, causing Uncle Doggie to

curse his lifelong bad luck, making their antagonistic relationship clear from the start. When they talk, they do not look at each other but speak directly to the audience, implying that the phantom is only an imaginary figure in Uncle Doggie's mind.

Qi's unexpected arrival can be explained in terms of Walter Benjamin's analysis of "involuntary memory," which "names the spontaneous upsurge of emotionally charged memories of past events that elude deliberate conscious recall" (Wang, *Illuminations from the Past* 109). Qi's ghost is Uncle Doggie's "involuntary memory," which has been suppressed into the unconscious part of his psyche but often spontaneously and formidably surges into Uncle Doggie's mind at the cue of mentioning the arch, not through conscious, deliberate recall. Throughout the play, this "involuntary memory" conflicts with Uncle Doggie's "voluntary memory," which "consists in the activity of a managerial ego that selectively absorbs external stimuli under the guidance of the intellect" (Ibid.). The increasing conflict and widening gap between what the phantom claims and what Uncle Doggie willingly acknowledges—between "involuntary memory" and "voluntary memory"—suggest that memory is a process of selective remembering and selective forgetting. The gap also indicates the "disintegration of historical time, a time out of joint between present and past" (Ibid.), coming from the historical tension between the nation's relentless modernization efforts and the neglected cultural memory that is unwilling to be repressed.

Appearing mysteriously and hellishly as an "involuntary memory," Qi's ghost claims that he comes because Uncle Doggie misses him. Phantom Qi's declaration

testifies to Freud's argument that "The unconscious contains secrets to our identity that we would do well to recover" (Hutton 61). Uncle Doggie's dependence upon landlord Qi to acquire an illusionary self-image is a secrect he himself consciously denies, as revealed by their quarrel right at the beginning of the play.

> UNCLE DOGGIE What are you laughing at?
>
> QI YONGNIAN You.
>
> UNCLE DOGGIE Why?
>
> QI YONGNIAN Because you never had it as good as I did.
>
> UNCLE DOGGIE Me? Never had it as good as you? *[With contempt]* Me? Never?
>
> QI YONGNIAN Well, Doggie, you never measured up. I lived behind that arch; I was known as the big shot with a big fat purse. When I died—not exactly under happy circumstances, it's true—I was still the big shot who owned fifty acres of land, so I can lie in peace. And you? You got the arch, but you'll burn it now. You know what that's called? You can't make a wolf out of a wolf's hide!
>
> UNCLE DOGGIE Get out of my sight, you stinking landlord!
>
> QI YONGNIAN We are in-laws, remember?
>
> UNCLE DOGGIE I never recognize the relationship, you foul my doorstep!

QI YONGNIAN Just look at the two of us, at loggerheads all our lives. Time to make peace. The young couple over there are planning for the good life. …

[The lights go up on CHEN DAHU, *in his late 30s, and* QI XIAOMENG, *in her early 30s, on the other side of the arch.]*

QI XIAOMENG That arch means the world to your dad. Do you dare touch it?

CHEN DAHU When a broken-down cart blocks the way, it has to be removed. (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 94)

While the quarrel between Uncle Doggie and Qi's ghost reveals the arch's central importance in their power struggle, it also shows that Uncle Doggie becomes himself only through stepping into a place other than the self. After losing his father, two wives, and his sanity due to his obsessive desire to get land, now he alienates himself from his son and daughter-in-law through stubborn preservation of the arch. As Barbara Freedman argues, "self-reference is procured only through an expulsion and repression of a part of our being" (53). Paradoxically, this denial of part of himself to become the other only ensures that he will never acquire a complete identity—proven by his final burning of the arch.

Furthermore, as Foucault argues, identity formation needs to be understood "as an historicized function of the social unconscious" (Tatlow 94). One needs to fulfill one's unconscious narcissistic desire by adapting to the transforming historical condition. Uncle Doggie's inability to reformulate his identity based on the nation's

industrialization and commercialization in the New Era not only leads to the disintegration of his identity, but also makes him an obstacle to historical progress. Zizek provides a key to this seemingly self-destructive response: "the negativity of the other which is preventing me from achieving my full identity with myself is just an externalization of my own auto-negativity, of my self-hindering" (275). Viewed in this light, his imagination of Qi's ghost as a source of negation is really an externalization of his own limitation—his inability to break away from the symbolic order of feudal society as represented by landlord Qi that is repressed into his unconscious.[56]

Uncle Doggie's intense psychological conflicts in this scene can be explained in light of Freud's theory of the structure of the human psyche:

> [Freud] characterized the psyche as an arena of perpetual conflict between instinctual impulses pressing for expression (id) and the no less insistent demands of conscience (superego) for their repression. Mediating the conflict is the self (ego), beleaguered by the task of determining the mix of acquiescence and constraint through which it defines personal identity. … In a spectrum of possibilities from the anarchic free rein of impulses to their total repression, the ego resolves these conflicts through a series of compromises. It is these

[56] As Eric Fromm argues, "the unconscious is not just the repository of repressed instinct, it also absorbs what is associated with the superego. … Such an unconscious is no longer merely the repository of repressed instinctual drives but also of repressed, because frustrated, hopes" (Tatlow 99).

> compromises that are the stuff of memory, a complex weave of fantasy and reality. (Hutton 63)

In *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana*, the impulsive desire of id is expressed through Qi's ghost and the demands of superego are voiced by Wanjiang and Dahu. When Qi's ghost wins the upper hand, Uncle Doggie's instinctive impulses are released anarchically and freely. Alternatively, when Wanjiang or Dahu has the upper hand, Uncle Doggie conscientiously represses his impulses. As in the above scene, at first the superego of Maoist era makes him repel Qi by calling him "you stinking landlord! … [Y]ou foul my doorstep!" Then he fights with his next generation who are preparing to tear down his arch the following day. Letting go of his instinctual desire to own it permanently, Uncle Doggie sets out to burn it down that night, shouting: "Oh, I'll feel so good, I'll be satisfied; I'll have settled the score … I'll …." Qi's ghost joins the acclamation: "Burn it! Burn it! Make some real fireworks! Burn it!" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 94).

Throughout his quarrel with Qi's ghost in the above scene, Uncle Doggie crawls on the ground, haggard and shattered. When the phantom ridicules him as a failure, Uncle Doggie collapses, overridden with heartbroken grief. At one point, Dahu and Xiaomeng appear in another part of the stage discussing plans to fool Uncle Doggie in order to dismantle the arch, while Uncle Doggie, unaware, falls asleep. Qi's ghost, however, is listening with glee. Qi then alerts Uncle Doggie: "Did you hear that? Sold!" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 94). Uncle Doggie wakes up suddenly, straightening his upper body to shout: "My family property! My ancestral career! I

cannot give it to another family!"[57] This staging technique of visually externalizing contradictory emotions and psychological structures through characters on stage and big body movements derives from both classical Chinese theater and Brechtian theater. As Tatlow argues, since "the emotions are themselves culturally and socially constructed," the exteriorization of the characters' psychological structure de-essentializes the characters, producing them as "the function of the forces that sweep through them. They become the battleground of the discourses rather than their producers" (214). Qi's ghost, Dahu, and Xiaomeng on stage de-essentialize Uncle Doggie's mind by displaying the battling discourses that produce his emotions. Thus, Uncle Doggie's psychology and behavior are presented as resulting not from individual ethical convictions but from cultural and historical interactions. This defamiliarization method provides insightful examination of the underlying mechanism of the character's reaction to the precise historical moment.

Presenting simultaneously onstage those historical forces that have participated in shaping Uncle Doggie's psyche also creates "a network of psychological and social relations" (Tatlow 213). Tatlow continues,

> theater has to externalize the subjective into the range of its relations. They are what is essential because they are essential in the construction of subjectivity. The theater must help us catch a glimpse of the totality or complexity of constructed relations that are always in

[57] This sentence was added in the play's premier performance, not in the published play script.

> process, as Brecht also tried to do, instead of constantly holding them down and collapsing the subjective beyond redress into an objective and hierarchical dependency. (218)

The first scene of the play is created exactly according to this principle of externalizing the subjective. The multiple forces that construct Uncle Doggie's subjectivity are presented as in a complex process of constantly interacting, influencing, challenging, and undermining each other. Everyone is immersed in his own world. No one can completely overcome or replace the other, but, at the same time, no one is in a permanent dominant position either. In this way, history is presented in its ambiguous multiplicity and transiency, exposing how modern history has rapidly changed the conception of nature and people's conflicting roles in it.

Uncle Doggie's repressed narcissistic desire also makes him consciously produce and manipulate people's memory about the arch. This is dramatized in Scene Eleven, when Qi's ghost and Uncle Doggie argue about their children's upcoming marriage. While Qi expresses a desire to blur the boundary between the two families—a wish secretly cherished by Uncle Doggie as well—Uncle Doggie's shattered ego consciously represses this latent desire. What his ego fears is the requirement of the superego—whether his "clean family" will be contaminated by a descendent of the "reactionary," and whether his victory over Qi as proved by his ownership of Qi's arch will be threatened (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 129). In his words, "if she's a Qi, and marries into the Chen family, then who's going to be the master of this arch here? Eh? Will it be the Chen arch or the Qi arch?" (Ibid.). Thus in order to

safeguard his victory, Uncle Doggie repeatedly asks the young couple whether the girl is Qi's daughter or not. Fooled by them about Qi Xiaomeng's true identity, he asks them to kneel down in front of the arch to take three vows, in order to make sure that the arch will belong to the Chen family forever. In his eyes, the arch is what Pierre Nora calls "the leavings of memory," which "provide a record of the efforts of historical actors to describe their cultural values" (Hutton 10). Regarding the arch as a memorial of his historical efforts and cultural values, Uncle Doggie's relationship with the arch registers his personal experience of history.

The three vows he asks his son and daughter-in-law to take follow the class struggle theory in the Maoist discourse, which claims the proletarian masses as masters of society. The vows are: "I'll never forget the benefits of our new society, never forget the bounties of our great savior. … I'll take good care of our family, protect our yard, and guard our arch, replacing old bricks and changing damaged tiles. Whenever I see the arch, it is like I'm seeing my parents. … I'll always hate the Qi family, and never meet with the Qis" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 130).[58] These three vows prove the meaning of the arch as transmitted through displaced memory, by adapting to the changing historical conditions. The arch does not remain stable in its meaning but produces new tradition and memory. Roach explains the cause of this destabilizing dynamic, "Much more happens through transmission by surrogacy than

[58] The second vow: "I'll take good care of our family, protect our yard, and guard our arch, replacing old bricks and changing damaged tiles. Whenever I see the arch, it is like I'm seeing my parents" is in Jinyun's published Chinese version of the play script (*Gou'erye niepan* 502), but is missing in Ying Ruocheng's translation.

the reproduction of tradition. New traditions may also be invented and others overturned" (28). Through this process of surrogation, the memory of the arch as Qi's family property is overturned, and a new memory of Chen family's ownership is created. In this way, memory is transmitted through substitution, "a public performance of forgetting" (Roach 45), the result of the push and pull of various historical forces. As both an effigy and a surrogate, the arch silently commemorates the process of loss and renewal, the staggering erasures required by history's progression forward.

As a "voluntary memory" frequently asserted by Uncle Doggie, this process of producing new memory proves Foucault's argument that "power produces knowledge. Power bends discourse to its needs and so revises our conceptions of the past. … Discourse molds knowledge and in the process crowds out alternative formulations. It therefore raises issues not only about the ideas it frames but also about those it excludes" (Hutton 113, 111). If power reversal enables Uncle Doggie to reframe the meaning of the arch as divorced from the Qis, the excluded memory is presented on stage through surrealistic theatrical methods. Throughout this scene of taking vows, Qi's ghost is on one side of the stage, amusedly observing them and reminding the audience of the fundamental reason and inherent contradictions of Uncle Doggie's behavior. On the other part of the stage kneel Dahu and Xiaomeng, whose conspiratorial alliance silently points to the futility of Uncle Doggie's vows. Chen Dahu's dismissive and perfunctory attitude to these vows ironically undermines Uncle Doggie's effort to transmit the arch as a family treasure. When Qi

Xiaomeng finally calls Uncle Doggie "Dad" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 131), Qi is shocked, but he quickly laughs, nodding his head to express his approval. The invisible phantom's satisfaction problematizes the satisfaction of the visible Uncle Doggie, whose effort to eternalize his superiority over the Qis through the arch is subverted by Qi Xiaomeng's becoming a family member, thus an owner of the arch as well. This oath ritual is ended when "The bell is heard again, with LI WANJIANG shouting: 'Time to work!'" (Ibid.). Li's order comes from the social symbolic order—the superego that Uncle Doggie's ego has been consciously obeying throughout this memory production.

This scene presents power-holders of diverse historical periods—landlord Qi of the feudal society, Wanjiang of the Mao era, and Dahu of the New Era—each of whom successively determine Uncle Doggie's relationship with the arch (his desiring it, acquiring it, and final destruction of it). Uttering their voices across temporal and spatial realms, their simultaneous presence on stage actualizes the Brechtian theater principle that "The field has to be defined in historically relative terms … [W]e must leave them their distinguishing marks and keep their impermanence always before our eyes, so that our own period can be seen to be impermanent too" (Brecht 190). Since these power-holders, with their distinctive historical marks, surrogate each other, their co-presence keeps the transience and relativity of each age before the eyes of the audience. In this way, Uncle Doggie's voluntary memory about the arch is not only problematic but also precarious and at risk of surrogation in the near future as well. This theatrical method puts into practice what Brecht calls "dialectical

materialism. In order to unearth society's laws of motion this method treats social situations as processes, and traces out all their inconsistencies. It regards nothing as existing except in so far as it changes, in other words is in disharmony with itself" (193). The processes that produce social situations are revealed by juxtaposing multiple historical forces and points of view. In this way, the society's laws of motion are unearthed as being motivated by conflicts between heterogeneous forces, whose power struggle makes the historical process full of inconsistencies and disharmonies, not a linear progression.

The cultural and social forces that shape Uncle Doggie's psychic conflicts are also made obvious in Scene Eleven, when Qi's ghost reminds Uncle Doggie of an old saying:

> QI YONGNIAN How does the old saying go? Remember?
>
> UNCLE DOGGIE Sure. What belongs to Mother is better than what belongs to Dad, what belongs to you is better than either, what you have in your pocket is better still, but what you hold in your hand is the best! O-ho, you are a reactionary! Li Wanjiang, he's spreading—
>
> QI YONGNIAN Hush. Look at this—*[Opens up a cloth parcel to show him the seal box]*
>
> UNCLE DOGGIE The seal box, hand it over! (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 127)

This scene vividly shows how Uncle Doggie instinctively follows Qi's enticement to remember an old saying that professes the selfishness of human nature—a taboo in the Mao era. But Uncle Doggie's conscience makes him repress that forbidden memory by reporting Qi's reactionary behavior to Wanjiang. Nevertheless, Qi's seal box immediately wins him over again. Uncle Doggie's frequent shifting of positions reveals how he constantly struggles between the contradicting demands of his id and superego, which register the social cultures of different periods of the progressive national history.

The play's surrealistic theatrical method of externalizing the working mechanism of Uncle Doggie's psyche and the shaping forces of historical surrogation violates socialist realistic style, the sole legitimate artistic style between the 1950s-1970s, the historical period dramatized in this play. According to Ban Wang, writing history in socialist realistic style was frequently "based on an exclusive principle of political selection" in order

> to find the inchoate clues that foreshadowed and hence justified the present move toward a preordained future. The reconstruction of history was more an attempt to confirm the status quo than a serious, scientific inquiry into the records and residues of history. Harnessed to an illusion of the thriving present and an even brighter future, it glided blithely over too many bloody ruptures in the past and the unresolved predicaments of old. (*Illuminations from the Past* 112)

Seen in light of Wang's argument, socialist realistic works are realistic in form but romantic or idealistic in content. This play offers a counter-discourse to socialist realistic works. Presenting those "bloody ruptures" and "unresolved predicaments" of the past serves not to confirm but to question the status quo that surrogates previous social orders. The complex reasons and multiple forces that contribute to producing historical events and phenomena are seriously investigated in this play, not selected to serve as political propaganda for any ideological position. Neither is the past presented as completely victorious, the present totally thriving, nor the future certainly brighter.

Playwright Jinyun explains his intention to dramatize the complexity of life and human being this way: "Life itself has 'multiple meanings,' so I try to write about life 'as a whole.' Human beings in life have 'multiple sides,' so I try to write about complex souls" ("Life Does not Let Me Down" 12). Jinyun's vision for the play obviously transcends the limitation of realism. According to Sun Qingsheng, a Chinese literary critic, "Realism comments upon life clearly and has obvious tendency. It combines eulogy of truth and justice with attack upon corrupted forces. It clearly expresses love or hatred" (191). In this way, realistic work's obvious authorial tendency prevents presenting reality in its complexity. This play avoids this simplicity through constructing a carnival world in which multiple voices express their opinions, without an omnipresent narrator or view overmastering them. No one is presented in a completely positive or negative light, and no sublimity or debasement is attached permanently.

The multiplicity aimed by playwright Jinyun cannot be achieved through a "monolithic, unified and systematic knowledge that would tolerate no heterogeneous thoughts" (Lin Q. 13)—a knowledge produced by socialist realist works. Brecht believes that for socialist realism,

> art functioned as a reflection of an already theorized reality. This often led to strange consequences. Art did not then produce the complexities of real social life, the imaginings, the silences and repressions, and the social fantasies that they evoked, but merely reproduced reflections of reflections according to predetermined 'theoretical' models. Socialist realism, therefore, deprived art of its cognitive function. It was no longer realistic, adequate to reality. Its purpose was abstract and illustrative. (Tatlow 51)

In the light of Brecht's argument, the "already theorized reality" (Ibid.) produced by socialist realistic works only reflects "the glow of reality" and "the superlative effects of the real" (Barthes 102). The history created by socialist realistic works is the Hegelian "world" history and Marxist history—the views of history that have guided China's modernization project. As summarized by Lin Qingxin, "While the Hegelian 'world' history envisages the realization of some 'universal' idea as the telos of humanity, the Marxists view human history or society as evolving from barbarity to civilization and finally to an ideal society of communism" (18-9). Under the guidance of these historical views, socialist realism provides "a fixed and stable representation of history or reality" in a "prejudged form" with "political

propaganda" (Lin Q. 14). It is "totalitarian" and "repressive in nature, for its formation and consolidation were founded on smothering differences" (Lin Q. 18, 15). Those imaginations, repressions, silences, and fantasies that are divergent from Hegelian and Marxist historical views are obliterated from socialist realistic works.

This totalitarian reality is created by utilizing the uniperspective of Western realistic aesthetic, which, according to Tatlow, "imposes a superficial arbitrary order on the natural world" that is "organized for exploitation by the dominant subject" in order to accomplish "the thorough subjugation of the viewer" (52). This uniperspective is subverted in Brechtian theater through utilizing the multiple perspectives of Chinese art. In his essay "On Chinese Painting," Brecht writes that Chinese artists "do not use the art of perspective. They do not like looking at everything from one single point-of-view. In their pictures several things are ordered … not independent of each other but not in a state of subordination which threatens their very existence. … This order requires no force" (qtd. in Tatlow 50-1). This "multiperspectival relational independency" enables Chinese painting to function "as active agent rather than as passive purveyor of the mirrored" (Tatlow 52). Brecht's creative interpretation of Chinese art's multiple perspectives inspires the creators of this play to present the interaction among multiple autonomous points of view, which "free the potential of the socially responsive imagination" and resist "a positivist, mechanistic thinking" (Tatlow 52, 53). In this way, the play exerts an active role in revealing the paradoxes and traumas of historical progress and national modernization, instead of reflecting an imposed unified order. The creators' opinions

are more latent and ambiguous, leaving creative space for the audience to reflect and choose from.

Socialist realistic theater's dogmatic construction of clearly defined categories, concepts, and ideas is also achieved through the medium of political melodrama—the dominant form of Chinese spoken drama during the twentieth-century. Michael R. Booth thus describes the characteristics of melodrama:

> Most definitions of melodrama have laid stress upon the concentration on plot at the expense of characterization, the reliance on physical sensation, the character stereotype, the rewarding of virtue, and punishment of vice. … The world of melodrama is thus a world of certainties where confusion, doubt, and perplexity are absent; a world of absolutes where virtue and vice coexist in pure whiteness and pure blackness; and a world of justice where after immense struggle and torment good triumphs over and punishes evil, and virtue receives tangible material rewards. (14)

While most characteristics of political melodrama prevail in traditional Chinese theater and socialist realistic plays, they are avoided by the creators of *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana*. Its presentation of emotional subtlety, character ambiguity, value uncertainty, psychological complexity, and open ending provides no definite answer to right or wrong, moral or immoral, winner or loser during this process of historical surrogation and power struggle. If melodrama "is a symptom of a culture's need to 'forget' traumatic events while representing them in an oblique form" (Kaplan and

Wang 9), this play's avoidance of melodramatic format testifies to the culture's need to remember the nation's traumatic experience by presenting them in a clear, open, direct, and sophisticated form.

The popularity of utilizing Brechtian theatrical methods to deepen the exploration of history and reality in the 1980s reflects the urgent necessity to examine China's traumatic past. As Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang argue, "While it shatters the culture's symbolic resources, trauma also points to the urgent necessity of reconfiguring and transforming the broken repertoire of meaning and expression. … [T]rauma intensifies the urgency of re-symbolization and reveals the bankruptcy of the prior symbolization. Trauma may provide opportunities to tap into a driving force that enables new symbolic expressions" (12-4). Although traditional Chinese theater and socialist realistic plays construct absolute ideological and ethical values in order to safeguard social order and moral hierarchy, these symbolic orders became bankrupt due to the successive traumas of modern Chinese history. The urgency to establish a new symbolic order stimulated the intellectuals of the 1980s to adopt modern Western literary and artistic methods to tap into the recesses of the memory and psyche of marginal figures. In this way, new symbolic discourses—private histories divergent from the grand national history—are constructed.

This play deepens its exploration of history and reality also through an open ending, not through a customary "round ending" of traditional Chinese plays and socialist realistic plays. The ending is open because it gives no final judgment to the dilemma of history, but invites contradictory interpretations from the audience.

Uncle Doggie's setting fire to the arch can be interpreted as implying his suicide and total failure of his life dream. Then the destruction of such a hardworking, kind-hearted, courageous, and perseverant individual reveals the inherent brutalities of history—history progresses forward at the cost of ruthlessly sacrificing one group of people after another. According to Lu Xun, a representative May Fourth intellectual, "Tragedy is to show the destruction of valuable things to viewers" (qtd. in Wang, *Illuminations from the Past* 220). Since China's traditional agricultural way of life has valuable qualities regrettable to be lost—such as human being's harmonious unity with nature—Uncle Doggie's sharp criticism of the nation's forsaking its old values rings a disturbing tone in the ear of the audience. This type of tragic ending

> exhibits an unflinching and unsentimental confrontation with the abyss of painful historical reality and eschews any easy, imaginary, and cathartic resolution. … The gaze on atrocities focuses on the individual's existential fate in a history that he or she does not possess. Lu Xun suggests that tarrying longer and more critically with a tragic past may help us sort out problems and predicaments in the tensions between tradition and modernity, individual and society, memory and history before we rush on to an unknown future. (Wang, *Illuminations from the Past* 224)

Seen in this light, the play's in-depth presentation of history's ruthless sacrifice of individuals directly conflicts with the painful historical reality that individuals are unable to master their own fate when being manipulated by the vortex

of historical change. The irresolvable conflict between the nation's inevitable requirement for a modern governing order and individuals' unforgettable memory of multiple traditions determines the characters' tragic destinies in the play. This conflict culminates in the catastrophe of Uncle Doggie's setting fire to the arch. Kaplan and Wang argue that "the catastrophic event [is] symptom of deep-lying contradictions of modernity, and the experience of modernity [is] living with shocks and suffering" (17). Uncle Doggie's destruction of his own life dream epitomizes modernity's disastrous rupture from the past. When the play ends in a fire swallowing the arch and Uncle Doggie staggering off the stage, accompanied by shrieks of laughter from Qi's ghost and the sound of a bulldozer tumbling in, the play vividly presents the sacrifice required for the birth of a new age—a trauma inevitable in history, thus doomed to repeat itself in the future. This tragic ending is considered by some Chinese critics, like Wang Hongtao and Cai Minghong, as a serious flaw of the play. According to them, since the reform and opening up in the New Era have boosted many peasants' enthusiasm and creativity to engage in groundbreaking economic activities, it is the right time for Uncle Doggie to fulfill his life-long desire to become rich. But burning the arch signifies his total negation of himself, thus creating an ending too pessimistic for the flourishing New Era (Cai 40-1).

But the ending can also be interpreted positively, as signifying the rebirth of Chinese peasants out of historical rampage and history's making progress by getting rid of the backward and the outdated in order to welcome the advanced and the updated. In this way, it is a restorative happy ending to the previous historical trauma

and suggests redemption and hope. This is how most Chinese critics, like Lin Kehuan and Tian Benxiang, interpret the ending (Jinyun et all. 55-6). Jinyun himself also confirmed the ending's positive implication at a symposium: "In recent years, the reality of huge changes in the countryside and the nation tells me, the old generation peasants represented by Uncle Doggie need and must experience 'nirvana,' our society and nation need and must experience 'nirvana.' Nirvana, I take its meaning of forsaking the old to seek the new, to acquire a new life" (Jinyun et al. 43). This interpretation conforms to national historical discourse's eulogy of the contemporary New Era as redeeming the nation from its disastrous past. According to Ping Pan, this popular interpretation of "nirvana" as "rebirth out of fire" helped the play to pass the Party authority's censorship (142-3).

The ending can also be interpreted as an unresolved conflict. Uncle Doggie leaves this upcoming industrial world to return to his agricultural paradise, thus remaining a master of his life and a nonconformist individual hero to the end. This interpretation takes the meaning of "nirvana" from Buddhism, as referring to the "state in which individuality becomes extinct by being absorbed into the supreme spirit."[59] Uncle Doggie burns the arch to radically efface his imaginary identity and symbolic universe in order to return to the ultimate life-force: nature. Zizek explains the death drive "as the re-emergence of what was ostracized when the ego constituted itself by way of imaginary identification: the return of the polymorphous impulses is experienced by the ego as a mortal threat, since it actually entails the dissolution of

its Imaginary identity" (171). If Uncle Doggie's imaginary identification with Qi causes alienation from himself, the destruction of that identification means total liberation of his polymorphous impulses and life force—best released in nature. The death drive is also the "symbolic death, the annihilation of the signifying network, of the text in which the subject is inscribed, through which reality is historicized—the name of that which, in psychotic experience, appears as the 'end of the world', the twilight, the collapse of the symbolic universe" (Zizek 34). Burning the arch demonstrates Uncle Doggie's effort to liberate himself from his obsession with the symbolic order represented by the arch and from his attempt to historicize the value of his life and existence through the arch. Returning to his little piece of land on Windy Slope signifies Uncle Doggie's return to nature, to the original life source, to the Real, without worrying about whether or not he will finally be considered as victorious over Qi in the larger social symbolic order. His flight from the present also signifies his returning to the past and memory, for which Uncle Doggie holds life-long reverence.

This interpretation seems to be what the directors had in mind *for Uncle Doggie's Nirvana* premier production. As the production's program states: "This peasant has suffered all for an unrealized aim. He will not die … nor will he have peace. Thus we borrow this outlandish word 'nirvana' to wish the hero an imaginary freedom beyond the boundary of life and death, after all the piteous happiness and

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[59] See *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English with Chinese Translation*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988. 761.

sad defeats he has experienced. The age in which the hero lived has just faded away. The play is a thought lingering at the conclusion of that age" (qtd. in Pan 142). This program note does not predict Uncle Doggie's rebirth through death, nor does it endow him with peace in this life. When Uncle Doggie sets fire to the arch, he mumbles: "Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow. You have your tomorrow, and I have mine" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 147). Uncle Doggie's tomorrow is not to follow the dominant trend of the contemporary age, but to escape the historical vortex and worldly concerns to return to nature.

This interpretation of the ending refrains from confirming the current New Era as having already been out of historical trauma. As playwright Jinyun says in an interview:

> Now in the countryside there are a small group of people who really get rich. Among them there are youths like Chen Dahu in the play who have established township enterprises. Now I cannot draw the conclusion as to whether the countryside's future depends upon them. Some phenomena already make me think: abundant wealth but lack of benevolence produces crime and evil. The souls of some people are again distorted during the New Era. … Thus, to people like Uncle Doggie's son Chen Dahu, the masters of new age who bury the old life of the fathers' generation, I think now it is too early to draw the conclusion that they are socialist new men. We still need to observe and think. (Jinyun, Lin, and Tang. 2)

From this interview we can see that Jinyun still evaluates the new generation according to the standard of socialist morality, thus he does not approve of their pursuit of money. Chen Dahu in the play cares only about the materialistic concern of the present age "[w]ith banknotes rolling all over the place like fallen autumn leaves" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 96). Without reverence for past heritage and spiritual sublimity, Chen Dahu undermines his own sublime historical status and prepares for his destiny of being surrogated in the future.

While Chinese critics almost unanimously criticized Jinyun's dramatization of the young generation as superficial and conceptual—attributed to the middle-aged playwright's lack of knowledge and understanding of them—we could justify his superficial presentation of them by the transience of accelerated modern time. As Lin Qingxin argues, "It is true that the notion of linear and irreversible time, while bringing temporal pressure to the moderns, especially urban populations, is conducive to the acceleration of economic growth, urbanization, and production, leading to the prosperity of commodity economy. However, it also entails the quick obsolescence of ideas, patterns of behavior and social forms, in the form of the quick succession of the old by the new" (73). Lin's argument illuminates the point that, while rapid modern development breaks through spatial barriers, bringing in urbanization and globalization, it also quickens the process of historical surrogation. The historical traumas brought by modernity's destruction of the familiar world as suffered by the previous generations will victimize new generations as well.

The play ends with a heteroglossian chaos: Chen Dahu and Qi Xiaomeng are laughing offstage; Uncle Doggie hurls the torch towards the arch, shouting: "Tomorrow … there'll be fun and games. … The arch—my arch!" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie* 147); People are shouting to put out the fire; Chen Dahu tells Qi Xiaomeng: "The bulldozer will be here at the crack of dawn. We don't have a minute to lose!" (Jinyun, *The Nirvana of Grandpa Doggie* 419).[60] The sound of a roaring engine tumbles in; a powerful tragic music resounds throughout the theater, mixed with Qi's shrieks of laughter. Threatened by the flashes of a bulldozer, Uncle Doggie scoops up a double handful of earth to put into his pitcher. Then he staggers off the stage in shaky steps, leaving the stage empty, illuminated only by the red light of the fire. With Uncle Doggie's exit and the destruction of those places of memory by the coming new age, the play ends with history's surrender of "its mediating role between past and future" (Hutton 9). Sweeping traces of a shabby past from the stage leaves a space for future historical struggles. Nevertheless, the new will soon be surrogated by the newer, and the future will be full of shocks and ruptures. When the audience walked out of the theater, carrying with them this disturbing memory of the cost of historical progress, they were provided with choices to make and actions to take—a responsibility to influence the future route of history.

[60] This final scene (Scene Sixteen) was missing in Ying Ruocheng's translation of the play, but included in Shiao-Ling S. Yu's translation *The Nirvana of Grandpa Doggie*, p419.

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III. A Call from the Depths of History: The Peasant Community in *Sangshuping Chronicles*

Sangshuping Chronicles was staged in 1988 by The Central Academy of Drama in Beijing and co-directed by Xu Xiaozhong and Chen Zidu. Based on writer Zhu Xiaoping's three novellas on Sangshuping, the play was written by Chen Zidu, Yang Jian, and Zhu Xiaoping, under the artistic guidance of Xu Xiaozhong.[61] The play was hailed as marking the maturity of the modern Chinese theatrical experiment during the New Era (Fei and Sun 131). Set in Sangshuping village on the Loess Plateau—commonly recognized as the birthplace of Chinese culture[62]—around 1968-1969 at the peak of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the play dramatizes the hard lives of the Sangshuping villagers under the "three forces [that] came

[61] Xu Xiaozhong was the President of The Central Academy of Drama from 1983-1999 and its emeritus president from 1999-2006. My analysis of the performance is based on the videotape of this premier production. Xu guided this play's creation from the right beginning. He chose Zhu Xiaoping's three novellas, conceived the aesthetic principles and cohesive vision for the play, and organized Chen Zidu, Yang Jian, and Zhu Xiaoping to write the play-script. He also led the production's creation team to go to the northwestern mountain area to do fieldwork for the performance (Xu X., "A Report" 106). Due to Xu's leading position in creating, producing, and performing the play, I quote Xu's writings in my analysis. Xu wrote about why he chose Zhu Xiaoping's novellas to be adapted into a play: "They show our nation's extraordinary resilience and vitality, offer courageous reflections on our nation's fate, and have profound historic substance. Zhu's work also, in my opinion, calls for fundamental social reform" (Ibid.).

[62] See the debate on Chinese Cultural origin in Wang Dongping 76-96. In his essay, director Xu Xiaozhong also writes, "We sincerely felt that the Loess Plateau was the cradle of the Chinese Nation and the origin of the Han Culture" ("Reflection" 29).

together to dehumanize the people—crippling feudalism, menacing ultraleftism, and severe material poverty" (Xu X., "A Report" 107). Presenting Sangshuping village as a synecdoche[63] of the essence of the Chinese peasant community during the past five millennia, the play follows the major trend of the "cultural fever" [*wenhua re*][64] of the latter half of the 1980s in its overall deprecation of Chinese cultural traditions. The major components of traditional Chinese culture—including Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, as well as China's long-standing agricultural economy—are presented not as a source to nourish the peasants, but as a restrictive force that deters human development. The ultra-leftist measures implemented during the Cultural Revolution are dramatized as only prolonging the pernicious feudal customs in the name of socialist ideology, producing a huge ironic discrepancy between the intention and the actual results of Mao's modernization project. The play advocates fundamental social reforms that would move the nation into a new age of

[63] According to Hayden White, synecdoche refers to something that "can be characterized by using the part to symbolize some *quality* presumed to inhere in the totality, as in the expression 'He is all heart'" (34).

[64] "Cultural Fever" refers to the "Great Cultural Discussion" that involved the entire nation from 1985-1989. The discussion not only re-examined the problems in Chinese culture and "the sociocultural implications of modern China" (Zhang 36), but also transplanted the 20th-century Western theories into the historical context of contemporary China, bringing into question the universal quality of modernity. Some important schools emerged in this cultural discussion included the pro-science Futurologist School, the Chinese Culturalist School that advocated a creative transformation of tradition, and a younger generation of scholars "whose radical cultural agency operates through a hermeneutic reading of contemporary Western theoretical discourse" (Zhang 47-8).

modernization, which becomes embodied in a modern chorus that performs national regeneration at the beginning and end of the play.

Explicitly declaring his intention to present Sangshuping village as a living fossil that "epitomizes the long and dark feudal society and the peasants' fate over five thousand years," director Xu describes the Sangshuping villagers as "isolated, ignorant, impoverished," living "according to a close-minded, conservative, feudalistic, and backward collective mentality" ("A Report" 107). Xu clearly stated the play's intention and message:

> Sangshuping is a living fossil of history that reminds people of the prolonged feudal society, of the still-existing cultural mentality of that time. … All of China is one big Sangshuping, regardless of time or place. It has always been so. But is it alright to be so? … We perform *Sangshuping Chronicles* in order to expose the savage crimes committed by ultra-leftists and feudalists, to draw attention to the urgency to elevate the entire nation's cultural and moral quality, to awaken the nation's consciousness to self-criticize and self-reflect upon the deformed national psychology! (qtd. in Wang X. 282)

Xu's statement declares his intention to dramatize Sangshuping's concrete figures and events as symbolizing China's culture, morality, and national psychology of feudal period. Although it is quite problematic to essentialize China's long history and rich diversity into this small rural community around 1968-1969, because it disregards the differences brought by temporal and spatial change, this generalization

could be construed as typical of Chinese way of thinking and characterizing the Chinese intellectual discourse during the 1980s. As simplistic as it is, this total negation of China's past aimed to advocate the urgent necessity to thoroughly reform the nation.

In order to achieve this purpose, the play deconstructs China's orthodox cultural traditions as having degenerated into ossified rituals that ruthlessly sacrifice individuals, who are engaged in primordial struggle for physical survival. Victimized by horrific natural, social, and historical forces, the villagers repeatedly turn into victimizers to victimize the weaker. Devastated environment, material poverty, schizophrenic mind, disabled body, impotent patriarch, and sacrificed women in this play compose a community that is no longer able to prolong its lineage. Likewise, the glorious Maoist rituals performed in the village—the display of Mao's icons, slogans, policies, revolutionary songs, and revolutionary model plays—are deconstructed as pretentious, futile signs without real-life relevance. The ironic rupture between Maoist discourse's radical requirement to effect revolutionary social change and people's actual adherence to customary way of life disqualifies the utopian vision proposed by the symbolic order of the Cultural Revolution.

Nevertheless, despite its critique of peasants' customs and mentality, the play eulogizes their astounding perseverance, endurance, and diligence in their struggle to survive in the harsh environment. In director Xu's words, "the villagers struggle inexorably against the harsh environment and poverty" ("A Report" 107), manifesting "our nation's extraordinary resilience and vitality" ("A Report"106).

Their inexhaustible life-force, amazing willpower, and undying humanity are conveyed on the one hand through those surrealistic scenes in which they are transformed into transcendent symbols. On the other hand, they are conveyed through the various types of folk theater performed in the play—love songs, *yangge*,[65] lion dance, harvest celebration, Monkey King,[66] Butterfly Lovers,[67] and traditional music drama—which construct an imaginary order that embodies peasants' dreams and desires. Since this imaginary order is ruthlessly destroyed by the reality of Sangshuping, the hope for the salvation of the community is expressed through the theme song played when tragic events occur. Celebrating China's "sacred" origin—"the Dragon in the East" (Chen et al. 192)—and the legendary sage kings from the golden period of Chinese civilization, the theme song calls for a regeneration of those qualities that made the Chinese nation and civilization one of

[65] *Yangge* (Rice Sprout Song) is a celebrative folk dance theater very popular in northern China. Originated in Song Dynasty (960-1279), its performance involves song, dance, and dialogue, accompanied by a music played by drums, gongs, trumpets, and cymbals. The performers usually wear a red silk ribbon around the waist. Some dancers use props like waistdrum, dancing fan, fake donkey, and litter. *Yangge* is performed in different styles in different areas.

[66] Monkey King is the main character in the classical Chinese epic novel *Journey to the West*, published in the 1590s. In the novel, he accompanies monk Xuanzang on the journey to retrieve Buddhist sutras from India. With immense strength, superb speed, and magic power, he is a popular hero who has been incorporated into various folk arts such as legends, folk tales, and popular theater.

[67] Butterfly Lovers is a popular legendary romance also known as *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*. This legend is "[a]rguably the most celebrated folk tale in Chinese culture" and "has been repeatedly retold in popular cultural forms from Yuan-Ming plays to various traditional and modern cultural forms, including prose narrative, folk ballad, regional theatre, classical poetry, modern novel, film, musical, concerto, ballet, modern dance, comics, and TV drama" (S. L. Li 109).

the most enduring in the world. At the beginning and end of the play, a chorus in modern dress comes on stage to sing this theme song, which is written with modern lyrics, composed with a modern tune, and played by modern musical instrument. The chorus also dances according to the theme song. By forming a sharp contrast with the traditional idioms, local manners, and native attire of the villagers, the modern chorus presents a renovated national identity characterized by collective unity, vigorous spirit, perseverant effort, and civil behavior.

As it emerged from the disastrous Cultural Revolution and began the process of opening up to the world in the 1980s, China experienced an immense spiritual, cultural, and ideological crisis. Those who were shocked to realize how much China lagged behind the world harshly criticized Chinese culture and society. The widespread sense of urgency to industrialize, commercialize, urbanize, and modernize the nation to a large extent determined this play's negative presentation of China's traditional agricultural community. The play reflects a social demand to carry out further reforms, to reconstruct the "psychological structure of the nation"—a phrase quite popular in China's intellectual circle (Liu 217). As will be explained in detail in this chapter, this play seamlessly hybridizes methods of modern theater with the hypotheticality [*jiadingxing*][68] and conventionalism of Chinese classical

[68] Hypotheticality is a tradition in classical Chinese theater. As explained by Zhao Y.H. Henry, it can be translated as "stage symbolism" or "hypothetical resemblance" (46). "Basically, hypotheticality is premised on the notion that the stage presentation of a play does not benefit from bearing resemblance to reality" (Ibid.). Hypotheticality "aims at convincing the audience that what is offered on the stage could be true, though hypothetically" (Zhao 47).

theater.[69] The play shifts between the real and the imaginary, the conscious and the unconscious, the past and the present, the constructed reality and the deconstruction of it. Analyzing how this play's creators innovatively use the motifs from traditional theater to facilitate their thorough examination of Chinese culture, society, history, identity, mentality, and ways of life, I explain why this play was evaluated as marking the maturity of modern Chinese theater.[70]

A. Sangshuping: A Microcosm of the Chinese Community

Since China has been an agricultural community for millennia, with peasants occupying a large segment of the population, *Sangshuping Chronicles* constructs Sangshuping village as an archetypal Chinese community filled with historical relics. Following the tradition of realism to familiarize artists with life, Director Xu led the

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[69] Director Xu Xiaozhong thus explains his intention to dialectically integrate "various Chinese and non-Chinese sources": "I want to further the tradition of realistic drama, to learn the aesthetic principles of China's traditional arts from an advanced perspective, to draw critically from all valuable sources of experimental theater, including modern theater" ("A Report" 106).

[70] Gao Reisen, a Chinese theater scholar, highlights the importance of this play's performance: "The performance of *Sangshuping Chronicles* adopted various types of theatrical means: realism and essentialism, reality and illusion, representation and presentation, as well as the integration of dramatic performance, music and dance – almost all the achievements of spoken drama's experiments were tested in this performance. Its grand scene, multiple characters, intense conflicts, strong national flavor, distinctive northwestern style, thorough historical reflection, and rich artistic information were rarely seen in Chinese theater. This is why it had such great repercussions in the Chinese theatrical circle, which referred to its popularity as the 'Sangshuping' phenomenon. … Almost all the theatrical practitioners sincerely identify with this new phenomenon of theatrical art. It marked the maturity of Chinese spoken drama in the New Era" (432).

production team to visit the northwestern mountain area. Reflecting on that trip, he commented:

> Within the counties we visited, if we dug three feet into the ground, we could find glorious cultural treasures. Even above the ground we frequently touched the remains of ancient culture, such as folk clay tigers, clay figurines, paper cuts, festive masks, colorful ladles, etc. The traces of customs handed down from ancient ancestors could be found here. We descendents exist and multiply in modern time accompanied by the quintessence and dregs of ancient culture created by our ancestors. Sangshuping village and its villagers are like living historical fossils. The play dramatizes a tragedy that happened in 1968. However, we hear a call from a soul of five thousand years! (“Reflection” 29-30)

Xu’s declaration clearly expresses his intention to examine the Sangshuping villagers as abiding by ancestral rules and ages-old customs—the traditions supposed to have bound generations of Chinese for millennia. Neither bothering to examine when and where those historical relics originated from, nor trying to trace the lineage of the Sangshuping villagers, Xu’s generalization of a tragedy in 1968—the darkest period in the PRC history—as synthesizing Chinese history of five thousand years reveals his tendency to present the Cultural Revolution as a product of the Chinese traditions. Especially since Sangshuping is located near the city of Yan’an, the cradle of the

CCP revolution, the play criticizes the failure of the CCP in fulfilling its goal to radically transform society.

The ancient Loess Plateau is symbolized on stage by "a huge revolving stage able to turn 360 degrees" (Chen et al. 190). The stage direction thus describes the set:

> In front, there is a vast stretch of sloping yellow earth, which would extend all the way to the horizon if not for the ~ shape cut in its middle left by the vicissitudes of life and the ancient weathered rocks by the side of the cliff on its left … Before the play starts, the yellow earth slope is facing the audience. Set off by the black velvet backdrop and the side curtains, the land appears awe inspiring, dignified, ancient, barren, and desolate. Some cold light from the right dimly reveals the contour of the rock. (Ibid.)

Since the Loess Plateau makes up the upper and middle parts of the Yellow River basin, which is commonly considered as the cradle of the Chinese nation and civilization,[71] the construction of this ancient yellow earth on stage as venerable, arid, and decadent conveys an ambiguous message even before the play begins. This effort to search for the roots of Chinese culture on the Loess Plateau is reflected in many literary and artistic works of the 1980s, such as *Yellow Earth*, a representative Fifth-Generation film made in 1984.[72] Yellow Emperor, a legendary sovereign and cultural

[71] The same as footnote 3.

[72] Fifth-Generation cinema refers to the cinema made by China's first generation of filmmakers after the Cultural Revolution. They broke away from the socialist-realistic tradition and opted for more free, unorthodox, and diverse methods and

hero reigned between 2497 B.C. – 2398 B.C. on the Loess Plateau, has been revered as the common ancestor of the Han Chinese, the dominant ethnicity of the Chinese nation. Xia (2070 B.C. – 1600 B.C.), Shang (1600 B.C. – 1046 B.C.), and Zhou (1045 B.C. – 256 B.C.)—China's first three dynasties—were all located in the Yellow River basin. Xi'an, a major city on the Loess Plateau, was frequently established as China's political, economic, and cultural center from eleventh-century B.C. to tenth-century A.D. As Chinese historian Ge Jianxiong argues, due to the central position of the Yellow River area throughout most of Chinese history, the traditions developed there integrated the cultures in other parts of China and incorporated them into Chinese civilization, which then spread back out into other parts of China. In this way, although the Yellow River area ceased to be China's cultural center after the eleventh century A.D., it is still reasonable to present the Loess Plateau as the cradle of Chinese nation and civilization (qtd. in Wang D. 96).

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subjects in film-making. Zhang Junzhao's *One and Eight* (1983) and Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* (1984) were commonly considered as marking the beginnings of the Fifth-Generation Chinese cinema. *Yellow Earth* is set in 1939 during the Sino-Japanese war. A communist soldier Gu Qing was sent from the CCP army at Yan'an to the remote north Shaanxi province, partly to collect local folk songs to be used in the army, and partly to influence the local peasants in favor of communism. Located on the Loess Plateau, the area is desolate, dusty, and arid, bordering the Yellow River. Gu stays with a poor family, in which a 14-year-old girl Cui Qiao is forced to marry a much older man in order to get dowry to pay for her mother's funeral and her little brother Han Han's engagement, following the old rules of peasants. Gu Qing indoctrinates Cui Qiao with hope for the salvation of the CCP. When Gu Qing leaves the area, Cui Qiao asks Gu to take her away to join the CCP army, but Gu says he must ask for the Party's permission first. Gu leaves, and Cui Qiao has to marry. After her marriage, Cui Qiao tries to cross the Yellow River to join the CCP but is drowned in the river. The play ends with a traditional rain ritual, in which the peasants dance to plead for rain. Gu Qing comes back, and Cui Qiao's brother Han Han struggles to get through those dancing peasants to reach Gu.

Another reason to present the Loess Plateau as a synecdoche of the traditional Chinese community lies in its desolate landscape, whose deterioration visually epitomizes the degeneration of Chinese civilization. During the golden age of Chinese history, the Yellow River area provided a favorable natural environment for the development of human society. As Raymond Dawson—a twentieth-century British scholar on Chinese language, history, and culture—points out, "the Yellow River basin provided a rich loessal soil, was well watered and not too thickly forested, and enjoyed a climate which was milder in winter than it is nowadays" (86-7). Ge Jianxiong also points out that, between 3000 B.C. and the beginning of the first century, the Yellow River area enjoyed a very good natural environment, with mild temperatures, plenty of rain, and loose, easily cultivated earth (qtd. in Wang D. 96). If this benign environment nourished one of the most ancient nations in the world, centuries of deforestation, over-grazing, population increase, as well as the Yellow River's disastrous floods and course shifts, have led to the desertification and decline of the area. In modern age, the Loess Plateau's monotonous, lifeless, and devastated landscape, filled with gullies and ridges, pathetically signifies the tragic stagnation of the nation.

Many historians and cultural critics of the twentieth century refers to the Loess Plateau as the most backward area. American geographer Ellsworth Huntington argues that the periodic invasions by nomads from central Asia and the ecological disasters of the Yellow River, having plagued northern China for more than two millennia, have produced a natural selection process that "allows for

survival only of those with the qualities of thrift, parsimony, selfishness, and callousness, which then become dominant traits in the region" (L. Sun, *The Chinese National Character* 165-6).

> Those northerners with more energy and initiative chose neither to perish nor to stay, but to leave the afflicted region altogether. … Those migrations were also selective processes, which allowed only the strongest and most resourceful to reach the final destination, and those qualities were also passed on to the progeny. As a result, only those with "passive qualities of economy, industry, patience, and endurance" rather than "active leadership" are fit to survive in an environment like north China. In other words, good stock has been continuously drained from north China by the migrations out of the region. (Ibid.)

Huntington's generalization about the racial degeneration in northern China, essentialistic and problematic as it is, influenced how Chinese intellectuals evaluated their nation. Huntington's theory represents the dominant intellectual trend of the twentieth century to separate China into several developmental zones, in order to explain the decline of northern China and the rise of southern China from perspectives of geography, climate, culture, society, politics, economy, race, eugenics, and personality. As Lung-Kee Sun summarizes, in the works of many Western and Chinese scholars, north China and south China are characterized in binary terms of backward conservative agricultural civilization versus advanced progressive

commercial culture. This problematic binary can also be seen in John F. Fairbank's theory of continental China, the inland agrarian-bureaucratic culture of the northern core area, versus maritime China, the seafaring culture in the southeast coastal regions and Southeast Asia where many Chinese immigrants reside. The constant northwest nomadic threat had reinforced the dominance of landlocked continental China, subordinating maritime China as a marginal appendage. The agrarian-bureaucratic power of continental China has stifled the development of maritime China. This situation only began to change from the nineteenth-century with the intrusion of foreign imperialist powers, whose political, economic, cultural, and military influences started to modernize the coastal cities in east and south China (L. Sun, *The Chinese National Character* 185-8). These scholars' attribution of northern China's backwardness to its agrarian economy, bureaucratic politics, devastated environment, and degenerated people influenced the cultural discourse of the 1980s, including *Shangshuping Chronicles*.

The deprecation of northern China was also a result of China's humiliating experience since the nineteenth century of being invaded and semi-colonized by Western imperial powers, which gained economic, political, and military superiority through industrialization, colonization, commerce, trade, and revolutions that overthrew the feudal system. Internalizing the Western colonial discourse about the superiority of the European nations, many people prioritized China's southeast coastal areas, which were most influenced by Western civilization, over the northwest inland area, which adhered to China's traditional way of life. This

problematic hierarchy was reinforced unilaterally during the 1980s, when many coastal cities were designated as Special Economic Zones [*jingji tequ*],[73] with special permission to import foreign capital, technology, managerial skills, and professionals. In popular discourse, the contrast between coastal areas and inland areas was translated as equalizing the contrast between advancement, openness, movement versus backwardness, enclosure, stagnancy. This clear-cut division also conjured up the binaries of creativity, democracy, wealth versus conventionality, despotism, poverty. According to this view, the hope for China's future relied on how much the blue maritime China could help the backward continental China catch up with the rest of the world. Although these antitheses were simplistic and stereotypical, they were reflected in *Sangshuping Chronicles* in the sharp differences between the villagers and the modern chorus, who embody these two sets of contradictory values in their costume, manners, movement, and language.

The popularity of these antitheses can be seen from the enthusiastic response to *Deathsong of the River* [*He Shang*, also translated as *River Elegy*], a six-series TV documentary aired by China Central Television in 1988. Created by a group of intellectuals, this documentary series severely criticized old Chinese culture and society, and caused huge sensations both at home and abroad. It deconstructed the

[73] From 1980, China started to establish Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in China's Southern coastal provinces where located old entry ports for foreigners and subsequently were most influenced by foreign culture. SEZs were described by Deng Xiaoping as "windows for technology, management, knowledge and foreign policy to better China's modernization program" (*Beijing Review*, vol. 27, no. 48, 26 November 1984, p. 19).

traditional icons, such as the Yellow River, Dragon, the yellow earth, the Great Wall, and Confucianism, blaming them as the culprit for the landlocked agricultural economy and monolithic despotism that prolonged China's stagnant feudalism for millennia. *Deathsong of the River* claimed that the necessity for the Chinese to survive the extremely harsh conditions in the Yellow River area through low-level agricultural production produced "elements in Chinese culture that tolerate the existence of evil forces" and "the fatal shortcomings of being sly and slippery, fatalistic, and submissive to oppression" (Su and Wang 106). This view of economic base as determining people's thoughts, character, and behavior resonates with Marxist socioeconomic theory. The proposal made by *Deathsong of the River* is reflected in *Sangshuping Chronicles*, in which the extreme poverty caused by adverse natural environment, inefficient agricultural production, and corrupted bureaucratic exploitation leaves the Sangshuping villagers with no other choice but to passively resign themselves to all kinds of oppression, evil forces, and a fatalistic view of life. The necessity to make a living out of limited resources ignites a fierce competition and produces a treacherous and deceitful mentality, which becomes particularly clear in the characterization of the community leader Li Jindou in the play.

Nevertheless, no matter how poor and devastated they may be, it is difficult for the Sangshuping villagers to leave the yellow land. *Deathsong of the River* thus elaborates upon how the reverence for the yellow earth has been deposited into the collective unconsciousness of the Chinese:

> Hence in worshipping the soil no other people in the world can match our ancestors for the sincerity, solemnity and depth with which the soil is imprinted in their culture and psychology.
>
> … …
>
> For thousands of years now, Chinese have wrested their food from the earth, facing the yellow soil, with their backs to the sky. The soil is the very root of their existence, a treasure passed from generation to generation, the entire meaning of human life.
>
> Thousands of years of culture are all crystallized in this yellow soil. And so it appears very mysterious, as if it enfolded the heart and soul of the Chinese people. (Su and Wang 120)

Since yellow soil, according to this claim, contains the spirit, mentality, feeling, culture, and the root of existence for the Chinese, it virtually imputes the problems of Chinese society to people's stubborn adherence to the monotonous agricultural way of life. Its description of the yellow earth as both nourishing and restraining parallels *Sangshuping Chronicles*' ambiguous evaluation of the peasant community living on the Loess Plateau.

According to *Deathsong of the River*, since the beliefs and behavior of the landlocked Chinese peasants cannot break away from the land, Chinese agricultural civilization is "a cultural type that is inward-looking and which seeks stability" (Su and Wang 122), refusing adventure and change. *Deathsong of the River* claims that "now the Chinese people have an even deeper and heavier lament: Why has our

feudal age lasted as long as the endless Yellow River floods?" (Su and Wang 184). This direct parallel between China's prolonged feudal era and the frequent disasters brought by the Yellow River negates most part of the Chinese history as devastating the nation. "Movement, migration and trade were all suffocated. The land and dictatorship held the Chinese people in bondage. Over the course of the past several centuries, how could they still understand the meaning of freedom and of trade?" (Su and Wang 132). Such a claim voices the prevalent sentiment of the 1980s that deprecated China's agricultural tradition and feudal system and eulogized the commercial and colonial activities of European industrial, capitalist nations. *Deathsong of the River* also criticizes Confucianism as lying at the root of China's problems:

> Confucian culture may indeed possess all sorts of ancient and perfect "gems of wisdom," yet over these past few thousand years it has been able to create neither a national spirit of initiative, nor a legal order for the state, nor a mechanism for cultural renewal; rather on its path of decline it has created a frightening sort of suicidal mechanism, which repeatedly destroys its own best talent, killing off the living elements within itself, and suffocating one generation after another of the finest flowers of our nation. Though it may possess a thousand-year's treasure hoard of gems, in today's world we may be forced to throw out the gems together with the junk. (Su and Wang 213)

The problem of this total anti-Confucianism is obvious, since it cannot explain why Confucian culture has lasted several millennia and how Confucianism "may possess a thousand-year's treasure hoard of gems" if it could not create or renew itself but only commit suicide or kill its best elements. As Wu Guang, a researcher in the Academy of Social Science of Zhejiang province, points out, until the fifteenth century, China had been in the leading position in world economy, culture, science, and technology. This proves that there are undeniable excellent values in Confucianism, which has sustained the core of Chinese culture. Furthermore, Chinese culture has complex multiple sources and has always been in a developing process. Thus, it is too simplistic and lopsided to equalize Chinese culture with Confucianism, on which is blamed the monopoly, bureaucracy, despotism, and corruption of feudal society (152-5). Since the anti-Confucianism of *Deathsong of the River* reflects the widespread anxiety over China's decline in modern era, its opinion is also expressed by *Sangshuping Chronicles*. The play dramatizes how Confucian ethics has degenerated into empty rituals that suffocate individuals in order to maintain the oppressive patriarchal order and prolong the patriarchal lineage. Thus, the play advocates the incorporation of new blood into the new era so that the nation can regenerate itself.

Besides Confucianism, the play also presents Daoism as having depleted its

positive qualities to nourish peasant life.[74] A Diagram of the Daoist Supreme Ultimate is carved into the round, revolving stage of yellow earth that composes the set. As described in the stage direction, "The yellow earth coils silently like a drawing of the enigmatic Eight Diagrams"[75] (Chen et al. 190). As a symbol of Daoism, an ancient Chinese religion that largely shaped the Chinese view of the world, the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate visually manifests that everything in the universe forms a unified whole, made up of two complementary forces, *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* is the female principle associated with earth, darkness, death, water, reception, endurance, intuition, interiority, coldness, silence, and stillness. *Yang* is the male principle associated with heaven, light, life, fire, aggression, assertion, rationality, exteriority, warmth, noise, and movement. Believing that the soft and the weak eventually overcome the hard and the strong, Daoist philosophy upholds *yin* to be a

[74] Daoism (Taoism) is China's oldest indigenous philosophic-religious tradition that has developed and transformed for over two millennia. As "the spiritual tradition at the root of Chinese civilization" (Blofeld 4), many Daoist beliefs have become folk religion. *Dao* in Chinese means "way," "path," "road," or "method." As summarized by Jeaneane and Merv Fowler, *Tao* is "the Way of all nature, the deep naturalness that pervades all and makes everything such as it is. It is the ultimate Reality that informs all things. … *Tao* is the undifferentiated Void and potentiality that underpins all creation, immutable, unchanging, without form. … *Tao* is that which begins all things. It is their potentiality, the unchanging 'that', which underlies all things as their source, giving impulse, form, life and rhythm to the changing plurality of the cosmos" (100-1).

[75] "The Eight Diagrams consist of an arrangement of single and divided lines in eight groups of three lines each. According to *Book of Changes*, these diagrams symbolize heaven, earth, thunder, wind, water, fire, mountain, and lake" (Chen et al. 190). In this premier performance, the stage is carved like the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate, which is the center of the Eight Diagrams.

more fundamental force than *yang*, and advocates a simple, peaceful, and tranquil life.[76]

Nevertheless, as Jeaneane and Merv Fowler point out, it is "the perfect balance between *yin* and *yang* polarities that enables the self to transcend them in activity" (52), and in real life, "*yang* generally appears to be superior to *yin*" (55). Modern Chinese iconoclastic intellectuals criticize the passivity, weakness, stasis, pettiness, and yielding—the *yin* qualities—that have dominated the Chinese national character and made them content to till the yellow land and remain docile under the exploitation of despotic rulers. The Chinese submit to the will of nature and resign themselves to adversity, instead of violently rebelling, radically transforming, or venturing out into the world to occupy new territory, markets, and resources. The lack of *yang* qualities weakens the ability of the Chinese to transcend the limitation of *yin* qualities—an imbalance that prevents the nation from conducting industrialization, modernization, and colonialism as Western empires. Lin Yutang thus analyzes Chinese people's passive resignation: "It shatters all desire for reform, laughs at the futility of human effort and renders the Chinese people incapable of idealism and action. … This nonchalant and materialistic attitude is based on the

[76] See Fowler's introduction of *yin* and *yang* (47-56). The Daoist priority of *yin* over *yang* can be seen in the following sayings from *Dao De Jing*, the most important Daoist classic by Laozi. "The spirit of the Valley does not die— / This is called: dark femininity. / The gate of dark femininity— / This is called: root of heaven and earth" (Moeller 17). "To keep the weak is called strength" (Moeller 123). "The rigid and great settle below. / the supple and soft, the delicate and the fine settle above" (Moeller 177). "The female overcomes the male / by constant stillness" (Moeller 141). "The soft defeats the hard" (Moeller 181).

very shrewd view of life to which only old people and old nations can attain" (53-4). Lin Yutang's description explains that Chinese passive inaction comes from their recognition that it is useless to take action to stage any reform or pursue any idealistic goal—a mentality that evokes senility.

This lack of *yang* is also reflected in *Sangshuping Chronicles*, in which we see too many people struggle for survival on the limited resources of the yellow land. The incompetence of the male characters and the sacrifice of the female characters show how the depletion of *yang* qualities leads to the devastation of *yin* qualities: Li Fulin is mentally sick and sexually impotent; Yu Wa, who is more cultured than other peasants, is still unable to take the responsibility of saving his sweetheart Caifang, who eventually commits suicide; the maltreatment of Qingnü drives her into mental derangement; Yue Wa ends up being sold off as a child bride, before the indifferent gaze of other villagers. The troublesome and dysfunctional relationship between men and women deprives Sangshuping of its creativity, order, harmony, and fulfillment, making it incapable to regenerate itself by procreating through its descendents.

Sangshuping's decadent life also counters the Daoist idealization of the countryside. As introduced by Lin Yutang, a famous writer of the early twentieth century, in Chinese culture, "the rural mode of life was always regarded as the ideal" (36).

> This rural ideal in art, philosophy and life, so deeply imbedded in the Chinese general consciousness, must account in a large measure for

> the racial health today. … For to be close to nature is to have physical and moral health. Man in the country does not degenerate; only man in the cities does. To scholars and well-to-do families in the cities, persistently the call of the good earth comes. The family letters and instructions of well-known scholars abound in such counsel, and reveal an important aspect of the Chinese civilization, an aspect which subtly but profoundly accounts for its long survival. (Ibid.)

Not only in the idyllic Daoist imagination was rural life immersed in spiritual purity, moral loftiness, physical health, and natural beauty—an ideal alternative and escape from the corruption and artificiality of the urban life, some May Fourth intellectuals also found in the idealist rural world a kind of human nature unbounded by Confucianism (L. Sun, *Warps of Historians* 146). Maoism, inheriting this iconoclastic tradition, subordinated the cities—"the breeding grounds of cultural and ideological corruptions"—to "the countryside as the true repository of social and cultural creativity" (Meisner 298). Countering this tradition of adoring the countryside, *Sangshuping Chronicles* presents the loss of rural paradise by dramatizing peasants as physically sick, spiritually corrupted, and morally degenerate—the depletion of an important sustaining force of Chinese civilization, human nature, and Maoist revolution.

Throughout the play, this turntable of yellow earth frequently revolves, expanding the environmental space, shifting time and location, and visually symbolizing how the cultural, economic, and political systems produced on this land

mysteriously control people's life. This control was manifested in Chinese history in the ultra-stable structure of Chinese society,[77] the monotony of peasant life, the isolation of peasant community, and the prolonged stagnancy of feudal system. This enclosed, self-sufficient, repetitive, and ordered way of life restricted the development, creativity, and autonomy of the individual Chinese. The play conveys this message through making characters always move in the opposite direction of the revolving turntable on stage, manifesting how their life contradicts the way of *Dao*, the operating principle of the universe. As a well-known Chinese idiom goes: "People will prosper if they conform to *Dao*, and die if they contradict *Dao*." The Sangshuping villagers' movement against the flow of the yellow earth turntable symbolizes their countering against *Dao*—"the rhythms of existence, the patterns of nature, the order of the cosmos" (Fowler 102). This dramatic movement conveys a

[77] The theory of Chinese society's ultrastable structure was proposed by Jin Guantao, the Director of the Philosophy of Science in the Research Institute of the Academy of Natural Sciences. Jin "postulates the existence of a regulating mechanism that enables different parts of a given system to achieve a functional equilibrium, which in turn guarantees the stability, hence the survival, of the system in any chaotic environment. … An ultrastable structure is made up of successfully regulated relationships and circulations of functional input and output among three interacting subsystems (*zi xitong*): the economic, political, and cultural. The persistent capacity of Chinese society to dissolve subversive forces gives rise to the proposition of ultrastability. … According to his model, it is the Confucian *zongfa* (clan-centered) system that consolidates the integrative capacity (*yitihua*) of the empire-state. Thus it is the complicity of the subsystems of the cultural with the political that prevents China from struggling free of the backward ideology characteristic of the small peasants' mode of production" (J. Wang 59). This theory had wide currency among the intellectual circle during the 1980s and was propagated by *Deathsong of the River* as well.

message about the difficulty, adversity, and tragic death imbedded in the ways of Sangshuping.

Among the ancient weathered rocks on the revolving stage there are a few battered Buddha statues. Since Buddhism is one of the three major components of Chinese culture, constructing it as part of the set provokes an examination of the role of Buddhism in people's lives. As the dilapidated state of the Buddhist sculptures suggests, the benevolence, tolerance, generosity, transcendence, spontaneity, imagination, and creativity as advocated by Buddhism are dramatized as having been replaced by totally opposite practices at Sangshuping. As *Deathsong of the River* declares, the Tang dynasty's designation of Buddhism, a religion from India, as the state religion signified the confidence, openness, freedom, and diversity of this most prosperous and creative dynasty in Chinese history. As a contrast, the decadent periods in Chinese history were all characterized by the governments' rejection of unorthodox opinion, restriction of people's knowledge, enforcement of uniformity, and annihilation of individualism (Su and Wang 141-5). These practices described by *Deathsong of the River* as enforced in decadent periods of Chinese history also characterize the Sangshuping village dramatized in this play, where people ruthlessly sacrifice women, outsiders, and divergent behavior in order to maintain the patriarchal order. Although Sangshuping is located near the historical site of the capital of Tang, and although the Sangshuping family clan shares the same surname—Li—with the imperial family of Tang, they have lost the excellent heritage of their glorious ancestors. Thus, through the contrast between Buddhist teachings

and Sangshuping's way of life, the play emphasizes the degradation of Chinese culture and community.

The paradoxical function of Chinese tradition is also conveyed through "an unfathomable old well left behind from the Tang dynasty" (Chen et al. 190), which mirrors the yellow turntable at a distance on the right. Due to the extreme aridity and barrenness of the Loess Plateau, water becomes the most precious source of life. A famous Fifth-Generation film, *Old Well*, dramatizes peasants' tragic, heroic search for water in northern China, a search that epitomizes the Chinese nation's struggle to survive and improve their lives under most severe circumstances.[78] *Deathsong of the River* also argues, "Over the past several thousand years, the thirst for water has given the Chinese people the strength to survive. To this day, this mysterious fate still hangs over draught-stricken north China" (Su and Wang 107). Because of this historical background, the old well in Sangshuping, "left by His Majesty the first emperor of the Tang" (Chen et al. 217), should be construed as a blessing bestowed

[78] *Old Well* was produced by Xi'an Film Studio in 1986, directed by the head of the Studio—Wu Tianming. Wu is one of the best known Chinese film directors who brought revolutionary changes to Chinese cinema in the 1980s. The film script was written by Zheng Yi, based on his own novel of the same name, and was translated by Yu Shiaoling and collected into *Theater and Society: an Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Drama*. The film dramatizes the long and difficult process for the Old Well villagers to find water. Located in deep mountains in northern China, generations of the villagers have dug 270 dry wells and lost many lives, not able to find water on their land. Sun Wangquan, a youth from a poor family in the village and was educated in the city, is determined to find water for the villagers. He goes to the county to attend a class and uses what he has learned to find the correct place to dig a well. In order to buy a wife for his younger brother, Sun Wangquan has to marry a young widow, sacrificing his love for a young girl. Under his leadership, the villagers finally dig a well and find water in 1983.

by history. The play dramatizes how villagers draw water from the well, in order to show them as still nurtured by the historical legacies of their ancestors. However, the well's depth and immobility at the same time indicate tradition's engulfing power and monolithic stability.

The well's ambiguous function is expressed through the folk song in the play:

> The well on the hilltop,
>
> From our ancestors we got,
>
> How deep is the well, you want to know?
>
> A good fifty meters you'll have to go. (Chen et al. 217-8)

This folk song vividly describes the huge sacrifice people must pay in benefitting from tradition—epitomized by Caifang's committing suicide in the well at the end of the play. Caifang is the only woman at Sangshuping who dares to rebel against social customs and patriarchal rule to pursue free love. Her repeating the same tragedy of numerous Chinese women conveys the message that the ghost of the feudal past still haunts people's lives during the radical Cultural Revolution, which advocated the eradication of the old world to establish a brand-new socialist society. As symbolized by their dependence on water from the well, the Sangshuping villagers' inability to break out of the restriction of deep tradition comes from their necessity to make a living under the extremely difficult circumstances.

B. Chinese History: A Cannibalistic Feast

This negative evaluation of Chinese historical heritage has dominated the

Chinese intellectual discourse since the May Fourth movement of 1919.[79] Lu Xun, a representative May Fourth intellectual, uses cannibalism as a trope to severely criticize the inhumanity, injustice, corruption, and backwardness imbedded in Chinese history, which he defines as a cannibalistic feast and a sadomasochistic process in which the victims in turn become victimizers by persecuting the weak. "China's past has been a cannibalistic feast; there are those who have eaten others and those who have been eaten by others; those who are being eaten have eaten people before; those who are now eating people will also be eaten one day" (Lu 454; vol. 3). Lu Xun's definition of Chinese history as human-eating, while having a huge impact on modern Chinese intellectual discourse, also guided the creation of this play. Director Xu explains that his "seed of image" for directing this play is "rounding up and hunting" ("Reflection" 30).[80]

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[79] May Fourth movement refers to the cultural upheaval that spread throughout China after the student demonstrations that took place in Beijing on May 4, 1919 to protest against China's signing of the Versailles Treaty. As Peter Zarrow summarizes, "The May Fourth movement is inextricably associated with political, social, and cultural liberation. Heir to the New Culture movement, it has stood for such conflicting zeitgeists as the rise of communism, the heyday of liberalism, rationality and modernity, science and democracy, national unity, the awakening of young China, labor, and the rejection of tradition. Patriotism, individualism, egalitarianism, and feminism were its watchwords" (149).

[80] Director Xu thus defines "seed of image": "Seed of image (also called summarized image, comprehensive image, or overall image of a performance) is a thematic message conveyed through images in performance. It is a symbolic image that summarizes the theme, a seed that produces various kinds of concrete images in the whole performance" (qtd. in Wang X. 129). The concept of "seed of image" was first seen in the works of Stanislavsky, whose system Xu was trained in for five years in the former Soviet Union. Xu's "seed of image" is presented on stage through the actors' performances (Wang X. 283-4).

> Within the net laid by the hunter, a group of blind beasts are rounding up and hunting some little beasts and each other as well. "Sangshuping" is a hunting field laid with net. Based upon thousands of years of backward natural economy, feudal society has precipitated certain cultural psychology, including the concept of the patriarchal clan, dehumanizing feudal ethics such as mercenary marriage, as well as narrow, conservative, and enclosed mentality. They are killing and harming the living creatures. … This is what spoken drama *Sangshuping Chronicles* provides the audience to reflect upon. (Ibid.)

Xu's directing concept of "rounding up and hunting" is an archetypal image that underlies all economic, political, cultural, and social activities at Sangshuping, manifesting itself in various formalities throughout the play. As analyzed by Ma Ye, a Chinese theater critic, this "rounding up and hunting" is enacted by feudalism to people, by stupidity to civilization, by savageness to kindness, by animal nature to human nature, by bureaucrats to the masses, by people to people. We can interpret the whole play as a ritual of "rounding up and hunting" (172). This ritual is dramatized through Sangshuping villagers' falling victims to the primitive, savage, feudalistic, and coercive forces, at the same time victimizing others in order to survive. Presenting this primordial life-and-death survival struggle as dominating the heartland of this ancient nation, the play undermines the claim about China's five-thousand-year history of civilization.

While Confucianism has played a crucial role in sustaining the Chinese civilization, many modern Chinese intellectuals criticize Confucian moral principles as empty rituals serving to preserve the oppressive feudal hierarchy. Actually, the Confucian term *li*—the rules of propriety that govern feudal officials' conduct—means "rites," "ritual," and "ceremony," signifying its performative function.[81] This habitual performance of moral codes is exemplified by the behavior of Li Jindou, the leader of the Sangshuping production team, who displays both "dove-like gentleness and serpent-like wisdom" (Lin 56)—the two attributes described by Lin Yutang as "the most striking quality of the Chinese people" (52). Director Xu describes Li Jindou as "a representative of Chinese feudal cultural mentality" ("Transformation" 14). Li Jindou's cultural mentality as a feudal patriarch makes him both take good care of the villagers' livelihood, at the same time take the lead in sacrificing women and outsiders in order to ensure the continuity of the patriarchal clan.

In order to criticize Li Jindou's resorting to Confucian moral codes to seek self-interest, director Xu asks Li Jindou's performer Cui Jingfu not to just pour out his emotions on stage, but to convey a distinctive attitude towards the character,

[81] *Li* started from Zhou (Chou) dynasty (1045 B.C. – 256 B.C.). "*Li* prescribed the rules of propriety which the feudal aristocracy of the Chou era was expected to observe. It served the Chou rulers as a political device both to raise the prestige of the Son of Heaven and to keep the nobles in line" (Callis 108). Later collected in China's earliest classics, these "records laid down the fundamental rights and duties of China's feudal nobility and had a function not unlike that of a constitution in modern times. Besides, they served to inculcate proper conduct and political discipline. The ceremonial feature of the Chou dynasty was so prominent that China's historians pointed to ornament and ceremony as the chief characteristic of the Chou era" (Ibid.).

either explicitly or implicitly.[82] When Li Jindou pleads with cadres to lower their harvest estimation in Act One, Scene One, Li behaves like a piteous bird, showing great respect to the authorities and asking for their benevolence. After being refused and beaten by them, he sits on ground and sobs miserably like a child. At the same time, he does not forget to tactfully take advantage of an urban youth Zhu Xiaoping to fight with the cadres. In directing this scene, director Xu asked actor Cui Jingfu to perform Li Jindou with an admiring attitude towards his ingenious and circuitous way of doing things. When Li Jindou forbids his widowed daughter-in-law Xu Caifang to marry anyone other than his own disabled son, he also presents himself to the villagers as a pitiful victim of Caifang's filial impiety. Director Xu asked actor Cui Jingfu to convey Li Jindou's nauseating shamelessness and perverseness. When near the end of the play Li Jindou requires Caifang to marry his disabled son right that night, director Xu asks actor Cui Jingfu to say such a monologue in mind: "Look, Li Jindou has already become a fierce tiger that swallows a lamb!" (Xu X. "Transformation" 15; "A Report" 111). Here, director Xu utilizes Brecht's alienation effect in acting, which requires the actor to reject complete conversion, to keep a critical distance with his role and observe his own acting (Brecht 91-9). This alienation effect highlights the theatricality of morality in traditional Chinese community—with theatricality referring to "an excessive quality that is showy,

[82] Cui Jingfu is a famous theater and film actor. Born in 1951, he graduated from the 1986 Advanced Program for Experienced Actors held by the Acting Department of The Centural Academy of Drama. He has won many awards, including a special award from the Ministry of Culture for his performance of Li Jindou in *Sangshuping Chronicles*.

deceptive, exaggerated, artificial, or affected," that "simultaneously conceals or masks an inner emptiness, a deficiency or absence of that to which it refers" (Postlewait and Davis 5). The excessive Confucian ethical codes utilized by Li Jindou—reverence to authority, submission, benevolence, and filial piety—to gain self-interest reveal their showy, exaggerated, artificial, deceptive, and empty nature.

Modern Confucian scholar Liang Shuming blames extreme poverty as a reason why the Chinese fail to actualize their moral ideal of benevolence: "In reality, since China never had the material foundation to actualize this ideal, 'benevolence' has ossified into rituals and codes of behavior. The Chinese, as individuals, chafe under their oppressive demands, and the concept of the self is stifled" (L. Sun, *The Chinese National Character* 90). Wang Zhaoshi, another May Fourth intellectual, elaborates upon how famines deepened the selfish and egotistic tendency of the Chinese, because only those who refused to share food with others or were cruel enough to sell their own daughters had a better opportunity to survive (14-6). These scholars' opinions are echoed by *Sangshuping Chronicles*, which dramatizes how extreme poverty leaves the Sangshuping villagers with no other choice but to ruthlessly sacrifice the weaker in order to preserve themselves or to prolong the patriarchal lineage.

The play begins with a collective ritual of "rounding up and hunting" (Xu X. "Reflection" 30), which sets the tone for the struggle for physical survival at Sangshuping. At the onset of an untimely storm that threatens to ruin the ripening

grains, Li Jindou runs onto the stage, violently beating a gong to call for the villagers to perform a rain ritual to drive the black clouds away.

> (*VILLAGERS of Sangshuping hurry to join him, clanging gongs, drums, and various utensils. Raising their faces toward the sky, they bellow at the top of their lungs*.)
>
> VILLAGERS: (*Shouting*)
>
> Black Dragon, Black Dragon, move on,
>
> In the south you can drop down.
>
> (*Someone sets a beat; the clamor becomes more rhythmical*.)

At the invocation of Sangshuping villagers,

> (*VILLAGERS from the neighboring village of Chenjiayuan* [to the south of Sangshuping] *rush onto the stage from the other side, beating gongs and drums and whatever they can find. Cursing those from Sangshuping, they begin to yell*.)
>
> NEIGHBORING VILLAGERS: (*Shouting back to their neighbors*)
>
> Black Dragon, Black Dragon, stay
>
> In the north you can play.
>
> (*Finding a cadence, their shouting also becomes more orderly*.)
>
> (Chen et al. 191)

Soon these two groups of neighboring villagers begin to rhythmically curse each other. The curses typically include what Lu Xun sarcastically refers to as the "national curse"—which targets not the adversary, but the mother of the adversary—

an instance of victimizing the weakest. Since collective rain ritual should be a primordial religious activity to ask for blessings from heaven, its continued practice in Sangshuping with a totally opposite goal—to ask for heaven to bring disaster to neighbors—showcases the degeneracy of the ancestral heritage.

While manifesting the peasants' superstition and incompetence when faced with adverse forces, this opening scene of primitive survival struggle summarizes their activities throughout the play. As historian Chen Guyuan points out, since the traditional Chinese prioritized the clan over the individual and the country, it was common practice to victimize other clans in order to benefit their own, at the cost of neglecting the well-being of the whole society (63). While this victimization of other clans was necessitated by extremely scarce resources for daily survival, it did not develop a sense of social responsibility, unbiased moral justice, inviolable individual rights, or broad love for humanity. As dramatized in *Sangshuping Chronicles*, the clan leader Li Jindou has undisputable authority and legislative power, and the clan members can only conform to the rules and safeguard the interest of the clan, without sympathy for people outside the clan.

Besides the clan, the play also dramatizes how families suffocate individual autonomy. Lin Yutang thus summarizes the strong sense of family of the traditional Chinese:

> Among the cultural forces making for racial stability must be counted first of all the Chinese family system, which was so well-defined and organized as to make it impossible for a man to forget where his

> lineage belonged. This form of social immortality, which the Chinese prize above all earthly possessions, has something of the character of a religion, which is enhanced by the ritual of ancestor worship, and the consciousness of it has penetrated deep into the Chinese soul. (34)

While Lin Yutang praises "such a well-organized and religiously conceived family system" (Ibid.) as contributing to racial stability, this play dramatizes how the elder generation of the family has the authority and responsibility to arrange the lives of their children, who have no independence or autonomy to lead their own lives but to obey the elderly, even to sacrifice themselves in order to fulfill their duties to the family.

Within the family, women are always sacrificed for the interest of men. When the 12-year-old girl Yue Wa is arranged by her parents and the clan leader Li Jindou to be sold off as a child bride so that her brother Li Fulin can buy a wife, the whole village comes to see her off.[83] Although cognizant of what kind of tragic life is waiting for the girl, the villagers, surrounding the innocent Yue Wa, all comfort her with sweet words, as if it were a fortunate event. Though the villagers follow the

[83] Li Jindou euphemizes Yue Wa's being sold off as a child bride as "giv[ing] her up to a family as an adopted daughter" (Chen et al. 226). This type of minor marriage was usually called taking a "little foster daughter-in-law." Under minor marriage, a girl was sold to her future husband's family at a very early age, raised up by her "in-laws" and then became the wife of her "foster brother" after acquiring physical maturity. The husband's family gains some advantages in this type of marriage and could treat the "little foster daughter-in-law" like slaves (Johnson 12-3). In this play, not only Yue Wa is a victim of this type of marriage, but Caifang was previously taken as a "little foster daughter-in-law" by Li Jindou when she was 12, and after her first husband—Li Jindou's eldest son—died, Li Jindou readopted her as his daughter, intending to remarry her to his disabled second son (Chen et al. 216-7).

Confucian ethical codes of maintaining the harmony within the community, their conscious role-playing only highlights their hypocrisy and affectation, as well as the emptiness, deceptiveness, and artificiality of these ossified rituals. In order to reveal the theatricality of their behavior, director Xu asks actors to speak such a disturbing monologue in mind: "Audience, look, there are both masses and cadres here. Some of them are even CCP members. But these impudent logics are expressed by them so beautifully!" ("Transformation" 15) Conveying the actors' critical attitude towards the characters highlights the villagers' insincerity in performing these ethical codes, making the audience unsympathetic but critical of these hypocritical villagers.

Besides Yue Wa's mother, the only person who feels heartbreaking agony over Yue Wa's tragic future is her 28-year-old brother Li Fulin, whose mental maladjustment makes him an immature child unable to behave like an adult. Right after Yue Wa is led away on her journey, Fulin rushes out from darkness, running madly all over the rotating stage to desperately search for his sister. The stage's rotation highlights Fulin's restlessness and anxiety. While Fulin's frantic action on the turntable expresses the profound sadness of the people living on the Loess Plateau, next to the turntable calmly stands a group of villagers who are physically strong and mentally sane. In opposition to their active participation in coaxing Yue Wa just moments ago, they now choose to dissociate themselves from desperate Fulin to remain detached spectators. Standing there motionless like stone, they stare blankly into the void, unmoved by Fulin's lament and pleading. Their indifference not only manifests their familiarity with such tragedies, but also their passive

resignation to the principle of existence at Sangshuping. Their "shrewd wisdom" is validated later in the play when Li Fulin's agony over losing his sister leads to his maltreatment of his wife Chen Qingnü—who is bought with the same bride money earned from selling Yue Wa—and his failure to consummate his marriage. These paradoxes more powerfully present the Sangshuping villagers as helpless victims of their circumstances.

Nevertheless, the Sangshuping villagers' passive resignation to adversity produces a morbid psychology that releases their frustration in a distorted manner—through inflicting humiliation upon others for diversion. Knowing that Li Fulin fails to have sex with his wife Chen Qingnü, several village men round up the mentally retarded Fulin, challenging him to demonstrate his ownership of Qingnü. When the terrified Qingnü tries to escape, the villagers round her up, like a group of beasts closing in on a hunted prey. When Fulin tears off Qingnü's pants, the villagers congregate in a close circle to feast on the humiliating spectacle. This scene echoes Lu Xun's description of the pathetic Chinese masses that enjoy gathering together to appreciate atrocity inflicted upon another Chinese.

Believing that the victim-victimization cycle is the aberrant manifestation of the distorted human nature, Lu Xun explains that the reason for the subjects of tyrants to derive sado-masochistic pleasure from watching public executions is because the subjects of tyrants are crueler than their masters. They enjoy watching cruelty-in-action and the suffering of others as entertainment, pastime, and compensation (366; vol. 1). Lu Xun's criticism can be used to explain the

Sangshuping villagers' behavior in this scene. Since they are accustomed to enduring all kinds of oppression, they are entranced at watching suffering inflicted upon another victim in order to compensate for their own sense of being wronged. Their "communal act of viewing" (Davis 130) makes them disengaged spectators neither granting sympathy to the persecuted nor taking action to transform the community. As Lu Xun criticizes, "The Masses, especially in China, are always spectators at a drama. If the victim on the stage acts heroically, they are watching a tragedy; if he shivers and shakes they are watching a comedy. … There is nothing you can do with such people; the only way to save them is to give them no drama to watch" (91-2; vol. 2). By remaining unsympathetic and inactive, the spectators also turn themselves into performers who are antagonistic to the victims they are viewing. Deriving cruel pleasure from watching others suffer, when there is no such drama to watch, they can create one. This is why the Sangshuping villagers encourage Li Fulin to demonstrate his ownership of Qingnü in public, taking advantage of the fact that Fulin is mentally deranged and sexually maniac. Their urge to see sex performed in public abnormally releases their sexual desire suppressed in daily life.

But, director Xu was unwilling to present the Sangshuping villagers as totally ruthless persecutors. Instead, he staged a surrealistic scene to transform them into transcendent signs that symbolize whatever remaining conscience there is at Sangshuping. Right after Li Fulin displays the pants he ripped off of Qingnü, declaring, "She's my woman. I bought her, exchanged my sister for her," the thematic music starts playing and the light darkens (Chen et al. 240). The villagers

surrounding Qingnü transform themselves into chorus members and gradually scatter. As described in the play script, "Unexpectedly, a broken but spotless white statue of an ancient maiden comes into view, representing time immemorial and all the women sacrificed over the centuries" (Chen et al. 240). The broken, spotless white statue is meant to be a metonymic visual signifier of women's innocence, contribution, and sacrifice throughout history. Then, "XU CAIFANG solemnly and respectfully covers the statue with a piece of yellow silk. The chorus follows the girl and kneels down around the statue" (Chen et al. 240).

Transforming the Sangshuping villagers from ignorant, cold-hearted crowd into conscience-stricken sympathizers reflects only the kindness of the play's creators, not of the villagers. The critics of the 1980s viewed this scene as one of the play's blemishes. Wang Xiaoying, a theater director and doctoral student of Xu's, commented that Xu's imposition of his subjective emotions upon this scene weakens the play's objective examination of the tragic destiny of the Chinese nation: "It draws the emotion of the audience from being shocked by those savage, ignorant behaviors towards feeling love and sympathy for Qingnü. If they are shocked by 'ugliness,' the play's examination of the destiny of the nation could be deepened. However, here this tragic sense is interrupted and covered by a strong sense of 'beauty'" (292). Wang's comments represent the opinions of many critics at the time who criticized Xu's intention to euphemize historical atrocity.

Euphemism is a dramaturgical technique that characterizes all genres of Chinese music drama, which always ends with a "round," or happy, ending in order

to avoid a direct confrontation with tragedy. Ban Wang writes about how Hu Shi, a well-known early-twentieth-century intellectual, criticizes the lack of tragic consciousness in Chinese theater, fiction, and poetry.

> The Chinese have a deeply entrenched belief in things completed in happiness – the myth of roundness or roundism. The theatrical convention abounds in scenes of this happy roundness. The most common is the ritualistic appearance of a young couple happily married at the end of the play, who make a bow to the audience, so that everybody may walk away contented. Fiction and poetry also brim with similar absurdities of roundism. … Significantly, this wish fulfillment has shaped the Chinese view of history in general and past carnages in particular. (69-70)

In light of Hu's criticism, we can see that *Sangshuping Chronicles* is situated halfway between the euphemism of classical Chinese theater and the tragic vision of Western theater. While smoothing over the brutality of history in several scenes, the play also presents history as full of tragic catastrophes. Thus, the creators of this play on the one hand broke away from the habitual cultural mentality, on the other hand proved how culture transmitted from the past still played an important role in shaping people's view of history. Xu Xiaozhong, an outstanding theater artist of the 1980s, seems to be unable to completely escape from the restriction of Chinese culture he himself condemns throughout this play.

Nevertheless, although this criticism of Xu's euphemism is valid to a certain degree, we cannot ignore the subversive power imbedded within Chinese theatrical aesthetics. As Haiping Yan argues, "Chinese music-drama focuses on the 'human feelings' in tension with social scripts' normative legibility. … [T]he phrase 'moving the people' (*gandongren*) both stipulates the aesthetic goal for Chinese drama and pinpoints the sources of ethical renewal, since 'moving' always begets possibilities (though not necessarily achieving change). Chinese music-dramas are organized and operate as 'spheres of feelings'" (76-7). These "spheres of feelings" (Yan 77) are the "living sites of theatricality in Chinese performing art" (Yan 86). Seen in Yan's argument, by building up powerful emotions through passionate music, grave movement, poetic image, dimmed light, and reverent atmosphere, this scene aims to arouse strong, indignant feelings from the chorus members and the audience towards the society's normative legitimacy of injustice and persecution of women. Director Xu explains his intention for this scene: "At this moment, my heart was saying: People, lower your heads and look at the origins of our nation – mother and earth. When the lights dim, the people kneeling on the ground are moving away as if into infinity as the turntable gradually rotates. Analogously, I hoped the spectators' conception of the play would also gradually expand" ("A Report" 110). By moving people into strong feelings, director Xu wants to stimulate them to think and reflect on a level that concerns the entire national history, not just the tragedy of a single woman, so that they can carry out fundamental reform to change the society.

Director Xu explicitly expresses his intention to learn from Chinese traditional theatrical technique of breaking realistic illusion and building up subjective reality and poetic imagery in order to stimulate the audience's emotional participation and rational thinking. Trying to make the theater "more powerful philosophically," Xu "hoped to stimulate the spectators' thinking by keeping their attention and empathy very close to the characters" ("A Report" 108). Xu's method parallels Yan's analysis of classical Chinese theater: "In the moments when a disjunction between characters' behavior and ideal behavior becomes apparent to an audience," Confucian philosophy is conveyed "not through the culmination of discursive argument and alienation but rather through the heightening of emotional feelings in both the acting and the spectator" (Postlewait and Davis 35-6). Inheriting this theatrical technique, this scene builds up emotional power just to achieve its purpose to transform ethical behavior in society.

If Qingnü's gentleness, obedience, and desire to become a mother follow the Confucian ethical codes for women, her tragic destiny, despite her conformance to her designated role, utters a powerful denunciation of the mechanism of gendered violence imbedded within the Chinese community. By transforming the Sangshuping villagers into enlightened chorus members who conscientiously pay reverence for "a representative of the countless Chinese women that have been brutally damaged and insulted by feudalistic ignorance" (Xu X., "A Report" 109), the play highlights the sharp contrast between the ideal behavior and the Sangshuping villagers' actual behavior. Through this disjuncture, the Confucian ethical codes are condemned and

subverted, and a modern ethics is constructed. This ethical transformation is achieved through the powerful theatrical effects produced by expressive aesthetic methods. Xu's purpose to stimulate the audience's thought and action echoes the didactic function of Brechtian theater, which, like Chinese classical theater, has a "tradition of ethicalized aesthetics, or theatricalized ethics" (Yan 75). Thus, this play's successful utilization of these theatrical techniques proves it a product of dialectically integrating the traditional and the modern, the Chinese and the Western.

C. The Cultural Revolution: A Theatrical World

Dramatizing the peasants' tragic existence under feudalistic legacies proves the necessity to stage a widespread revolution to fundamentally transform Chinese society. However, the play is set around 1968-1969, when the Cultural Revolution was at its peak—in the sense of reconstructing China's political system, including establishing revolutionary committees at the local level and reelecting the CCP's central committee. Nonetheless, the play dramatizes this "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution," which declares war on the old world to build a revolutionized new world, as totally unable to eradicate the feudal legacies that have suffocated the Sangshuping villagers. Like a theatrical world, the Cultural Revolution is characterized by a huge discrepancy between what is performed on the national stage—the social symbolic order—and what happens off stage—the social reality.

As a continuation of the CCP revolution, the ultimate purpose of the Cultural Revolution was to bring widespread prosperity and equality to the people: "The Communist revolution, though inspired by Marxism-Leninism, should be understood

as a third world peasant rebellion motivated by fundamental economic destitution. The path to fulfillment is forged around a metaphorical transformation of Lu Xun's human-eating old society into a futuristic carnival of socialism" (Yue 5). As Yue has noted quite correctly, Lu Xun's trope of traditional Chinese society as a cannibalistic feast is a communist revolution catchword meant to invigorate the oppressed masses' revolutionary spirit to smash the exploitative old world, to "free themselves of that devouring system and transform it into egalitarian revelry" (2). However, paradoxically "the revolutionary struggle was not a civic banquet; the masses had to be prepared to tighten their belts, swallow bitterness, and sacrifice their flesh and blood. Tragically, the utopian carnival fell through the broken iron rice bowl, as the 'big pot of socialism' became too depleted to sustain the belly for the promised feast yet to come" (Ibid.). The tragic irony described by Gang Yue parallels the Sangshuping community dramatized in this play. While the Sangshuping villagers are organized into a production brigade that resembles an "iron rice bowl"—in the sense of collective ownership of production means, collective labor, and equal distribution of food—the continued material and spiritual poverty, social inequality, moral injustice, and physical violence show the CCP's failure to build a revelry and banquet enjoyed equally and civilly.

During the 1980s, it was widely recognized that a major failure of the Cultural Revolution was Mao's attempt to surpass the capitalist stage of social development, which was regarded by Marx as a prerequisite to produce the material wealth necessary for communist society. Believing that the peasants' political

consciousness and revolutionary enthusiasm can boost economic production, Mao strove to make China leap into communism through radical revolutionary means. The centralized, hierarchical bureaucratic structure that infiltrated all spaces of society—a bureaucratic structure described by Arif Dirlik as "in organizational terms … quite modern" (82)—exerted a coercive, highly organized control over social production and distribution. As dramatized in the play, the state's unreasonably high quota set for the production team and the centralized distribution of agricultural products deepen the poverty of peasants, exemplifying the huge gap between theory and practice, intention and result, policy-maker and laboring masses, during the Cultural Revolution. Extreme poverty, declared by Mao as an advantage for people to stage revolution, is presented in this play as the biggest obstacle to achieving communist ideals.

Heather Phillips explains the extreme poverty presented in this play as resulting from the "poor crop planning in the 1960s":

> As part of a national plan to increase domestic grain production, the Chinese government "encouraged" farmers in the northwest to exchange their regular crops for grain, which does not produce root systems stable enough to protect the fragile loess topsoil from rain and wind. In the 1960s and 1970s, this policy plunged the inhabitants

of the plateau into extreme poverty, from which 81 million people living on the plateau still suffer today. (140)[84]

Phillips's information explains how the unified state order's prioritization of the public over the private, the collective over the individual, produced unreasonable state policies that deepened the devastation of the area. This play vividly presents this conflict between the state and the peasants in Act One, Scene One, when local cadres come to estimate Sangshuping production team's yield for the year.

After being well fed at the production team's table, five cadres estimate high yields of Sangshuping's grain this year, thus set a high quota for the production team to deliver to the state. Struggling like a preyed victim, team leader Li Jindou tries his best to argue with the cadres, piteously pleading with them to lower the estimate. However, his argument and plea only invite abuse and humiliation.

DIRECTOR LIU: Li Jindou, watch your mouth. Don't you know what situation we're in?

LI JINDOU: I know, I know! The whole country is flourishing!

DIRECTOR LIU: The situation's not just great. It's fantastic. Therefore, we poor and lower-middle peasants should make greater contributions.

LI JINDOU: Yeah, yeah. We should make contributions. We should offer our souls …

[84] Heather Phillips's information comes from Zhang Wei, *China's Poor Region: Rural-Urban Migration, Poverty, Economic Reform and Urbanization*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003. 57.

DIRECTOR LIU: So, what's there to talk about? Let's go.

LI JINDOU: My dear leaders, please. Every year at this time, you overestimate. Two hundred or three hundred, it's easy for you to say. But after the harvest, there is "loyalty grain" and there is "devotion grain" to be delivered to the state. What's there left for us peasants? (*Getting more and more agitated.*) The little ones must be fed and the grown-ups have to eat to work the fields. All these years we've heard that the situation is getting better. (*He seems to be losing his self-control*.) Well, it's getting better all right. But after working our butts off for a year, we peasants don't even have a slice of white bread on our table. How do you expect us to live?

(*Everyone is shocked*.)

DIRECTOR LIU: (*Loudly*) Li Jindou!

(LIU *throws the hot tea in his cup at* LI JINDOU.)

CADRES: Jindou, how dare you!

(Li *is shaken*.) (Chen et al. 195-6)

This dialogue presents the politicization of economic issue, as well as the huge discrepancy between the over-inflated official discourse and the actual lives of peasants. Ignoring the villagers' stark poverty and profound misery, Director Liu's declaration of the situation as "flourishing" and "fantastic" is darkly ironic and ridiculously hypocritical. As Hayden White argues, "The aim of the Ironic statement

is to affirm tacitly the negative of what is on the literal level affirmed positively" (37). Dramatizing the characters' pretentious echoing of the glorious social symbolic order does not verify its truth, but reveals its empty and ritualistic nature, just like the Confucian ethical codes practiced at Sangshuping. Li Zehou, an influential Chinese scholar in the 1980s, argues that Chinese orthodox cultural tradition always prioritizes the public over the private, righteousness over interest, heavenly principle over humanly desire. This tradition reappeared during the Cultural Revolution in the name of proletarian revolutionary consciousness and lofty communist ideals (195). The state's requirement for peasants to "make greater contributions," to "offer our souls," and to deliver "loyalty grain" and "devotion grain" in this scene shows the state's definition of individual human beings as cogs that maintain the operation of the big socialist machine.

The play's negation of the political regime of the Cultural Revolution is also reflected in its presentation of the swashbuckling, despotic cadres in an exaggerated, stereotypical manner. Sitting on Li Jindou's back and spurring him as if he were a horse, the abusing cadres are not different from the evil feudal rulers caricatured in Chinese classical theater and the villainous KMT officials stereotyped in Maoist works. The leading cadre, Director Liu, wears a green suit that resembles the uniform of the People's Liberation Army, with a Chairman Mao badge pinned to his chest. His suit and badge inscribe a correct political meaning of bringing liberation and benefit to the people, the opposite of his actual behavior, thus signifying the exaggerated theatricality of the time. Plump and high-spirited, forming a sharp

contrast with the haggard, gloomy villagers, Director Liu has an over-white face that resembles the white-face stereotype in classical Chinese theater. Since this stereotype signifies treachery and evil, this cultural reference implies Director Liu as no better and the Cultural Revolution as just repeating another cycle of Chinese history.

Ignoring the peasants' protest, the coercive cadres undermine the Cultural Revolution's nominal goal to be "a war against bureaucratic privilege and oppression" to safeguard "the principles of popular democracy" (Meisner 293). As Meisner writes, "For Mao, bureaucracy had always been among the greatest evils … a principal source of social vices and inequities" (258). Advocating the masses to eliminate the corrupted and privileged bureaucrats, Mao aimed to establish a management system run by the people and for the people—paradoxically, with the condition of consolidating his own centralized power and diffusing the power of his political rivals such as Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping. If Mao, "the great steersman," could not avoid this paradox, then it was no wonder that governmental organizations at various levels failed to fulfill the Cultural Revolution's theme of "modernization without impersonal bureaucratization" (White and Law 19).

In this play, Director Liu complains that he has to estimate high yields of Sangshuping's grain exactly because of the incredibly high quota set from the above (Chen et al. 196). This way, the highly organized socialist system reinforces the bureaucratic function in traditional China "where a well-defined elite of scholar-bureaucrat-landlords dominated not only political but economic and cultural life. … A socialist system, with ultimate faith in the rationality of the human mind,

substitutes allegedly chaotic market control with decisions consciously made by the political elite located in a hierarchically constructed organizational setting" (Lee, *From Revolutionary Cadres to Party Technocrats* 6). Lee's argument points to the similarities between China's political tradition and socialist system—both relied on the decisions made by the political elite instead of the spontaneous market control, thus could not avoid the bureaucratic machine that Mao intended to smash through his political campaigns. The ghost of China's political past was deeply imbedded in this yellow land, making the birth of a new system virtually impossible.

Hong Yun Lee explains why the cadres' unchallenged authority was reinforced by the political structure set up since the founding of the People's Republic of China, which aimed to bring liberation, justice, and democracy to the people.

> Although local cadres were held accountable to the upper echelon, the mechanisms needed for ordinary members of the unit to supervise their leading cadres have been nonexistent or extremely weak. Mass participation in political campaigns, leadership participation in labor, and criticism and self-criticism have become formalized rituals and empty rhetoric without much impact on the operation of the overall system. (*From Revolutionary Cadres to Party Technocrats* 7-8)

Lee's description of the ordinary masses' inability to supervise their cadres is reflected in this play in the Sangshuping villagers' failure to obtain justice and support from cadres. If Mao's belief in the role of ideology in determining people's

behavior models itself on the Confucian way of cultivating people's morality, rather than relying on a well-developed legal system, then it is no wonder that Mao's political principle of making cadres representative of the people also becomes empty rituals like Confucian ethics. When farmhand Yu Wa wants to sue Li Jindou for his tyrannous rule, Caifang tells him: "I'm just afraid you'll never be able to bring up the matter" (Chen et al. 223). Likewise, Qingnü's pleading for a divorce is also refused by higher-ups. These episodes present the ubiquitous bureaucratic machine operating the Cultural Revolution as uncaring for the need of the people.

The cadres' injury of peasant life is symbolized by the dramatic episode in which they order Sangshuping's farming ox "Harelip" for their dinner to celebrate the establishment of the communal revolutionary committee—an organ of self-government to replace the old ruling structure. From the food already ensured for their dinner, "pigs, lambs, poultry, eggs, dried fruit, and whatnot" (Chen et al. 254), we can see how the poverty-ridden peasants are obliged to provide the cadres with the best food they have in order to win their favor. Brigade secretary Liu Changgui complains that the communal headquarter demand the ox to be sent to them without bothering to pay for it. When Li Jindou protests that "to kill a farm animal is illegal," secretary Liu replies, "That's a revisionist law passed before 1966" (Chen et al. 254-5). This short dialogue alludes to the policy conflict between Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi, the chairman of the PRC during the early 1960s. This political struggle was

one of the main reasons for Mao to launch the Cultural Revolution.[85] Dramatizing how Mao's policy weakens the supervisory-managerial role of the Party, the play not only criticizes Mao's failure to constitute a political system that serves the masses, but also reflects the widespread social indignation over the bureaucratic abuse of power in the 1980s.

The sacrifice of peasants is viscerally presented in the play's climactic scene: beating the ox to death. As a hardworking farming animal that eats grass but produces milk, ox is a symbol of self-sacrifice in Chinese culture—the exact opposite of donkey that labors little but brays loudly, as Li Jindou implicitly refers to the cadres as donkey in the scene of grain estimation. Ox in Maoist discourse always symbolizes the humble peasants who make great contributions but remain silent. Hence stockman Li Jinming calls ox Harelip "our treasure, the lifeline of our village" (Chen et al. 251) and cares for the ox as if it were his own child. Killing the ox epitomizes the destruction of the peasants' livelihood. Furthermore, the ox is also a

[85] This revisionist law refers to a law implemented from 1961-1965—a period of new economic policies led by Liu Shaoqi. These new economic policies included: reinforcing centralized Party control over the countryside, removal of communal controls over individual peasant producers, providing urban assistance to rural areas, sending Party cadres to the villages to replace and criticize the Maoist-inspired local cadres, restoring small private family plots, reopening free market in rural areas, returning "communized" personal and household belongings, and permitting peasants to reclaim uncultivated lands and till them on their own. The purpose of these policies was to boost agricultural production to resolve the famine caused by the Great Leap Forward Movement and the People's Commune Movement led by Mao Zedong. Mao criticized Liu Shaoqi's policies as "revisionism" that would revert China from socialism to capitalism. The Cultural Revolution was directly initiated by an attack on those "capitalist-roaders" led by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping (Meisner 260-72).

metaphor of intellectuals—such as Lu Xun, a model intellectual often compared to an ox in Maoist discourse. Beginning in the 1950s, those intellectuals accused of capitalist thoughts were sent to be reeducated in the countryside, where they lived in ox sheds and did hard physical labor, just like an ox. Ox is also an appropriate metaphor for Chinese women, who made silent contributions but were ruthlessly sold, exchanged, and violated like animals.

In addition, according to Chinese critic Sun Yuhua's analysis of this play, "Ox has always been a symbol of the Chinese nation" (15). Although ox is gentle, tolerant, perseverant, and enduring, it has fatal weakness, always fearful of others and unable to rebel. Thus, it can only be persecuted. "If it wants to acquire liberation and freedom, it must become a huge dragon that suddenly wakes up, rises, and flies. An ox beaten to death is just like an un-awakened Dragon in the East. When will it suddenly wake up? The struggling, whining ox becomes the material embodiment of every Chinese's hope for the nation" (Sun 15). Since this call for China to rise up characterized China's series of revolutions during the twentieth century, including the Cultural Revolution, it reflects the continued anxiety during the 1980s over when China would eventually transform into a strong modern nation.

What is even more shocking is that the actual killing of the ox dramatized in this play is conducted by the Sangshuping villagers themselves, who thus destroy their own lifeline. As director Xu writes: "Sangshuping villagers beat 'Harelip' to death, thus beating to death their own hope of existence. … In the net woven by feudalism and ultra-leftist policies, 'the Sangshuping villagers' are thus persecuting

each other, actually persecuting themselves" ("Transformation" 14). In this way, beating the ox to death is a climactic re-enactment of the victim-victimization cycle that characterizes the Chinese life and history. Rather than following Mao's instructions to heroically rebel against their exploiters, the villagers try to frustrate cadres by killing the ox first, thus ironically acquiring "revolutionary heroism" through persecuting the weak. Their feeble way of resistance undermines the glorification of peasants in Maoist works.

This scene of collective violence and suicide is led by stockman Li Jinming, a more sympathetic, liberal-minded character in the play. His sudden transformation from kindness to cruelty, when driven by fury and despair, exemplifies the dehumanizing effect an inhumane environment can have on people. The primitive ritual of "rounding up and hunting" (Xu X., "Reflection" 30) is enacted in this scene by Li Jinming, who mimes the movement of madly beating the ox with a wooden plow, while the other villagers, surrounding the ox, mime the movement of being beaten. Their frenzy, desperation, and sadness are expressed through bloody red light, slow-paced exaggerated movement, and powerful thematic music. The struggling ox, "whose shape, decoration, and movements were as close to folkstyles as possible" (Xu X., "A Report" 110), is played by two actors in the manner of lion-dance. However, the festivity of this lion-dance, which signifies prosperity and happiness in the traditional sense, is reversed by the miserable mooing and painful struggle of the ox. After the ox finally collapses, the villagers perform a heart-rending memorial ceremony for the dead ox. Their ritualistic movement not only expresses reverence

for the ox and agony over their tragic destiny, but also utters silent protest against the unjust heaven. Again, the expressive aesthetics of classical Chinese theater is appropriated here to elevate this scene to a transcendent and abstract level, in order to comment on the repeated cycle of Chinese history.

The dramatic episode about the ox is divided into several separate scenes and interspersed with the episode of victimizing outsider Wang Zhike, in order to highlight the similarities and differences between these two enactments of "rounding up and hunting" (Xu X., "Reflection" 30).[86] As Lung-Kee Sun points out, "The Cultural Revolution was a historical case in which the ugly side of human being was exploded most extensively through the most sublime idealistic means" (*Warps of Historians* 274). Although the villagers' intention to expel Wang is to get his two disheveled caves and meager food ration, the explosion of this selfishness is facilitated by the extensive political struggles during the Cultural Revolution that exactly aimed to eliminate human selfishness and exploitative mentality.

Accusing Wang as a class enemy who has murdered a cloth peddler, though without sufficient evidence, the villagers convene political criticism meeting as a

[86] Director Xu explains his idea to contrast the fate of ox with that of Wang Zhike: "Old farming ox 'Harelip' has a common mode of destiny with outsider Wang Zhike, all annihilated by 'rounding up and hunting' at Sangshuping. Although it seems that the Sangshuping villagers are harming two other lives, in essence they are harming themselves. However, their attitudes to the two lives are different. In the scene of 'beating the ox to death,' the Sangshuping villagers are crazy and furious; but they are indifferent and apathetic to binding Wang Zhike to prison. In order to reveal the connotations of this tragedy, to alert the audience, we intersperse these two plots. … Through such grouping, I hope to endow the incidents of daily life with more connotations of historical reflection" ("Transformation" 14).

quasi-court to conduct glorious class struggle, with both verbal accusation and physical violence. Hong Yung Lee thus introduces how violence was legitimized during the Cultural Revolution:

> The predominant feature of the Cultural Revolution was its arbitrary violence against persons who in normal times would have enjoyed the security of a stable society. The violence came in many guises and degrees. It was applied in the form of criticisms and enforced self-criticisms, accusations and intimidations, quasi-judicial investigations, rectification, purges and counter-purges, beatings and tortures, and sometimes death. The violence was applied arbitrarily, because its targets were not selected on the basis of any well-defined objective criteria, but on the basis of one's own political ideology or even reports and rumors or assumptions about one's political ideology. Political persecution on the basis of personal vendetta was widespread. ("Historical Reflections" 93)

This arbitrary violence is inflicted upon Wang in the name of revolution and political ideology. The villagers' narrow-minded discrimination against non-clan members is disguised by vaguely denouncing Wang as a "counter-revolutionary" who intends to retaliate "against the revolutionary masses" of "poor and lower-middle peasants" (Chen et al. 248). Criticisms, accusations, intimidations, quasi-judicial investigations, purges, and beatings—these routine rituals during the Cultural

Revolution—are enacted in this play only to get Wang's meager living resources, even though Wang is an orphan whose only home is at Sangshuping.

Lacking enough justification, the criticism meeting soon turns from a revolutionary romance into a farce. First, the less educated Bao Wa, the head of the militiamen in the village, fails to fluently read a speech full of pompous revolutionary slogans. Then, driven by Li Jindou's announcement that accusers will be rewarded with workpoints, Sister Cuiping volunteers to expose Wang's "crime" of doting too much on his son. Cuiping's ridiculous denunciation makes Li Jindou curse Cuiping's ancestors, igniting a fight between Cuiping and her husband. The criticism meeting soon devolves into complete chaos, only to be stopped by Li Jindou's threat to take away trouble-makers' workpoints. However, no matter how awkward is this political drama, it must reach its destined denouement: Wang's private garden plot will be taken away and his food rations will be lowered. When the dejected Wang and his son walk back home, a folk song resounds, recounting the reason behind Wang's tragedy: the struggle for physical survival.

After all these measures fail to make Wang leave Sangshuping, Li Jindou finally decides to send Wang to the police, based on the accusation that Wang "threatened to kill and murder as retaliation against the revolutionary masses" (Chen et al. 248). Before Li Jindou presses his fingerprint on the written complaint, his conscience makes him pause. His psychological struggle is externalized through an unrealistic episode, in which the action freezes for a moment and the light darkens, leaving only a spotlight shining on Li Jindou, who "moves aside, lost in thought"

(Chen et al. 249). A chorus of the villagers, led by stockman Li Jinming, appear on the turntable to argue with Li Jindou. Representing the remaining conscience of Sangshuping, Li Jinming cautions Li Jindou that filing this suit may cost Wang's life, "all because you didn't want the cave dwelling to fall into the hands of a Wang" (Ibid.). To this Li Jindou replies, "But our team needs that cave to put our stone mill in right now" (Ibid.). This imaginary episode is interrupted by the realistic voice of Li Jinsheng, the leader of the Poor Peasant Association, who declares that of course the Lis' cave should be occupied by the Lis, thus urges Li Jindou to fingerprint the document. With that, the chorus disappears, and Li Jindou "rolls up his sleeves, making a great show of preparing to make the print. … The table with the complaint on it suddenly collapses under the pressure of LI JINDOU's hand. Though falling down with the table, LI firmly puts his print on the paper" (Chen et al. 249). While the sudden collapse of the table signifies the destructive power of his behavior, Li Jindou gloats over his masterpiece.

The scene in which Wang is finally bound up and taken away by the police is presented as another enactment of "rounding up and hunting" (Xu X., "Reflection" 30). Wang's heartbreaking separation from his eight-year-old son stimulates no action from the crowd of onlookers who have gathered to watch Wang's arrest. "Some are silent, some look on indifferently" (Chen et al. 253). This scene is immediately followed by the scene in which the ox is ordered for the meal and then beaten to death. The villagers' violent sensation over the sacrifice of the ox forms a sharp contrast with their callousness towards Wang's tragedy: while the ox labors for

them, Wang is just another person competing for the limited living resources. The immorality of the villagers presented here deconstructs the moralizing goal of the Cultural Revolution, bringing into sarcastic light Mao's doctrine that "politics determines everything and the masses determine everything" (Li Z. 189). With the parochial, conservative cultural mentality remaining in the Chinese community, the Cultural Revolution turns out to be a "struggle for power and resources among central rulers, political and economic elites, and nonprivileged groups" (Lupher 186). Dramatizing how a human life is sacrificed by the Sangshuping villagers for meager material resources, the play presents the lofty morality of the Cultural Revolution as the same empty ritual as the Confucian ethics.

Another political ritual deconstructed by this play is the unification of the international proletarian class against imperialism. At Wang's criticism meeting, Bao Wa quotes lines from a popular revolutionary song in the early 1970s: "the east wind is blowing and the battle drum has sounded. Who's afraid of whom in the world?" (Chen et al. 241).[87] Entitled "People All over the World Will Definitely Be Triumphant" ["*Quanshijie renmin yiding shengli*"], this song was adapted from a

[87] During the Cultural Revolution, many revolutionary songs were created in order to educate, motivate, and unify the masses to support government policies. As Isabel Wong points out, "The use of music as a social, political, and educational tool, as advocated by Chinese Marxists, is not alien to traditional Chinese thinking. It has been a serious governmental concern since the time of Confucius, who himself edited and wrote music for some three hundred poems intended as educational tools" (112-3). While the CCP did inherit this Confucian tradition, the melody and content of their revolutionary songs are completely new. They are militant, bombastic, impassioned, and vehement, with anti-feudalist, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist content. From the very early days of the Chinese communist revolution, revolutionary songs were recognized and used as important political, didactic tools.

Mao's statement delivered on May 20, 1970 to denounce the Cambodian coup and the US military action in Cambodia.[88] [89] The rest of the song, though not included in the play, would not escape the memory of the audience who had experienced the Cultural Revolution:

> It is not that people are afraid of the American imperialists,
>
> But that the American imperialists are afraid of the people!
>
> Those following *Dao* will get help,
>
> Those against *Dao* will lose help.[90]
>
> Historical law cannot be resisted, cannot be resisted!
>
> American imperialism is doomed to fail,
>
> People all over the world will definitely be triumphant! (Ailrc.com)

With a march-like militant rhythm, the song advocates the unified class

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[88] From 1969-1970, during the Vietnam War, the US troops not only bombed eastern Cambodia to destroy the North Vietnam storage facilities and supply lines to the South Vietnam, but also invaded Cambodia to destroy the headquarters of the "Viet Cong," the North Vietnamese communists in South Vietnam. Furthermore, the US supported General Lon Nol to depose the Cambodian king Norodom Sihanouk in order to expand its influence in Southeast Asia.

[89] Since the play is set around 1968-1969, dramatizing the usage of a song composed after 1970 reveals how the play's creators synthesized the Cultural Revolution practices in this play, instead of adhering to historical facts.

[90] These two sentences are from *Mengzi*. Mengzi (372 B.C.-289 B.C.) was a major supporter, propagator, and developer of Confucianism. For Mengzi, *Dao* means a ruler's benevolence towards his subjects, who have the right to overthrow a ruler who ignores people's needs and rules harshly. Maoism inherits Mengzi's interpretation of *Dao*. In this song, *Dao* means the historical law that justice will eventually overcome evil, and people all over the world will eventually triumph over reactionary oppressors.

struggle of the solidified proletariats in the world, and expresses confidence that justice—believed to be determined by people all over the world—will surely overcome injustice represented by American imperialism. The intense international struggle between capitalism and communism reflected in this song played an important role in the Cultural Revolution. In November 1957, with the emergence of a large number of socialist countries throughout the world and China's increasing influence in the newly independent former European colonies in Africa and Asia, Mao declared:

> It is my opinion that the international situation has now reached a new turning point. There are two winds in the world today, the East Wind and the West Wind. There is a Chinese saying, "Either the East Wind prevails over the West Wind or the West Wind prevails over the East Wind." I believe that the East Wind is prevailing over the West Wind. That is to say, the forces of socialism have become overwhelmingly superior to the forces of imperialism. (Wedeman 3)

Mao's statement voiced his over-optimism about the triumph of socialism in the international world, just as his over-idealization of peasants' revolutionary spirit. Mao's definition of capitalism and socialism as two totally opposite forces always struggling with each other, while registering the international situation at the time, is as unrealistic as the Cultural Revolution discourse. Furthermore, as Andrew Hall Wedeman points out, by 1965 the "imperialist" power, led by the United States, had stopped the advance of socialism in Asia and Africa. The halting of socialist

expansion in the world shifted the balance of China's internal political power, which, together with Mao's conclusion that the ideology of the CCP had deteriorated, led to the initiation of the Cultural Revolution (3).

The hostile international environment made China at the verge of war with both the USSR and the US in the 1960s. This "ominous external situation certainly stoked fires of domestic paranoia" (White and Law 7). This domestic paranoia was manifested in Mao's vision of China replacing the USSR, which he believed to be taking a revisionist road, to be the center of the world proletarian revolution. Mao's anti-capitalist, anti-revisionist struggles both in the domestic and international arenas hindered China from addressing its real domestic problems. Chinese intellectuals in the 1980s attributed China's traumatic history to its indigenous appetite for violence, instead of to outside enemies, and proposed "an intropunitive rather than an extrapunitive solution to China's problems with modernization" (Dittmer 37). This intropunitive solution was to locate the origin of China's disease in its cultural roots. As *Deathsong of the River* argues, "History has proven countless times that the decline of a civilization is not caused by attack from external forces, but rather by the degeneration of its inner system. Toynbee said that the greatest role of an outside enemy is to strike a final blow to a society that has already committed suicide, yet not drawn its last breath" (Su and Wang 116). If we take into consideration this dominant intellectual trend of the 1980s that blamed Chinese civilization's internal system—countering against the CCP's denunciation of imperialist invasion and exploitation of China as a major reason for China's backwardness in modern times—

this heroic song against outside oppressors is dramatized in the play as another empty signifier without relevance to reality.

On the other hand, this song expresses China's determination to be self-reliant when confronting arch-enemies, instead of seeking alliances with big powers like the US and the USSR. Described by Dirlik as "key to the political, economic and cultural goals of the Cultural Revolution" (165), this spirit of self-reliance is dramatized as inspiring Caifang in this play, who is discriminated precisely because she has the courage to fight against the dominant oppressive forces to pursue free love. In Act One, Scene Four, Caifang is attacked by patriarchs in the village and vilified by other women, who have internalized the Confucian gender codes as natural and legitimate, as a "shameless bitch," "soul snatcher," "husband killer," and "Concubine Yang, the disaster"[91] (Chen et al. 212). Not afraid, Caifang strikes a heroic pose and makes a sweeping gesture, like a valiant heroine in revolutionary model plays, and defiantly sings this song in order to show her strength and confidence. However, she soon succumbs to her sense of vulnerability and cries helplessly. The failure of this song to boost her self-confidence further reveals the futility of the Cultural Revolution discourse. This revelation is even more ironic if we consider that many revolutionary songs were composed and revised

[91] Concubine Yang refers to Yang Yuhuan (719-756), the favorite concubine of Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty. She was accused of distracting the emperor too much from state affairs and of bringing about the moral corruption of the court. Blamed as the fundamental reason for the An Lushan rebellion, she was ordered to strangle herself in 756. Her story was frequently used in the patriarchal discourse of China's feudal society to warn against the dangerous role of women.

collectively—by professional composers, workers, and peasants together—in order to include mass opinion, eliminate the gap between the professionals and the masses, and ensure the creative products as truly works of the masses (Wong 130-1). This song's irrelevance to peasant life again highlights the Cultural Revolution as a theatrical world wherein the social reality is hugely different from its representation in the social symbolic order.

D. Revolutionary Model Play: The Antithesis of Sangshuping

Besides the overblown revolutionary song, what even more reveals the theatricality of the Cultural Revolution is the ironic contrast between what is presented in revolutionary model plays—the only legitimate theater performance during the Cultural Revolution—and what happens in the characters' lives. Revolutionary model plays are important cultural products created by the Cultural Revolution authorities to modernize Chinese culture. As Paul Clark argues, "The whole thrust of the Cultural Revolution cultural project was to make China modern" (192). The necessity for this modernization project is reflected in this play in the prevalence of feudal culture and ideology at Sangshuping. Due to traditional theater's popularity among the folks, China's successive theater reformers "regarded the modernization of traditional theater as an essential part in the construction of a modern nation and Chinese identity" (X. Chen 108). In the eyes of the Cultural Revolution authorities, it is crucial to modernize traditional theater so that the feudal ideology propagated by it will be eliminated and a modern identity of the nation and its people will be constructed in the theater for people to learn from.

The aspirations and problems, promise and fallacy, inherent in the Cultural Revolution are reflected in revolutionary model plays. Like their predecessors of modern Chinese intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution authorities wanted to elevate Chinese culture to the level of modern world culture, with a new objective to serve the proletariats. This intention was made clear by Mao's revision of his Yan'an "Talks" in 1953 by inserting the following sentence: "We should take over the rich legacy and excellent traditions in literature and art that have been handed down from past ages in China and foreign countries, but our aim must still be to serve the popular masses"' (qtd. in McDougall 289). Such policy of integrating Chinese traditions and foreign elements to serve the present purpose was carried out in the creation of revolutionary model plays. Thus, by examining the conventional and the new in revolutionary model plays, we can perceive the tensions between promise and reality, aspiration and restraint, imbedded in the age of the Cultural Revolution as dramatized by this play.

On the one hand, the linkage of model plays with the past is quite obvious. Besides dramatizing the past CCP revolution and adopting the operatic form of Chinese traditional theater, they also use the aesthetic methods of "adventure tales and popular dramatic works written for less well-educated audiences of the past" (Hegel 222). These methods include: limited moral and character complexity; "type-characters specialized by their social functions and moral stances" (Hegel 204); "clearly defined role categories" (Ibid.); the emphasis upon "action over any complexities of interaction" (Ibid.); "complicated plots and contrived coincidences"

(Ibid.); "highlighting of exaggerated characters" through "bold theatrical effects, action, and spectacle" (McDougall 294). At the same time, their overt didacticism, romanticism, and idealism carry on the tradition of "Confucian moral tales" (Hegel 223), reflecting "the Confucian heritage of cultivating and emulating superior men" and the Confucian "assumptions of human nature" as "malleable," "perfectible," and "naturally attracted toward the good" (Judd 273). Furthermore, model plays' mythic heroism, "human will and corresponding action are persistent cultural themes in Chinese culture and not uniquely or exceptionally features of the Cultural Revolution" (Judd 276). Model plays' intricate connection with Chinese traditions exemplifies the paradox of the Cultural Revolution project in smashing the old world to establish a "brand-new" socialist culture and society. As dramatized in this play, the past dominates every aspect of Sangshuping.

On the other hand, the modern aspects of model plays are also undeniable. An important aspect is the incorporation of modern artistic techniques imported from the West. Using "the narrative strategies, character presentation, and climactic devices usually associated with feature films, … [t]he modernized operas similarly incorporated movement, blocking, lighting, and other staging elements from the spoken drama stage to produce a new kind of Chinese musical theater. … The results of these experiments in hybrid borrowings were both distinctly modern and definitely Chinese" (Clark 251). Clark's argument points to the achievement of model plays in modernizing Chinese musical theater. Bonnie McDougall also delineates the Western elements in revolutionary model plays:

> The main Western elements in the model works were the semirealistic, semisymbolic, and elaborate stage settings, the Western-style orchestration, and Western musical instruments (these instruments, including the piano, were considered more forceful and better suited to express contemporary heroism than were the traditional Chinese instruments). Some gestures associated with the international proletarian movement, such as the workers' clenched-fist salute, were also incorporated into the stage movements of the Peking operas. (294-5)

McDougall's analysis makes clear how modern Western culture, an official taboo during the Cultural Revolution, contributed to creating this proletarian socialist culture. This paradox represents the contradiction, thus the impossibility, of the Chinese Revolution project.

All of these collaborations between the conventional and the new, the Chinese and the modern, aimed to empower the masses. In the words of Jiang Qing,[92] "Since as long ago as the Paris Commune, the proletariat had not resolved the problem of its own direction in literature and art. Only since our work with

[92] Jiang Qing (March 14, 1914 – May 14, 1991) was Mao's third wife and a major leader of the Cultural Revolution, condemned after 1976 as a counterrevolutionary responsible for many of the disasters during the Cultural Revolution. Previously an actress, Jiang Qing made efforts to modernize traditional opera in order to shape the popular taste and dramatize the CCP revolution. From 1964-1966, Jiang Qing and Lin Biao, the then minister of defense and a potential candidate for Mao's successor, endorsed eight exemplary theater works "model plays" [*yangbanxi*]. Jiang Qing's coterie monopolized control over model plays' repertoire, stage production, critical reception, and aesthetic criteria (Braester 107).

revolutionary model operas from 1964 has this problem been resolved" (qtd. in Judd 266). Jiang Qing's declaration proclaims revolutionary model plays as groundbreaking works created by and for the proletariats, the first in world history to herald a modern new age in which the broad masses are liberated to become powerful masters of themselves and their society. Ellen R. Judd thus comments on heroism in model plays:

> one may see the main heroic characters of the model operas as a displaced mythical embodiment of deep human aspirations for autonomy and efficacy in the social world. … A tightly drawn tension between this aspiration, heightened in the CR, and its limited potential for realization, underlined by the course of the CR, was a central conflict of the era and one whose expression in the heroes of the model operas made their heroism a key symbol. (273)

While the myth of proletarian transcendence, autonomy, and power in model plays projects the socialist promise to liberate the human being and develop human potential to the utmost degree, the misery and incompetence of the peasant class in *Sangshuping Chronicles* highlight the obstacles to the realization of such heroism. A more detailed comparison between the world created by model theater and the Sangshuping in this play reveals the failure of the Cultural Revolution's modernization project as interpreted by the creators of this play.

At the wedding ceremony of Chen Qingnü and Li Fulin, two village women admire the bride's beauty, mentioning that Qingnü is an amateur actress in the

commune's propaganda team who played the role of Li Tiemei in the revolutionary opera *The Red Lantern*.[93] Set during the War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945), *The Red Lantern* dramatizes a revolutionary family related not by their blood but by their shared proletarian ideology. Li Yuhe, a railway worker and an underground CCP member, has lived for seventeen years with his adopted mother and adopted daughter Li Tiemei—both lost their family members in railway workers' strikes. Due to their efforts to transmit secret codes to the CCP guerrillas, Li Yuhe and his adopted mother were captured and persecuted by the Japanese. Li Tiemei, with the help of their proletarian neighbor, carries out the unfulfilled task of her father and grandmother.

Although just a passing reference, *The Red Lantern* offers an important subtext to understand this play's dramatization of the Cultural Revolution history. According to Xiaomei Chen, "In 1967, … at the peak of the Cultural Revolution, a mass movement was initiated to re-produce model plays in amateur theaters, which were encouraged to imitate the performances of the professional model theaters" (119). This amateur theater movement aimed to destroy the entrenched elite superiority in theater creation to involve the broad masses in producing model

[93] *The Red Lantern* [*Hongdeji*] was the first model play chosen by Jiang Qing to put her aesthetics into practice. Based on a film and several theater productions, the play was revised into Beijing opera in 1963 under the supervision of Jiang Qing. The script writer was Weng Ouhong and A Jia, and the director was A Jia. The lead actor who played Li Yuhe was Qian Haoliang, and the lead actress who played Li Tiemei was Liu Changyu. *The Red Lantern* was adapted into a film of the same title by the August First Film Studio—a People's Liberation Army film studio—and was first screened in 1971 (Braester 108-9).

characters so that the theater's social influence can be enhanced. As Xiaomei Chen argues, "It was believed that by acting out the roles of the revolutionary characters—that is, by creating the revolutionary other while rejecting the nonrevolutionary self—the actors would be reformed and shed their bourgeois ideology. In concentrating on every body movement and perfecting every operatic tune, the players of the model operas rechanneled their energies toward a revolutionary ideal" (92). By making as many people as possible participate in the grand spectacle of the proletarian revolution in model plays, the Cultural Revolution authorities aimed to make life imitate art, instead of vice versa. Countering this assumption, this play dramatizes the failure of Qingnü, an amateur performer in a model play, to fundamentally transform herself by emulating the role she herself performs. In this way, the play reveals the illusionary nature of revolutionary model plays, undermining their glorious purpose and social function.

The similarities between the actress, Chen Qingnü, and her role, Li Tiemei, reside only in appearance: pretty face, slender figure, red flowery jacket, and a long braid. In daily life, Chen Qingnü is in every aspect the opposite of Li Tiemei, whose heroism, courage, strength, and firmness when encountering enemies form a sharp contrast with Qingnü's fear, timidity, weakness, and submission in dealing with her husband. Although her eyes are big, bright, and expressive like Li Tiemei's, Qingnü's pitiable, terrified expression and eagerness to please her husband are ironic reversals of Tiemei's determined, stern expression that supposedly strikes fear into the heart of her enemy. While "Tiemei" literally means iron plum, the iron-willed

Tiemei, who survives her ordeal to triumph, is incomparable by the weak-minded Qingnü, who loses her sanity due to the mistreatment by her husband and the community. While Tiemei is full of revolutionary optimism and indomitable rebellion against her oppressors, Qingnü has to submit and becomes completely disillusioned with women's destiny. She bitterly concludes at the end of the play: "The same! Women are the same all over the world" (Chen et al. 259). Qingnü's tragic life questions the capacity of the CCP's movement to liberate women.

Basically at the same age as Qingnü, Tiemei is ambitious to become a successor to the revolutionary cause without any concern over her private life as a young woman. This characterization reflects Mao's indoctrination to prioritize revolution over an individual's pursuit of love, sex, and physical beauty—criticized by Mao as bourgeois ideology. Learning nothing from her role on stage, Qingnü is eager to fulfill women's traditional responsibilities as specified in the wedding song: "Cooking, washing, and cleaning, / And bearing children for your spouse" (Chen et al. 230), in order to win favor from her husband and establish her status in the new family. However, no matter how hard she tries to attract and soothe Fulin with her beauty and gentleness, Qingnü still does not win Fulin's heart to consummate their marriage. If Fulin's insanity and impotence are symptomatic of the schizophrenic and devastated Sangshuping society, Qingnü's failure to restore Fulin' sanity and productivity symbolizes Sangshuping's inability to continue its lifeline.

Although Qingnü is admired by the villagers for her youth and beauty, she gets no sympathy or help from them to alleviate her suffering. Instead, it is at the

instigation of several envious village lads that Fulin humiliates Qingnü in public. This is another antithesis of *The Red Lantern*, wherein Li Tiemei triumphs over her enemies with the help from other proletarian comrades. If model performances "were the ritual enactment of a morality that its audiences and performers needed to internalize" (Clark 57), the immoral behavior of the Sangshuping villagers in this play, as audiences of the model play, signifies the model play's failure to achieve its didactic goal. Li Tiemei's eventual leaving the enemy-occupied area to find the CCP guerrillas ironically offsets Qingnü's inability to escape her tragic life in Sangshuping, since her bride money is already spent for her brother to marry and her divorce suit is rejected by officials.

The hopeless situation women face in traditional patriarchal society is exactly why women occupy center stage in model plays, in which they all transform themselves from the most oppressed into revolutionary warriors or party leaders. As Kay Ann Johnson points out, "Few societies in history have prescribed for women a more lowly status or treated them in a more routinely brutal way than traditional Confucian China" (1). Confined by feudal marriages, women were subject to all kinds of violence coming from within the family. Because of this, the feudal marriage system has been constantly attacked by modern progressive intellectuals as representing the violation of human rights and the denial of individual autonomy in traditional China. As Lewis Mayo points out,

> In addition to the denunciation of the marriage institution itself, feudal marriage has served as a metaphor in more wide-ranging attacks on

> the old social order. The repressiveness of marriage symbolizes a society ruled by inflexible ritual and customs. The image of the suffering bride bound by unforgiving convention and brutal male power can be made to represent exploitation and degradation in general. Moreover, the obligation of married women to carry their burden in silence stands for the fate of all those who cannot directly voice their resentment. Intellectuals could depict the frustrations of their lives through a marital system that was represented as anathema to emotional fulfillment and personal freedom. Thus although women were the true victims of the iniquities of feudal marriage, the pain of marriage could be identified with sufferings that were experienced by men as well. This has clear parallels with the long-standing use of the suffering of women to symbolize the plight of the nation or of neglected scholars in classical Chinese literary genres. (139)

Mayo's argument can help illuminate the symbolic role of feudal mercenary marriage in this play to signify how traditional China's civil order functions as a ritualistic formula that legitimizes cannibalistic practices in real life. This is synthesized in Fulin's wedding ceremony, which is performed with appropriate ritual and glorious signs of a happy marriage: red garments, red flowers, characters of "double happiness," wedding songs, and celebratory dance. However, the emptiness of these formalities becomes obvious when the groom is revealed as having been acted out by Fulin's brother, because Fulin is too mentally deranged to behave

decently at the ceremony. This "contrast between the formal rhetoric of happiness in marriage and the hidden sufferings experienced by women is analogous to the gap between propaganda and reality felt so keenly by those of the Cultural Revolution generation" (Mayo 142). Although this gap characterizes all aspects of life at Sangshuping, it is condensed in the sharp contrast between the powerful model women who play important roles in public life in propagandist revolutionary model plays and the Sangshuping women's subordination within the family.

But this type of mercenary marriage, negating free choice and emotional attachment, victimizes men as well—as manifested in Fulin's physical and spiritual suffering due to his incapability to love and marry according to his heart's desire. If this suffocating marriage system represents the feudal order that sacrifices the entire nation and its people, family is defined differently in revolutionary model plays. The revolutionary family imagined in *The Red Lantern* transcends the bondage of traditional families, since family members come together not due to their blood relationship but to their common tragedies, shared sufferings, class interests, revolutionary goals, and ideological commitment. As Xiaomei Chen argues, "Model theater pushed to the extreme a displacement of family drama, which had been central in traditional operas" (108). Due to the central importance of family in the Chinese life, most traditional operas are family dramas that deal with family issues and concerns. In order to make people break out of the restraints of traditional families, revolutionary model plays create a big solid proletarian family to fight against feudalism, capitalism, revisionism, and imperialism. However, this myth of

proletarian unity as imagined in model plays is deconstructed by the Sangshuping villagers in this play, who only care about the patriarchal lineage of their biological families, without scruples to persecute the underprivileged outsiders. If *The Red Lantern* is "peopled by selfless human beings whose lives personify the bitter past imposed by an imperialist foe, and who voice implacable faith in the socialist future" (Snow 244), *Sangshuping Chronicles* is peopled by selfish characters whose lives personify the bitter past caused by the internal diseases of Chinese society, and who have no faith in the socialist future.

The revolutionary family constructed in *The Red Lantern* is composed of family members of all genders and generations—a grandmother, a father, and a daughter—in order to show how a revolutionary family can have all the spiritual nourishment and material care of traditional families in addition to noble revolutionary tasks. As Xiaomei Chen argues, "Paradoxically, the public sphere—or the big revolutionary family to which the women were devoted—was staged in model theater to function exactly like a miniature home with its traditional structure, such as a symbolic patriarch, matriarch, and family members of all ages and both genders" (111). This structure of the big revolutionary family is reenacted at Sangshuping in this play, whose organization as a production team with collective ownership of land, collective labor, and equal distribution of products breaks through the boundary of small families. However, this big family of Sangshuping is different from the proposed proletarian family in model play not only because it is predominantly composed of members of the same family clan but also because it

prejudices against non-clan members. Since Li Jindou, the patriarch of the Sangshuping community in this play, is the equivalent of Li Yuhe in *The Red Lantern*, the comparison between the two, who share the same family name Li, casts another illuminating light on the failure of the Cultural Revolution to achieve its glorious goals.

As a loving father and a revolutionary model for his adopted orphan daughter Li Tiemei, Li Yuhe in *The Red Lantern* can be regarded as "a symbolic father of all the orphans of the oppressed class" (X. Chen 130). As Li Yuhe asserts: "People say that family love outweighs all else, / But class love is greater yet, I know. / A proletarian fights all his life for the people's liberation" (Snow 133). His altruistic spirit, generosity, and moral uprightness form a sharp contrast with Li Jindou's selfishness, stinginess, and moral ambiguity. If Li Yuhe "is a Chinese Prometheus bound" (Snow 244-5) who passes down the red lantern—the sparks of proletarian revolution inspired by Marxism-Leninism-Maoism—to the next generation, Li Jindou in Sangshuping passes down the patriarchal practices of feudal society.

Li Yuhe in *The Red Lantern* is the archetypal hero for model plays, the exemplary sublime hero of the proletariats. Full of revolutionary optimism, confidence, courage, and determination, his "sublimity allows him to command the stage and demand submission from enemy and fellow revolutionaries alike" (Braester 114). Li Jindou in *Sangshuping Chronicles* frequently betrays his vulnerability, helplessness, piteousness, and pessimism. Like other villagers, he is obliged to continue his family line, but he is ridden by extreme poverty and suffers

the death of his eldest son. Near the end of the play, in his effort to save the production team's fodder from the collapsing storage cave, he loses a leg. If Li Yuhe in *The Red Lantern* offers his injured body, resounding voice, sublime suffering, and heroic death "to bear witness to the coming triumph of the communist revolution" and his "ideological rectitude" (Braester 113), Li Jindou's mutilation and failure to prolong his family line project the miserable demise of Sangshuping. Squatting by the well that swallows Caifang, the disabled Li Jindou cries silently. A victim of the extremely severe living circumstances and a victimizer of the weaker, Li Jindou's depression embodies the despair and helplessness of all of the Sangshuping villagers.

Being both treacherous and honest, kind and cruel, selfish and selfless, foolish and capable, Li Jindou is a complex character like other characters in the play. His ambiguity is the opposite of the total sublimity of Li Yuhe in *The Red Lantern*, who is "the perfect embodiment of selfless devotion to the Party's goals and is utterly lacking in moral or political complexity" (Hegel 210). While the characterization in model plays inherits the role-type tradition of Chinese music drama, *Sangshuping Chronicles* tries to avoid stereotype.[94] Yu Huiyong, the actor who plays Li Yuhe in the film version of *The Red Lantern*, thus describes Jiang Qing's directives for the staging: "Comrade Jiang Qing asked us to create the proletarian heroic image of Li Yuhe through the use of magnificent things. That is, we must resort to the most beautiful music, the best arias, the most impressive

[94] Chinese music drama has many genres, which share some common characteristics, such as character stereotype, stylized movement, free shift of time and space, symbolic set, episodic structure, singing, dancing, and narration.

movements, and the most important positions on the stage to create this heroic image more prominent, more ideal, and more lofty" (qtd. in L. Yang 29). As a result of applying the principle of "three prominences" [*santuchu*],[95] these staging requirements aimed to push the sublimity of the hero figure to the utmost degree—a god of revolution without human blemishes.

This "highlighting of exaggerated characters" through "bold theatrical effects, action, and spectacle" reflects "the spirit of traditional Chinese theater" (McDougall 294). Actually, as Braester argues, Li Yuhe is a "thinly disguised stand-in for Mao" (122). His dominant position on stage and beyond the stage "signals the abrogation of the spectator's judgment and legitimizes the leadership's actions in the name of the masses" (Braester 114). Li Yuhe's overwhelming heroism dictates the audience's "desired emotions" (Ibid.) and legitimate aspirations, "at the same bars any dialogue with the audience" (Braester 115). It affirms the Maoist policy that exerted hegemonic control over public discourse and literary production and annihilated dissidence and ambiguity. As "the supreme arbiters of meaning," the Party and Mao informed the audience "of their own opinions as 'the masses.' … Viewers were required to suspend all judgment of their own … to fully identify with the enunciator of revolutionary ideology" (Braester 116-7). Seen in this sense, model plays inherit

[95] The principle of "three prominences" was first expounded in May 1968 by Yu Huiyong, the then minister of culture, and later standardized by Yao Wenyuan—a member of the Gang of Four [*sirenbang*], the leading group of the Cultural Revolution. The theory stipulates: "Among all characters, give prominence to the positive characters; among the positive characters, give prominence to the heroic characters; among the heroic characters, give prominence to the main heroic characters" (qtd. in L. Yang 29).

the totalitarian practices during the feudal era, when emperors were believed to be the Sons of Heaven whom everyone must obey. Despite the Cultural Revolution's iconoclastic goal, its paradoxical position within Chinese historical lineage is exemplified by revolutionary model plays.

The glorious image of the red lantern also has symbolic significance. As Braester argues, the iconographic attributes of the lantern—"red, shining, bright"—"make it a direct reference to Mao, … often described as the bright red sun" (121). The red lantern is "the touchstone of genuine revolutionary loyalty" (Braester 121), "a symbol of revolutionary allegiance" (Braester 124), and signifies "unmitigated triumph" (Braester 123). As "the heirloom of the Chinese proletarian class" (Braester 125), it "points to the persistence of revolutionary ideology" (Braester 122) and "the succession of authority" (Braester 124). Countering all these brilliant meanings of the red lantern, the dark connotations of light dramatized in *Sangshuping Chronicles* undermine the Cultural Revolution's claim to continue and upgrade the CCP revolution. When Yue Wa is led away to be a child bride, it is Zhu Xiaoping,[96] an urban intellectual youth sent to the rural area to be re-educated, who illuminates the road in the front with a flashlight—an ironic subversion of the usual meaning of light as symbolizing enlightenment, knowledge, and hope. Signifying Zhu's conformance to Sangshuping's ways, this gesture satirizes Mao's ideology that intellectuals can learn from peasants. Since Mao's strategy of "countryside surrounding the city"—

[96] As introduced earlier in this chapter, Zhu Xiaoping is the author and narrator of the three novellas on Sangshuping, from which this play was adapted. In the play, *Sangshuping Chronicles*, Zhu Xiaoping is a minor character.

making countryside the revolutionary front for military, political, economic, and cultural forces, then seizing state power by armed struggle—proved efficient to win victory over Japan and the KMT, when Mao decided to stage the Cultural Revolution, he again emphasized the importance of the countryside. Declaring that, "In history, it is always people with a low level of culture who triumph over people with a high level of culture" (Mao 240), Mao subverted China's traditional social hierarchy by elevating peasants above intellectuals.[97]

The play refers to this important historical phenomenon by dramatizing how Zhu Xiaoping has no other choice but to follow the local rules of this enclosed community of Sangshuping. As Xiaomei Chen argues, Chinese intellectuals "have traditionally survived totalitarian society by acting in both supportive and subversive roles with regard to the prevailing political agendas" (127). This is also how Zhu behaves at Sangshuping. With a better sense of social justice and morality, Zhu not only fights against the bullying cadres, but also protests against the dictatorial behavior of Li Jindou. When Li Jindou orders the villagers to beat Yu Wa soundly for his love affair with Caifang, Zhu protests to Li that "we can't beat people like this" (Chen et al. 221) and he helps Yu Wa escape. However, this is the only instance that Zhu acts against Li. In other tragic episodes at Sangshuping, Zhu participates, becoming one of the masses. Zhu's silent conformation signifies the failure of the May Fourth project in advocating free expression of opinion, unrestrained circulation

[97] In traditional Chinese society, Confucianism designated social hierarchy, from higher to lower, as intellectuals, peasants, artisans, and bureaucrats.

of information, and exertion of individual will. As Xiaomei Chen points out, "During the Cultural Revolution, intellectuals were supposed to imitate their subaltern counterparts, speaking their languages, adopting their manners, wearing their clothes" (120). Living and laboring together with them, Zhu acquires a sympathetic understanding of the Sangshuping villagers. When he leaves the village at the end of the play, he says to Caifang: "I won't ever forget Sangshuping and all of you. Though I haven't been here long, I've learned so much. I'll come back and see you" (Chen et al. 258). Offering no help to Caifang, whose arranged marriage comes up very soon, Zhu's incompetence exemplifies intellectuals' loss of social function during the Cultural Revolution. Caifang's committing suicide right after Zhu leaves symbolizes the total failure of modern Chinese intellectuals to transform society.

Yang Jian, one of the play's authors, comments on the role of Zhu Xiaoping as the author and narrator of the novella series on Sangshuping, from which this play is adapted:

> The author's humanitarian stance is his basis for understanding and discovering the nature of Sangshuping village. … The success of the author's narration first comes from his ability to appropriately arrange his relationship with the peasants. The author acknowledges that in the broad sense, he also lives under the principle of existence at Sangshuping. He even recognizes the rationality for the Sangshuping principle to exist. … Zhu Xiaoping knows that the destiny of the peasants determines the destiny of the nation, thus is related with his

> own destiny. He understands the peasants' desperation in poverty, thus he acquires an appropriate point of view to portray Chinese peasants. (377)

Yang's comments point to how Zhu's understanding of the Sangshuping villagers makes him accept and tolerate them. Zhu does not present himself as a tragic hero sacrificing his sublime youth in the countryside—the typical image of intellectual youths in the literature of the 1980s—but as "a simple, weak recorder, like a page boy" (Yang J. 377). Putting himself among the peasants, he portrays them with great sympathy, not from a condescending point of view. Zhu's humility comes from his realization that "during the Cultural Revolution, the educated youths lost something, which was only like a drop of water, whereas those who truly suffered were the peasants, whose suffering was like rivers. A drop of water is limited, but rivers are eternal" (qtd. in Xu X. *A Directorial Art* 352). Zhu's deep concern for the masses highlights his incapability to take action, just like those powerless intellectuals within the feudal system. In this sense, Mao's China repeats another vicious cycle of Chinese history.

The degradation of intellectuals is also reflected in revolutionary model plays. As Paul Clark points out, "A cult of the physical and the body during these years was part of the militancy of official culture. The heroes of the model operas all show a toughness that expressed a rejection of reliance on the cultivated mind of traditional intellectuals and a need for physical endurance and risk taking" (253). Even "the heroes' appearance in make-up and costume was designed to embody current social

values such as 'healthy beauty', 'labour beauty' and 'martial beauty'" (L. Yang 55). The official culture's emphasis upon physical survival, body toughness, militant struggle, and material production—neglecting spiritual refinement and intellectual sophistication—strengthens the ruthless victim-victimization cycle at Sangshuping. Since those Party-trained, ideologically corrected intellectuals and military leaders replaced traditional intellectual elites during the Cultural Revolution, its legitimate cultural products as represented by revolutionary model plays also lost their function to criticize contemporary society and power-holder, but to eulogize whatever the Party wanted to propagate.

Traditional intellectuals' strong sense of social responsibility was exemplified by Lu Xun, whose works are known for their sharp criticism and fierce attack upon Chinese culture and society. Although Mao set up Lu Xun as a model for the intellectuals to emulate, as Merle Goldman argues, Mao's view of literature presented in his Yan'an talks, the guideline for the literary and artistic creation of the Maoist era, was "implicitly opposed to that of Lu Xun" (181).

> Where Lu Xun had promoted Western styles and ideas, Mao urged writers to return to traditional folk styles so that the masses could better understand their writings. Lu Xun's work had exposed the dark side of society and derided the masses as well as the elite for their apathy, backwardness, corruption, and injustice. Mao emphasized instead the Soviet doctrine of socialist realism, which mandated an optimistic, heroic literature that served the Party's goals and extolled

> the masses. Writers were no longer to criticize reality, as Lu Xun had done but to depict the Party's view of reality. No longer was literature to reflect life as it is or as the individual saw it exemplified in Lu Xun's work, but as it will be and as the Party and Mao saw it. (Goldman 181-2)

Mao's direction for literature and art to serve as the Party's propaganda tool to present an idealized society and masses, although aiming to elevate the masses to live up to those optimistic heroic models, just deprived literature and art of their function to truthfully reflect reality, expose social problems, correct human morality, and cure cultural disease. However, Lu Xun's courage to introduce Western culture's tragic vision and realistic spirit to criticize society and people was what China really needed. During the 1980s, many people held the opinion that, if Lu Xun continued to live after the establishment of the PRC, he would not become such an icon extolled by Mao, but persecuted during the Cultural Revolution as other intellectuals, since he would fiercely attack the dark side of the new society as well. After the historical trauma of the Cultural Revolution, when the Party's control and censorship slackened, many intellectuals felt the urgent necessity to continue the heritage of Lu Xun. This trend accounted for the dark images of traditional Chinese community in *Sangshuping Chronicles*.

E. Folk Art: The Imaginary Order of Sangshuping

If model plays fail to influence people's life, *Sangshuping Chronicles* presents the sustaining power of traditional folk arts among the villagers. When the

Sangshuping villagers celebrate their bumper harvest, they do not resort to revolutionary model plays but to traditional opera to express their joy. On this special occasion, the official taboo is temporarily broken, the social rule is temporarily transgressed, and the hierarchical order is temporarily suspended. This breaking away from taboo, rule, and hierarchy resonates with Bakhtin's definition of carnival as flourishing "beyond the law, above the law, and even against the law," as offering "release from the oppression of official culture, a suspension of its laws, an exhilarating inversion of its authority, a momentary state of topsy-turvydom, in which the common people become powerful and the powerful people become ridiculous" (Roach 143). On this harvest celebration in *Sangshuping Chronicles*, the official taboo on traditional drama, the patriarchal rule of Li Jindou, the orthodox moral codes, and the usual suppression upon subversive forces are all temporarily transgressed and subverted.

For the villagers, the best theatrical performance that can express their dreams and desires is a flirtation scene from a traditional opera *Funu Zhuan* [*The Story of Funu*]. Originally a legend called *Hupo Chi* [*Ember Spoon*] created during the early Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), the play was later adapted into a Sichuan-style opera called *Kujie Zhuan* [*The Story of Bitter Chastity*] to extol Funu's filial piety to her father and chastity to her lover. In 1955, during the first phase of the socialist reform of Chinese music drama, it was adapted again into *The Story of Funu* to emphasize feudal officials' corruption and cruelty as well as common people's

sympathy, mutual help, and rebellious spirit against evil rulers.[98] However, at this harvest celebration in *Sangshuping Chronicles*, all these orthodox teachings are of no interest to villagers, who only stage the part that dramatizes the erotic feelings between the heroine Tao Funu and the hero Xu Xun. This meta-theatrical episode again showcases the discrepancy between the repertoire in the villagers' cultural memory and the archive designated by the official discourse—again highlighting the theatricality of the social symbolic order of the Cultural Revolution.

Since the Cultural Revolution authorities denounced traditional popular drama as among the "Four Olds" (old thoughts, old culture, old customs, and old habits)—the superstitious, vulgar feudal dregs that must be eliminated from socialist society—the play dramatizes the villagers' obsession with it in order to illustrate the CCP's failure to establish a new national theater represented by revolutionary model plays. Criticizing traditional operas for only dramatizing "emperors and ministers" [*diwang jiangxiang*], "scholars and maidens" [*caizi jiaren*], as well as "cow ghosts and snake spirits" [*niugui sheshen*], the Cultural Revolution authorities like "Jiang

[98] See *Encyclopedia of China*. See also Bell Yung's writing on the process of reforming traditional operas during the Maoist era: "From 1949 to 1955, in the first major phase of change, the government set up committees and agencies in Peking and in other centers throughout the country to oversee the 'reform' of Chinese opera in general. Many traditional works were revised, mainly in plot. … This large-scale, hastily executed movement to revise or originate a great number of operas resulted in a lowering of artistic standards, while with the departure from the stage of popular traditional elements attendance fell sharply. … From 1963-1965, the government again tightened its control over the repertory. Reports, speeches, and articles by such prominent figures as Mao Zedong and Jiang Qing denounced many traditional operas as feudalistic, superstitious, and vulgar and urged the revolutionization of the stage so that it would reflect and serve socialism. … During the Cultural Revolution, attacks against tradition and the past in all areas intensified" (146-7).

Qing argued that without revision and improvement, no audiences would want to see traditional operas" (Clark 61), which "could not protect the nation's economic base and could even damage it" (Clark 60). This play counters Jiang Qing's assumption by dramatizing traditional opera's deep root and popularity among the villagers, who regard it as the best way to express their enthusiasm with economic production. Although the hero and heroine in this opera fit the category of "scholars and maidens," it does not prevent the villagers from identifying with them. As Robert E. Hegel points out, "Since so many of the stories of fictional and dramatic narratives had circulated for centuries in the broadly popular oral tradition as well, much of the credit for the vitality and creativity of this material was ascribed to China's masses" (200). Thus, the villagers' love of traditional theater asserts the energy and initiation of the masses and the local, and undermines the effectiveness of the homogenized national theater of model plays imposed from above. In this way, the conflicts between autonomy and control, the modern and anti-modern aspects of the Cultural Revolution project, are manifested in the controversy over traditional popular theater. If the Cultural Revolution authorities intended to modernize Chinese theater, their monopoly of the cultural market and denial of the local autonomy were definitely anti-modern.

Another reason for the Cultural Revolution authorities to denounce traditional popular theater is its erotic content, since "[l]ove stories are a major genre in old-style Chinese opera" (Clark 50). With love between two sexes designated as degenerate bourgeois ideology, the heroes in revolutionary model plays have no

interest in personal love other than class love, and their heroic status is determined by their class background and revolutionary ideology. Zhou Yang, once the deputy cultural minister of the PRC, noted that "the flaunting of sexuality" in traditional theater was "a means of 'titillating the landlords' (*saoqing dizhu*)"—"the peasants' way of resisting and sabotaging the feudal order and feudal morality in a society where other paths of expression were blocked" (Holm 27). Thus, with the end of feudal order and oppression in the countryside, Zhou argued, "there would no longer be a need to cater to the tastes of a decadent local elite" (Ibid.). Seen in this context, the popularity of traditional love plays among Chinese peasants, as dramatized in *Sangshuping Chronicles*, not only counters the stereotypical definition of love and sex as only the tastes of a degenerate exploitative class, but also manifests the continued restriction upon human expression in socialist society. Zhou Yang's claim that a totally new world has been established is representative of the Cultural Revolution discourse's unrealistic depiction of social reality.

At the beginning of this carnival event, the patriarch Li Jindou tries to exert his usual authority in the village. He announces that, due to the bumper harvest this year, he will make an exception to perform an old play. But after the celebration, everyone should go back home to clean the feudalistic residue from their mind. Then he volunteers to play Miss Tao Funu. But his acting is too awkward and his voice is too hoarse to perform the heroine, so several impatient youngsters push him off the stage, ignoring his authority. The usually marginalized people get to perform. Yu Wa, who is too refined to be a good farmhand, is selected by the villagers to play the hero

Xu Xun, and Caifang, who is too unrestrained to be a good woman, boldly volunteers to play the heroine Tao Funu. Although Li Jindou and several women protest against Caifang's showing herself off on stage, their protest is ignored by other villagers who only want to appreciate a good performance. Thus, Yu Wa and Caifang, attracted to each other but daring not express their feelings, for the first time have the opportunity to open their heart through performing this flirtation scene.

The politics involved in this metatheatrical event needs to be understood in the context of the official discouragement of the female impersonation tradition of classical Chinese theater. Lu Xun, "[r]enowned for his relentless attacks on the evils of old Chinese culture," believes that "the artistic conventions of traditional Chinese drama are superficial" and the "male cross-dressing and its ultimate iconic representation on the stage (i.e., the *dan*) is linked with corruption in politics and age-old sociopolitical evils lurking in the shadow of a false democracy" (S. L. Li 17). In line with Lu Xun's criticism of the superficial artistry of female impersonation as representing the deceptive, pretentious nature of Chinese democracy and morality, the PRC government discontinued the male *dan* training at Chinese opera schools. As Siu Leung Li introduces, "In the People's Republic of China, male cross-dressing is at the brink of extinction under the state's cultural policy of discontinuing male *dan* training at Chinese opera schools, while female cross-dressing has survived and developed in a relatively more benign climate than its male counterpart" (2). The PRC government's different policies towards male cross-dressing and female cross-dressing evidenced its effort to liberate women by overturning the gender hierarchy

in Chinese theatrical practices. Although female players and female transvestism have been on the Chinese stage since as early as "the eighth century in the time of the Tang emperor Suzong (reign 756-763)" (S. L. Li 33), "the male cross-dressing practice has forever been foregrounded, signifying the ideology of a male theater and the patriarchy that produced it" (S. L. Li 19). Thus, by stopping the training of male transvestism but allowing female transvestism, the PRC government aimed to strengthen female agency in theater and social life. The especially powerful, masculinized female characters in revolutionary model plays reflect this purpose.

Seen in this light, Li Jindou's insistence on male cross-dressing, on constructing an ideal femininity as imagined by men, is his conscious effort to maintain the patriarchal dominance in Sangshuping's cultural production. If in everyday life Li Jindou continues his patriarchal practice under the mask of socialist ideology, female impersonation in theater becomes another disguise. His awkward performance proves the failure of his pretense. In the same way, by volunteering to play the heroine, Caifang resists against Li Jindou's containment in order to assert female agency in constructing femininity. Unashamed to express her erotic desire through performing this flirtation scene, Caifang is also empowered by her capability to satisfy the audience.

In the middle of the performance, the light darkens on other characters, leaving one spotlight shining on just Caifang and Yu Wa. The two performers step onto the revolving stage steeped in moonlight, as if transcending to a dream world. Planning to leave Sangshuping together after the harvest, their aspiration for the

future is expressed by two dancers who, dressed in colorful folk costumes, enter the revolving stage to dance "a duet folk dance smack of humorous modern dance" (Xu X., "A Report" 110). Their movement resembles two butterflies flying freely together. Attracted and excited, Caifang and Yu Wa run to dance together with them, imitating their movement. Soon the imaginary dancers disappear, leaving Caifang and Yu Wa dance spontaneously. However, this romantic world is soon disrupted by the sudden appearance of "a ring of shimmering lights" that turn out to be "torches in the hands of angry VILLAGERS surrounding the couple" (Chen et al. 220). With torches glimmering in darkness like wolves' eyes, this scene reenacts the ritualistic "rounding up and hunting" (Xu X., "Reflection" 30). Presenting this scene poetically, not realistically, director Xu seeks to excite the audience's philosophical meditation and appeal to their aesthetic appreciation as well ("A Report" 109).

The cultural imagination invoked by the dancers' movement of flying butterflies is significant, not only because butterfly is China's traditional mascot that symbolizes beauty, love, peace, prosperity, freedom, happiness, and everlasting life,[99] but also because it reminds the audience of a popular legendary romance *Butterfly Lovers*. Originated in Eastern Jin Dynasty (317 A.D. – 420 A.D.) and transformed into the present form in Tang Dynasty (618 – 907 A.D.), the legend tells of a girl, Zhu Yingtai, who disguises herself as a boy to attend school for three years and develops an intimate friendship with her classmate, Liang Shanbo, without revealing her true gender identity. On their way back home after finishing school,

Zhu asks Liang to come to her home to propose marriage to her fictitious sister. Liang agrees, but waits to come to Zhu's home. Only then does Zhu present herself as a female, but her father has already arranged her marriage with Ma, a man from a prestigious family. Liang deeply regrets his lost opportunity and dies in the office of a county magistrate. On Zhu's wedding day, when the wedding procession passes Liang's tomb, a violent whirlwind stops them from continuing their journey. Zhu goes to offer a sacrifice to Liang's tomb and laments over Liang's death. The tomb splits and Zhu dives into it. Soon a pair of colorful butterflies flies out of the tomb.

This legend is extremely popular among Chinese folk society because it expresses people's collective wish to break through the imprisonment of feudal arranged marriage and traditional gender roles to acquire equality in education, human rights, and autonomy. If Zhu's cross-dressing in *Butterfly Lovers* is an unusually courageous way to transgress the confinement of the home into the public realm designated only for men, Caifang's identification with Zhu also reveals her wish to go out of Sangshuping to lead a free life. In *Butterfly Lovers*, Zhu is very active, intelligent, and takes initiative in determining her own life and developing her relationship with Liang. It is Zhu who decides her own transvestite adventure, invites Liang to propose marriage, and finally commits suicide to remain true to her love. Compared with Zhu, Liang is dim-witted, passive, incompetent, and feminine. However, if Zhu's cross-dressing proves gender identity and gender hierarchy as

[99] See Xu Hualong's description of the meaning of butterfly in Chinese culture (325-7).

constructed fictions, her final return to her regular gender role and her suicide propose that there is not much room for transgression in real life.

In *Sangshuping Chronicles*, Caifang is also like Zhu, more courageous and active than her lover Yu Wa. She initiates their alliance by asking Yu Wa to take her with him, "to a far, far away place" (Chen et al. 220). When she finds that her wish cannot be fulfilled at the time, she urges Yu Wa to flee, promising to wait for him to come back. Yu Wa's failure to return to rescue Caifang proves his lack of masculinity—his inability to take action to make changes in life. Caifang's suicide can be interpreted as a courageous act of self-determination, a desperate resignation to women's destiny, or a conscious enactment of the Confucian codes for a "virtuous woman" to remain loyal to her man. If the legendary romance *Butterfly Lovers* still has a "round" ending, in the dead lovers' achieving eternal unification by becoming a pair of butterflies, no such wish fulfillment is offered to Caifang in this play. Instead of achieving transcendence, freedom, or liberty, Caifang's soul is forever confined within the deep, dark well left over from the Tang Dynasty. By dramatizing this tragic ending for Caifang, the creators of this play broke away from the euphemistic tradition of classical Chinese theater to present the hopelessness of Sangshuping.

Another extraordinary quality of these two women is their transcendence of the common criteria for marriage of their times. Zhu in *Butterfly Lovers* does not mind Liang's humble social status and family background, but values the sincere attachment they have developed through three years of study together. In *Sangshuping Chronicles*, Caifang also does not care for money, the primary reason

for the mercenary marriage at Sangshuping. When Yu Wa tells Caifang that he cannot afford to marry her, she replies: "I don't mind hardships, I don't mind being poor. As long as you treat me right, I'll even go begging with you. Even that would be sweet!" (Chen et al. 220). Caifang's words express how much she yearns for the sincere caring and spiritual commitment between lovers, not to be treated as a tool and traded like an animal. Her wish to be treated as a human being voices the collective protest of Chinese women against the brutal oppression of feudal patriarchal system.

Paradoxically, this interpretation of *Butterfly Lovers* as an anti-feudal text is a product of the PRC, which defines this romance as "a model for the masses to follow in the unceasing quest for freedom of marriage and equality for women" (S. L. Li 116).

> The first written records of Liang-Zhu from the Tang and Song dynasties without exception foreground the image of the "the virtuous woman" [*yifu*]. … The ideology of *lienü* and *jiefu* (both terms also mean "virtuous woman") in the thousands of years of Chinese traditional culture dominates the Confucian moralistic interpretation, co-opting this potentially subversive story to a mythology (in Roland Barthes' sense) to reinforce patriarchal values.
>
> Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, an opposite dominant reading in the vein of socialist ideology has emerged to "de-

> toxify" the patriarchal appropriation, and the "Butterfly Lovers" has become a convenient vehicle for anti-feudalism. (S. L. Li 115-6)

The PRC's anti-feudal interpretation of *Butterfly Lovers* parallels its creation of powerful women characters in revolutionary model plays and its successive marriage reforms to liberate women. Thus, the repetition during the radical Cultural Revolution of the butterfly tragedy, which was created more than 1,500 years ago, reinforces the play's criticism of the CCP's failure to achieve its goal of anti-feudalism. No matter how the PRC government re-appropriates China's cultural assets to serve its social reform, the reality of Sangshuping remains unchanged from the past millennia, manifesting the incapability of cultural discourse to bring social transformation.

The yearning for eternal spiritual unification as expressed in *Butterfly Lovers* is cherished by another man at Sangshuping: the outsider Wang Zhike, who is unwilling to leave Sangshuping just because he wants to stay by his dead wife and be buried in the same tomb after his death. This is expressed by the folk song:

> Live or die, I won't desert you,
> Die or live I won't leave the valley
> Alive, we eat from the same bowl,
> Dead, we'll share one grave. (Chen et al. 248)

Wang's pursuit of emotional and spiritual values renders him vulnerable in the harsh struggle for physical survival at Sangshuping. Wang's failure to fulfill the humble wish of this ancient story proves how society has not made any progress in

improving people's life—an irony of Mao's teleological view of history as constantly progressing forward.

Sangshuping's reality crushes the dreams cherished by both adults and children. In another metatheatrical event in the play, the 12-year-old girl Yue Wa, before she leaves home to be a child bride, wears the mask of Monkey King to mimic his naughty behavior in order to please the adults. As a figurative character who has magic power, optimistic heroism, indomitable courage, and inviolable integrity, Monkey King can transform himself freely among different forms of life and travel through different realms of the world. Daring to challenge all authorities, conventions, and restraints, he embodies people's fundamental desire for salvation, freedom, peace, justice, independence, and truth. Monkey King is especially beloved by children precisely because he caters to their wild imagination, vital energy, and picaresque nature. However, Monkey King's subversive function is lost for Yue Wa. Only his funny behavior remains for her to conceal her sadness in leaving home forever. At her mother's request, Yue Wa has to kneel down to thank Li Jindou for finding a husband for her. Yue Wa's docile obedience, innocence, and sensibility highlight the cruelty and indifference of those adults. Monkey King's transformation from a rebellious folklore hero to an obedient puppet in this scene reflects the lack of creativity and vitality in the folk world of Sangshuping.

Nevertheless, the play does not present Sangshuping as completely depleted of its energy. Instead, the Sangshuping villagers' life force, will power, and perseverant spirit are expressed through their dynamic folk songs and dances. In his

"Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and the Arts" delivered in 1942, Mao emphasized the importance of folk arts in educating the masses and encouraged writers and artists to experiment with local performing, musical, and visual art forms. "In response, music personnel in Yan'an assembled a massive collection of folksongs from the northwestern region near Yan'an" (Wong 126). While Mao's advocacy manifested his intention to incorporate folk arts into national art, this effort was terminated by the Cultural Revolution, when folk arts were declared "politically unfit" (Ibid.). However, the frustrated Sangshuping villagers in this play neglect the Cultural Revolution authorities' prohibition of folk arts to continue to express their dream of love through local love songs. If their everyday life is monotonous, harsh, and miserable, their love songs create an imaginary order that projects their suppressed passion, inexhaustible energy, and undying hope.

Another folk art that enjoys great popularity among the Sangshuping villagers in this play is a type of folk theater, *yangge*, whose performance involves "songs, dances, and dialogue," "accompanied by an assortment of percussion instruments such as drums, gongs, and cymbals" (Wong 126). Since *yangge* was closely connected with the peasant life in Shaanxi province, where the CCP's headquarter Yan'an was located, it was revised by the CCP for propaganda purposes. "In 1943 the revised 'new *yangge*' became the chief cultural and political expression of the Yan'an government and as such influenced other aspects of musical production" (Ibid.). The new *yangge*'s important role in Yan'an government's cultural and political discourse manifests the Party's effort to remain closely connected with the

masses at that time. However, when *yangge* was discouraged during the Cultural Revolution along with other folk forms, due to its religious and ritualistic nature, the social symbolic order became increasingly disconnected with social reality. As David Holm introduces,

> After 1966, performance of *yangge* in the countryside must have come under considerable pressure, owing to the campaign against religious practices. Very little was seen of *yangge* during the Cultural Revolution years (1966-1976), and it was seldom mentioned in the media. Jiang Qing's dislike of folksong was well known, and *yangge* was much too closely associated with the disgraced Yan'an generation to escape the general blight on forms other than Peking opera. (35)

Although Holm suggests that *yangge* was officially banned during the Cultural Revolution, this play dramatizes how *yangge*, like other official taboos, continues to enjoy great popularity among the Sangshuping villagers. At celebratory events, *yangge* is spontaneously performed by the villagers to display "a panorama of peace, prosperity, and reproductive vigor" (Holm 17). This panorama is just what Sangshuping lacks. If the cannibal ritual of "rounding up and hunting" (Xu X., "Reflection" 30) dominates the villagers' life, and the political ritual designated by the Maoist discourse has no relevance to the villagers' life, the religious ritual of *yangge* performances functions as a remedy to the villagers' sadness in daily life. When the villagers welcome seasonal farmhands to harvest their grain, they happily dance wheat-cutting *yangge* together. Their dynamic movement and unified

collaboration in *yangge* dance demonstrate their optimistic spirit, resolute courage, and inexhaustible energy to continue their life and labor. At Qingnü and Fulin's wedding ceremony, *yangge* dance and song are also performed, with the leader of the wedding procession holding a red umbrella and the group singing about a wife's duties: "Cooking, washing, and cleaning, / And bearing children for your spouse" (Chen et al. 230).

In these two *yangge* performances, we see the traditional movements, songs, and props, such as an umbrella and handkerchief, instead of the new political symbols of the hatchet and sickle that were supposed to replace the old props in the revised new *yangge*. As Holm points out, although the CCP reform of *yangge* was initiated as early as 1943, it did not have the intended impact on folk society.

> One 1953 field survey from Jiaxian in North Shaanxi showed that, in by far the majority of troupes, the open umbrella of the old *yangge* was still at the front of the procession, and that in only a very small number of cases had the new form, the hatchet and sickle, replaced the old. The report indicates that peasants did not mind using the new political symbols, but were opposed to the elimination of elements the Party thought were feudal. (35)

Holm's information helps us understand the *yangge* performances in this play. In the wedding *yangge*, the old *yangge*'s open umbrella at the beginning of the procession plays the traditional role to direct the other dancers' movement and invoke

fertility.[100] Although the new political symbol—the sickle—is not used here, it is used a few scenes later when "FULIN brutally cuts off QINGNU's braids with a sickle" (Chen et al. 236). This inverted use of the sickle not only undermines the official discourse that celebrates "new masses" and "liberated women," but also implies that manual agricultural production is no longer sustainable. Although the energy released through the *yangge* performances is vital, the play ultimately demonstrates how that energy is wasted in backward economic production and feudal practices.

F. Performing Nationalism: The Theme Song and the Modern Chorus

If both the social symbolic orders of traditional China and Maoist China and the imaginary order of folk arts do not change social reality, the play provides an alternative future for the Sangshuping villagers. This optimistic future is constructed by the passionate theme song, composed of "modern harmony with folk melody" (Xu X., "A Report" 110), which resounds whenever tragic events happen. Celebrating China's mythical origins and glorious wise kings from the ancient past, the theme song presents a coherent, sacred national identity for the modern Chinese burdened and divided by a heavy past. As Kiki Gounaridou argues, "When a nation seeks to be reconnected with a sense of national identity, its cultural celebrations often express nostalgia for a past that defines a cultural high point in its history" (1).

[100] See David Holm's interpretation of the umbrella leader in *yangge* in McDougall ed. 18.

This cultural high point in Chinese history is defined in the theme song by "Dragon in the East," "Great Yu," and "King Wu"—the ancient mythologies and legends that represent the golden age of Chinese civilization:

> China was born on this yellow earth,
>
> The descendants of the Dragon in the East it nursed,
>
> Great Yu's footprints were once all over the land,
>
> Where dashed King Wu's chariot grand. (Chen et al. 192)

The sacred national symbols—yellow earth, dragon, Great Yu, and King Wu—in this first stanza of the theme song assert the "sacred" origin, "inviolate" continuity, and "divinely authorized immortality" of the nation. Aiming to stimulate the present Chinese to live up to those glorious models and strive for national survival in the modern age, these sacred icons idealize the origin of Chinese civilization. A deeper examination of them reveals the fictitious nature of this imagined national identity.

First, the dragon is an imaginary animal, created by combining the totems of various tribes that gradually came together to form the Chinese nation in its early age. For this reason, the dragon is composed of the head of a horse, the horns of a deer, the ears of a cow, the beard of a goat, the nose of a tiger, the eyes of a rabbit, the body of a snake, the scales of a fish, the legs of a dog, the claws of an eagle, the tail of a bird, etc.[101] On one hand, the composition of the dragon suggests that the Chinese nation was formulated at the very beginning on the principles of openness, democracy, and equality. On the other hand, the fictitious nature of the dragon also

signifies the imaginative quality of assigning the powerful dragon to represent the "essential greatness" of the Chinese nation. Thus, there is no guarantee that "the descendents of the Dragon in the East" (Chen et al. 192) will regain the "magic power" of their imagined national origin. On the contrary, the parochial, incompetent Sangshuping villagers undermine the theme song's presumptuous claim about the nation's divinity.

Two other icons, "Great Yu" and "King Wu"—two legendary sage kings during the founding period of Chinese civilization—are also problematic to represent the "greatness" of the nation. Known for their extraordinary wisdom, great abilities, iron will, determined perseverance, moral justice, and devotion to the people, both Great Yu and King Wu were said to have led their people to overcome natural and social calamities. Great Yu's main achievements were taming the disastrous floods of the Yellow River and establishing China's first legendary dynasty, the Xia Dynasty (2070 B.C. – 1600 B.C.). As Chinese historian Gu Jiegang points out, Great Yu was originally a god in ancient mythology. He was historicized as a cultural hero during the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770 B.C. – 256 B.C.), the period when China was coalescing into a nation, in order to establish an ideal model for leaders of the new nation (130-52). King Wu, as the founder of the Zhou Dynasty (about 1046 B.C. – 256 B.C.), was said to have led his people to overthrow the despotic emperor of the Shang Dynasty (1600 B.C. – 1046 B.C.) in order to establish his kingdom based on

[101] See Dong Guangjie's interpretation of the dragon as a symbol in Chinese culture (26-40).

the principles of rationality, humanity, and serving the people. The contrast between these two glorious ancestors and their degenerate descendents in this play only exemplifies Joseph Roach's argument about "the paradox of collective perpetuation: memory is a process that depends crucially on forgetting. …[C]ulture reproduces and re-creates itself by … *surrogation*. … Because collective memory works selectively, imaginatively, and often perversely, surrogation rarely if ever succeeds." (2). Roach's argument parallels this play's presentation of Chinese culture as perpetuated through having its excellent parts displaced by decadent disease, although in appearance Chinese culture continues its lineage. Thus, the imaginary national ancestors are not relevant to the nation's present, even less to the nation's future.

Recognizing that it is a fallacy to claim the nation's greatness based on its legendary golden age, the second and third stanzas of the theme song only express the determination to make persistent efforts to forge forward, without assuring when the nation will wake up from the long nightmare of the past:

> Traversing the dense, impenetrable mountain peaks,
> Walking out of the dream of five thousand years,
> History raises the same queries:
> "When will you wake up, Dragon in the East?"
> Even if ahead there's a difficult path,
> Even if there are mountains to climb ever higher,
> To themselves, the question they'll always ask,
> They'll seek and search, never retire. (Chen et al. 192-3)

The resilience, tenacity, and will manifested in these two stanzas not only empower the Sangshuping villagers to continue their existence in extremely adverse environment, but are also widely recognized as the great spiritual strengths that have sustained the Chinese nation through the vicissitudes of history. The significant social, economic, and cultural transformations during the 1980s seemed to provide hope for the "Dragon in the East" to wake up.

In order to visually present the nation's regeneration during the 1980s, the modern chorus enters the revolving stage at the beginning and end of the play to sing the theme song and accompany their singing with dance. Dressed in brightly colored modern-style nylon jumpsuits, their resourceful, vivacious movements present them as enlightened modern citizens, quite different from the backward, haggard, ignorant Sangshuping villagers. Played by the same actors who play the Sangshuping villagers, the modern chorus concretely embodies the feasibility for the Sangshuping villagers to transform themselves into modern citizens of the New Era. Since their movements mime climbing mountains, forging paths, rowing dragon boats, and progressing forward, the modern chorus visually presents bringing revolutionary changes to Chinese society through modernization. Their collaborative, disciplined movement constructs a much-needed unified national identity for the audience, whose mind was still in the process of healing from the traumatic past and feeling anxious about the nation's future. If this play conveys a too-pessimistic evaluation of Chinese culture, society, and history, it reflects only one side of the cultural discourse of the 1980s.

Another side—a more optimistic evaluation—is reflected in the magnificent banquets in *The World's Top Restaurant*, a play I will analyze in the next chapter.

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IV. No Banquet Lasts Forever: Tradition and Modernity in *The World's Top Restaurant*

Chinese culinary arts may arguably be China's most renowned cultural contribution to the world, in the sense that Chinese food has permeated nearly every corner of the world and has found a place on almost everyone's table. As the focus of people's lives during China's millennia-long agricultural age, Chinese cuisine reflects the development of Chinese history and embodies the cultural, political, and moral principles of ancient China—which all aim to pursue harmony, balance, and unity between nature, society, and human life. Despite China's chaotic social transformations, frequent national disasters, and troublesome political status during the twentieth century, Chinese cuisine's increasing worldwide popularity speaks to the enduring power of Chinese culture in modern age. The central importance of culinary arts in people's life and Chinese culture made it an important trope in the "Cultural Fever" of the late 1980s. It became the subject of a three-act play, *The World's Top Restaurant*, premiered in 1988 by Beijing People's Art Theater (BPAT) and written by its resident playwright He Jiping.[102]

[102] The videotape of this premier production is the source of my analysis of the play's performance. This premier performance was co-directed by Xia Chun and Gu Wei—both are senior actors and directors at BPAT. Character Lu Mengshi was played by Tan Zongrao. Character Chang Gui was played by Lin Liankun, who also played Uncle Doggie in *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana*. The video was filmed by BPAT and Beijing TV Station, published by Beijing TV Art Center Audiovisual Publishing House. It was released as part of a DVD series of the best works of Chinese theater, film, and TV made during the People's Republic of China.

Dramatizing the characteristics, production, and development of Chinese cuisine through the case of a Beijing roast duck restaurant, Fujude, whose historical prototype, Quanjude, still enjoys an international reputation today, the play presents Fujude's vicissitudes as a microcosm of the historical cycle of the Chinese empire. The action of the play is located between 1917-1928, when China's imperial system has collapsed and is in the process of being surrogated by the modern political system of the Republic of China. The play presents Fujude's efforts to become Beijing's top restaurant as a synecdoche[103] to epitomize not only Beijing's struggle to maintain its centuries-old supreme status as the nation's capital, but also China's striving to preserve its cultural lineage under the threat of Western imperialist powers. Centering on how diverse characters in the play reenact various Chinese traditions—the imperial rule, Confucian ethics, extravagant banquets, Peking opera, martial arts, and military strategies—in order to construct their social identities and accommodate the changing present, the play explores the crucial question of how to reform Chinese traditions in order to serve the nation's ongoing modernization project.[104]

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[103] According to Hayden White, synecdoche refers to the phenomenon that "can be characterized by using the part to symbolize some *quality* presumed to inhere in the totality, as in the expression 'He is all heart'" (34).

[104] For Deng Xiaoping, the leader of China's reform and open-door policy during the New Era, "modernization meant more industrialization, greater use of more advanced technology throughout society—including the countryside and the military—more rapid economic development and a higher standard of living for as many people as possible. It also meant a transformation of the people's attitude, leading them to want to move away from the stereotypes of the Cultural Revolution period and from the bonds of the traditional feudal past, and toward a society more

The dynamic social changes, intense political struggles, and frequent historical surrogations taking place in the warlord years of Republican Beijing account for the tumultuous lives of diverse characters who come to dine, work, or do business at Fujude. As a capital city with a history of over three millennia years, Beijing is a historical site wherein multiple political, social, and cultural forces interact and compete with each another. The forced accommodation of and incomplete surrogation between the old and the new, the traditional and the modern, and the aristocratic class and the common folk, produce a complex overlap of multiple historical eras and diverse social classes, among which each character is paradoxically positioned. Having lost the proper moral quality to fulfill the Mandate of Heaven, the Manchurian aristocratic class practices various imperial rituals[105]—court dress, long queues, genteel etiquette, imperial flag, and luxurious banquets—in order to simulate the continuity of its rule and mask its actual incompetence in the present. Through the ironic discrepancy between the glorious signs of power and their lack of substance in reality, the play presents the irreversible collapse of

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open to the outside world." Modernization also meant "a formal legal system before which everyone would be equal … guided by 'socialism with Chinese characteristics.' … Modernization meant democracy in the sense that people would be freer to learn new ways and ideas and discard the 'mass line' of the Maoist era, but it certainly did not mean the Western style in which rival parties would compete for political power" (Mackerras, Taneja, and Young 1-2). Open-door policy meant China's opening its door to the outside world and becoming a more active part in the world economy. Starting from 1978, China gradually participated in foreign trade and international finances, and established Special Economic Zones (SEZs) [*jingji tequ*] in coastal areas.

China's imperial system and the pathetic degeneration of Chinese cultural traditions at the hands of the leisured wealthy class. But the imperial past does not disappear with the demise of the Qing dynasty; instead, it is carried over into the general way of life in the city and imitated by the new rulers and social celebrities of the Republican era. The close ties and similarities between the deposed aristocratic class and the new power-holders present the failure of the Republic to transform China into a modern nation.

If the old and new political regimes are too corrupted and dysfunctional to construct a modern nation, the restaurant is presented as an enterprise that actually attempts to carry on and transform the excellent traditions—such as culinary arts, Confucian ethics, and military strategies—in the modern era. Linking the imperial court with the secular world through its location, name, geomancy [*feng shui*], and decoration, the restaurant repeats the regular cycle of imperial dynasties in its vicissitudes to survive in the modern era. While the first and second generation proprietors identify with dynasties' founding emperors to manage the restaurant according to the Confucian moral principles of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, diligence, and frugality, the third generation proprietors model themselves on the profligate descendents of the aristocratic class. Their farcical reenactment of the civil and military aspects of Chinese masculine identity by practicing Peking opera and martial arts only ironically reveals China's loss of national integrity under the attack

[105] China's primary political concept of dynastic cycle regards "moral retribution, ritual magic, and historical voluntarism" (Wakeman 55) as determining the prosperity and decline of imperial dynasties.

of Western imperialist powers. By dramatizing how these two young proprietors undermine the restaurant's development through dissipated and immoral behavior, the play proposes that China's autocratic political system is the fundamental reason that destroys the nation's lasting prosperity.

The immorality, corruption, and incompetence of the ruling class contrast with the virtue, skill, and diligence of those who work at Fujude, including its managers, chefs, waiters, and apprentices. They function as agencies to voluntarily revitalize Chinese culture during this chaotic transformational period. The play highlights the figure of an innovative manager, Lu Mengshi, who creatively adapts Confucian ethics—self-respect, lofty ideals, righteousness, and benevolence—and ancient military strategies to the restaurant management. In order to rectify the malpractices transmitted from the past, Lu also carries out many innovative reforms, such as gaining independent management rights, governing by rules, abolishing the monopoly of cooking skills, and expanding the variety of dishes served at the restaurant. Lu is assisted by his lover, Yuchu'r, a prostitute and master cook. While Yuchu'r's exquisite cooking skills and wisdom exemplify the talents of Chinese women, her profession and independence challenge the orthodox Confucian morality and patriarchal structure. Coming from a humble social background, Lu Mengshi and Yuchu'r's success in managing Fujude reflects the unstablized social hierarchy and the increased social mobility during the Republican era. Their reform measures could be interpreted as registering the need for further reform during the 1980s, the time of the play's publication and performance.

Eulogizing the virtues and hard work of those obscure creators of the Chinese culinary arts,[106] the play demonstrates the influence of Maoist literature and art. The play's presentation of history in BPAT's characteristic realistic style with Beijing flavors aims to directly confront historical reality and express the contemporary nostalgia for the fast-disappearing old Beijing. If Chinese classical theater's illusionary world of wish-fulfillment reinforces the orthodox ideology of China's imperial past, this play's critical examination of the chronic disease in Chinese history and culture calls for the urgent necessity to further reform the nation. At the same time, the play proposes an alternative modernity based on the creative transformation of those exceptional elements of Chinese traditions. The play's confirmation of the continued validity of Chinese cultural values in the modern era presents an antithesis to the pessimistic negation of Chinese history in *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana* and *Sangshuping Chronicles*. In this sense, the play pioneers the celebration and revitalization of Chinese culture during the twenty-first century.

A. Chinese Culinary Arts: Embodying Chinese Cultural Principles

This play searches for the roots of Chinese traditional culture through examining Chinese culinary arts as a microcosm of Chinese history, culture, politics, and society. The history of Chinese cuisine began with the birth of the human race. According to Willy Mark, archaeological discoveries show that as early as 1,700,000

[106] See critic Qu Liuyi's introduction of the playwright He Jiping's intention to present on stage the social and cultural values created by those humble waiters, managers, and chefs in China's catering trade (45).

years ago, Yuanmo Ape-men in the Yun'nan province of China already prepared food with fire, the earliest trace of human usage of fire to develop cuisine in the world. Half a million years ago, Peking Ape-men also used fire to cook food (104). The sustained development of Chinese culture laid foundation for the prolonged lineage of Chinese culinary arts, defined by Jacqueline M. Newman as the "longest continuous food culture in the world" (xi). Since food was central to the Chinese subsistence during its millennia-long agrarian age, Chinese cuisine synthesizes the fundamental principles that have guided the Chinese community throughout history.

Cuisine is a serious topic in the ancient Confucian classics that laid the foundation of Chinese culture. As gourmet Xiu Dingxin points out in Act III of this play, *Book of Changes* [*Yi Jing*] and *Book of Documents* [*Shang Shu*] all write about cooking and the blending of flavors (He 210). These writings illustrate the dynamic relationship between the natural elements in the universe, food tastes, and human organs. In Chinese ancient classics, universal natural forces are catalogued into the Phases of Five Elements (wood, fire, earth, metal, water), which produced five basic tastes in food (sour, bitter, sweet, pungent, salty) and corresponded to five major organs in human body (liver, heart, spleen, lung, kidney) and five constant moral principles (benevolence, justice, propriety, wisdom, sincerity) (Yi Ding et al. 85). Thus, the harmonious blending and appropriate balance of five tastes in food have the importance of regulating the human body and morality according to the operation of universal forces. While this cuisine principle reflects the Chinese belief in the organic unity between the cosmos and humankind, as well as in the harmony,

balance, and order of nature, society, and human life, it is also the ideal pursued by people working at Fujude.

The play also presents how Chinese cuisine pursues this ideal of harmony, balance, and order by emphasizing all aspects of food: color, fragrance, flavor, texture, and shape, as well as the delicate mixture of flavors in cooking.[107] The principle of mixing flavors is elaborated in Act III, when waiter Chang Gui asks gourmet Xiu Dingxin why the famous ham made in Jinhua—Xiu's hometown—always has a dog's leg inserted into it. Xiu answers: "If you want sweetness, add a dash of salt. If you understand that when you're cooking, it's bound to taste great. And if you understand that about life, you'll get along fine" (He 188). Here, Xiu points out that cuisine and life should abide by the same principle of achieving order and harmony by balancing opposite, complementary elements. Wang Zixi, Fujude's assistant manager, thus describes his favorite breakfast snack "shredded turnip cake": "They look like those hexagonal tiles in the kitchen over at Liuguo Hotel, all fit together" (He 167); "Ivory turnip, white refined sugar, some green and red decorator fruit strips, rose and cassia syrup, in a crust of flour blended with high-quality pork fat. Light, but substantial. Substantial, but melts in your mouth. Only you have to eat it hot out of the oven!" (He 162). In Wang's description, the colors of this snack include ivory, white, green, red, rose; its rich flavor and fragrance come from mixing turnip, sugar, fruit strips, syrup, flour, and pork fat together, and from eating it hot

[107] See Lin Yutang's summary of the two basic principles of Chinese cuisine (340).

out of the oven; its shape is hexagonal, all fitting together; its texture is light, substantial, and melting. Wang's enjoyment of this snack proves how it pleases his various senses—visual, olfactory, gastronomical, and tactile—and how his daily errand of buying and eating it balances his busy, monotonous life with relaxation and excitement.

Chinese food's pursuit of harmony, balance, and order parallels the Confucian ethical codes for various social classes to fulfill their responsibilities and cooperate with each other, as well as the Confucian advocacy of tolerance, endurance, and compromise in order to maintain peace in life.[108] Believing that food has a moralizing and civilizing function that influences social customs, human behavior, and national politics, Confucius advocates for the delicate refinement of food so that human beings will behave graciously. As Johnny Kan argues, "It has been said that the history of a people is reflected by what and how they eat" (16). Since Chinese civilization has a long history and early maturity, China "naturally was a nation

[108] As Helmut G. Callis introduces, Confucius upholds that "A good society … is based on the natural sympathy of men toward men. To make human relations peaceful and beneficial for all, all must practice genuine reciprocity in their social intercourse with others. … The art of establishing good relations consists in developing attitudes of altruism, … beginning with the education of the individual in his family and culminating in the administration of the state and the pacification of the world. … Political relations in the Confucian context are essentially paternalistic since they are regarded as parent-child relations. Filial piety, supreme virtue in the Confucian family, appears on the political level as the childlike obedience and confidence of the people in the paternal benevolence of the ruler. … The system was in origin and tendency highly conservative and formalistically rigid. Its paternal authoritarianism which assigned the people a passively childlike, uncritical role toward their government gave preponderant support to the authority of a dominant bureaucratic class and to the preservation of the existing order" (117-9).

where the culinary arts would be developed to the highest degree of perfection. The satisfaction of the most fastidious, sophisticated tastes is one of the demands of an ancient and refined civilization" (Ibid.). However, although Chinese cuisine is viewed as a product and signifier of the sophisticated Chinese culture and the refined social behavior, this play presents the Republican society as immoral, corrupt, violent, and chaotic, even though people's tastes are still fastidious and banquets are still elaborate. The discrepancy between the signifier and the signified presents the degeneracy of the spirit and quality of Chinese culture during the Republican era.

Culinary arts is presented as not only closely associated with the human body and morality, but also to politics. Because China was an agrarian society for several millennia, food has been central to Chinese politics since ancient times. As early as China's first feudal dynasty, Xia (2100-1600 B.C.), the *ding* (a cauldron-like cooking vessel) was established as the symbol of power, or "the emblem of empire" (He 210). Gourmet Xiu Dingxin explains in Act III that "[p]rime ministers used to be called 'the cauldron's support,' in other words, the cook who holds the spatula" (He 211). This correspondence between cooking and politics is exemplified by a historic figure Yi Yin (1648-1549 B.C.), the esteemed prime minister of the Shang Dynasty. As Sa Zhaowei introduces, Yi Yin originally was a slave-chef but won the confidence of Emperor Cheng Tang by elaborating how the art of cooking could be applied in the management of the country. Yi Yin developed the theories of mixing five flavors and balancing water, wood, and fire in cooking (18, 23-4). Since Yi Yin's culinary principles pursued the ideal of harmony, balance, and order, his management of the

country also relied on the well-being and peaceful cooperation of all classes. This play dramatizes the violation of this political principle in the Republican society, in which the leisured wealthy monopolizes most of the social benefits and the poor working class leads a hard life. The lack of balance among various social strata leads to chaos and injustice in Chinese community, which needs to be reorganized in order to create social harmony.

Given the status of roast duck as the most esteemed dish of Beijing cuisine, which is the "top table of Chinese culinary art" (Lo 16), it is appropriate to present it as synthesizing the preservation, development, and transformation of Chinese culinary tradition in the modern world. A favorite dish of the Chinese imperial court since the Zhou Dynasty (1122-256 B.C.), by the time of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911 A.D.), Beijing roast duck had reached such a superb degree of refinement that it became an icon of imperial cuisine. Its characteristics reflect the national integration process through which various ethnic groups come together as one Chinese nation. The method for roasting the duck and the usage of the sweet bean sauce manifest the influence of "the Chinese Moslem cooking of Inner Mongolia and Singkiang, which specializes in roasting, barbecuing and deep-boiling lamb, beef and duck, all eaten with piquant 'dips' and 'mixes' of seasonings and sauces" (Lo 17). It also reflects the Manchu ethnic group's special taste for roast meat, due to their nomadic life in northeast China before conquering inland China. While utilizing local Beijing food materials, such as Beijing Duck and the local vegetable, "Great White Cabbage," its

preparation method of rolling the duck meat, spring onion, and sweet bean sauce into a lotus pancake reflects the style of Shandong cuisine.

Furthermore, crystallizing the innovation and execution of generations of imperial chefs, Beijing roast duck embodies the Chinese culinary principle of achieving harmony and balance among various types of foods (meat, vegetable, wheat, bean), diverse tastes (sour, sweet, bitter, pungent, salty), and all aspects of food (color, flavor, fragrance, texture, shape). Since Beijing roast duck synthesizes the culinary characteristics of multiple ethnicities, areas, and temporalities in Chinese history, it has become an important symbol of Chinese culinary arts. In the late Qing, the skill of roasting Beijing duck was released from the Qing court to the folk world to be practiced and developed in several restaurants in Beijing. Dramatizing Fujude as the most famous one, the play endows Fujude's business with the significance of preserving and developing the superb Chinese culinary arts in the modern world when China's imperial tradition is challenged by foreign imperialist powers.

Another factor that makes Fujude embody the preservation and development of Chinese culinary arts is that Fujude's founder, manager, and roast duck chef all come from Shandong province. Because *Lu*[109] cuisine is "a true embodiment of Confucian teachings—'No such thing as too much refinement'" (Liu Junru 58), the play dramatizes Fujude's meticulous feeding, selecting, preparing, roasting, and serving the duck, as well as its developing diverse dishes made of the duck. Liu Junru thus explains *Lu* cuisine's influence on the culinary arts in northern China: "In

[109] *Lu* is a simplified name for Shandong province.

the Ming and Qing dynasties, *Lu* cuisine is already the main component of imperial diet. … As the top cooking style of northern China, *Lu* style cuisine is the blue print from which the basic dishes of high-class and festive banquets, and home style cooking are developed. Not only this, the *Lu* style also heavily influenced the regional foods of Beijing, Tianjin and northeastern China" (58). Thus, the Shandong restaurant Fujude's growth amidst intense competition and social chaos has the symbolic meaning of preserving northern China's most renowned culinary traditions.

In addition to the roast duck chef Luo Datou, Fujude's other two chefs also master the highest cooking skill. One chef is Li Xiaobian'r, an expert in Manchu-Han Full Banquet, the most magnificent banquet of the Qing court. The other is Yuchu'r, an excellent chef of the prestigious Suzhou cuisine of southern China. All three chefs have close relationships to the Qing imperial cuisine, described by Su Chung as comprising the culinary traditions of Shandong, Manchuria, and South China as represented by Suzhou and Hangzhou (18-9). Coming from humble social backgrounds, the elevation of their social status through superb culinary skills proves cooking itself as an effective social transgressive act that facilitates social mobility and mingles diverse classes together. This democratic function of culinary arts and catering trade stimulates Fujude's business after the collapse of Qing—signifying a crucial historical shift of power from autocratic imperial rulers to diverse economic enterprises in the secular world.

B. Republican Beijing: A Site of Struggle

Due to Fujude's special capability to bring together diverse classes, whose interactions register the dynamic social changes in Republican Beijing, the play presents Fujude's vicissitudes as metonymic of the transformations of Beijing—an archetypal Chinese community—after the demise of the imperial system. With a history of 3,000 years as an urban city and 800 years as China's imperial capital, Beijing is believed to represent the most ancient, authentic, comprehensive, and orthodox Chinese traditions.[110] Encompassing cultures from various areas, temporalities, ethnicities, and classes, Beijing in the Republican era was not only a city of the dead, filled with historical relics for people to feel nostalgic or contemptuous about China's past, but also a center of historical change where various political, social, economic, and cultural forces competed for control over China. Modern forces have made obvious changes in Republican Beijing, gradually catalyzing this stronghold of the past towards a modern future.

David Strand thus describes Republican Beijing during the 1920s: "Beijing in the 1920s, as a human and physical entity, clearly preserved the past, accommodated the present, and nurtured the basic elements of several possible futures. Few cities in

[110] Beijing Men began inhabiting in the area of Beijing about 700,000 years ago. During the eleventh century B.C., the present Beijing area developed into a major city: Ji. Later it became the capital of several kingdoms like Yan, Liao, and Jin. Since 1276, Beijing has served as the capital of China, except a short period from 1928-1949 when the Republic of China shifted its capital to Nanjing. As Xu Chengbei argues, due to its particular location connecting China's central plains with its northeastern area, Beijing is crucial to the present territory of China by serving as the political and military center integrating the two areas and unifying the country (Xu, *Old Beijing: the Remaining Charm of Imperial Capital* 7-9).

China in the 1920s looked so traditional and Chinese and at the same time harbored the essentials of modern and Western urban life" (7). Strand's description provides a historical context for understanding this play. As dramatized throughout the play, the remains of the imperial past—the deposed emperor, Manchu aristocrats, court symbols, traditional cuisine, exemplary ancestors, former lifestyle, entrenched customs, inherited values, and cultural mentality—still hold strong influence over society. At the same time, modern forces—the Republican government and army, modern police, Western dress, foreign imperialists, new technology, democratic spirit, and individualistic pursuit—all produce obvious changes in the characters' lives. These diverse aspects of tradition and modernity structure the dramatic tensions within the play.[111]

Furthermore, the play dramatizes how tradition and modernity are mutually penetrated and constitutive. Beijing's long history determines its modernity to be based on its historical patterns. At the same time, the demands of modernity also

[111] I use "modernity" in the sense of "translated modernity" as proposed by Lydia H. Liu, who uses the notion "to identify and interpret those contingent moments and processes that are reducible neither to foreign impact nor to the self-explanatory logic of the indigenous tradition" (xix). By using this term, Liu aims to "focus on the ways in which intellectual resources from the West and from China's past are cited, translated, appropriated, or claimed in moments of perceived historical contingency so that something called *change* may be produced. In my view, this change is always already different from China's own past and from the West, but have profound linkages with both" (39). Lydia Liu also argues that "Terms such as 'nation,' 'culture,' 'tradition,' 'history,' and 'modernity' are, therefore, not just translations of metropolitan European theories but, more important, mediated forms of expression that carry the burden of these people's experience of a totalized West" (184). I use modernity in Lydia Liu's sense of "translated modernity" because the modernity manifested in this play is both profoundly different and closely linked with China's own past and the modern West.

drive people to interpret, construct, and manipulate history in certain ways in order to serve their present aspirations. Madeleine Yue Dong argues:

> The people of Republican Beijing, instead of rejecting its past, took it as a resource. … They were actively dealing with and giving meaning to the present in which they were living, believing in its significance for the future, rather than waiting to shed tradition and embrace a future defined in Western terms. By defining the meaning of the present, they were taking control of both the past and the future. In the present of Republican Beijing, they actively participated in, rather than passively followed, the definition of their own identity in the modern world. (307)

Dong's description of the people of Republican Beijing summarizes the characters in this play, who reenact different traditions in different ways in order to actively construct their identities in the present and orient their life in the future. If the deposed aristocratic class is obsessed with displaying imperial symbols and staging imperial ceremonies in order to deny their actual loss of power in the present, the ordinary people working at Fujude model themselves on China's exemplary historical figures and take an active role in regenerating the repressed modern spirits imbedded within Chinese traditions. The play also mentions Dr. Hu Shih in Act II, a

representative historical figure of the New Cultural Movement (1917-1923).[112] Radically rejecting Chinese traditions and advocating wholesale acceptance of modern Western culture, Hu's intricate connection to the condemned traditions reveals the fallacy of establishing a complete Western version of modernity in China. In this way, the play explores the complexity and ambiguity imbedded within Chinese modernity.

The dynamic interaction between Chinese traditions and modern Western values as dramatized in the play exemplifies Dong's description of Republican Beijing. According to Dong, the energy of Republican Beijing exactly

> came from dynamic and productive interactions between the past and the present, as well as efforts to define a future that would be relevant to, or even based on, these interactions. … [T]he struggles among the different histories of Republican Beijing relativized not only the past and the present but also the vision of a future dominated by the West and its values. Republican Beijing demanded a nonhegemonic definition of modernity. (306)

Dong's argument provides an effective footnote to understand the play. The diverse historical forces dramatized in the play as struggling in Republican Beijing compel

[112] "New Culture" Movement is "a vague label for intellectual changes lasting from the mid-1910s into the 1920s. 'New Culture' was in fact a rallying cry for efforts to abolish everything associated with subservience, hierarchy, patriarchy, and decadence. … [L]ed by men who had studied in Japan, the US, Germany, Britain, and France, … the whole point was that a new culture would form the basis of a new kind of egalitarian and libertarian politics" (Zarrow 129).

the characters to approach and utilize traditions not in their original sense but in harmony with modern Western values. The modernity transplanted into Republican Beijing does not have the given attributes of Western modernity either, but an alternative version of modernity originating from within Chinese traditions. In this way, the characters in this play do not remain subjugated under any fixed version of tradition and modernity, but take an active role in defining their past, present, and future.

The play begins by dramatizing a tumultuous historical event in 1917, when the deposed Qing court is resurrected with the warlord Zhangxun supporting the puppet emperor Puyi to re-ascend the throne. Ironically describing how the old aristocrats celebrate this restoration, the stage direction at the beginning of the play points out the empty, false nature of their jubilance:

> Business has been particularly good for the taverns and restaurants the past few days. The last emperor of the Qing dynasty has ascended the throne, to the cries by "loyal subjects" that "the imperial system must be restored; the common people want their former lord," escorted by the warlord Zhang Xun. Restorationists and other enthusiasts of nostalgia living inside and outside the Forbidden City have dug out court clothes from the bottoms of trunks, displayed braided queues, whether genuine or false, and filled the streets with a flood of campy-looking "ancestors." According to the traditions of our Chinese nation, the one and only form for expressing joy is eating, and so Meat

> Market Lane has erupted with this momentary revival like the last glow of the setting sun or of a dying man. (He 138)

This sarcastic description clearly presents this restoration as an empty show devoid of any substance, as producing only a parade of campy signs and exaggerated consumption, instead of any significant social change. The ironic depictions of these revived signs as being "dug out … from the bottoms of trunks," "like the last glow of the setting sun or of a dying man," define this restoration as going against the progression of history, thus doomed to fail.

The stage direction's assertion that, "according to the traditions of our Chinese nation, the one and only form for expressing joy is eating," not only locates eating at the center of Chinese life, but also points out the ceremonial and celebratory function of eating. Nevertheless, the ironic tone of this comment undermines the blissful harmony projected by the exquisite banquet ceremonies. If the most basic function of eating is to maintain physical existence and satisfy sensual desire, when it becomes the only means to express joy, it reveals serious spiritual impoverishment and mental monotony. As the play progresses, we can see that the magnificent banquets in Republican Beijing do not signify social prosperity or community harmony, nor produce virtuous behavior that Chinese cuisine is supposed to nourish. On the contrary, they help to construct an illusionary return of the past world in order to temporarily evade the crises and chaos in this dynamic transformational period. In this way, the degeneration of the Chinese cultural spirit in Republican Beijing is

reflected through people's dietary activities, which maintain their material form but lose their moral and spiritual function.

What is more ironic is that the play dramatizes this resurrection of the dead as being aided by their surrogaters—the agents of the new Republican government—thus signifying how the old and the new, the traditional and the modern, collaborate with each other in the pursuit of power. First established in the late Qing dynasty under the influence of Japanese and Western—especially French—modern police systems, the modern police in Republican Beijing incorporated, recycled, and transformed the long-existing Beijing Gendarmerie personnel, perspectives, attitudes, and practices.[113] The Republican police in this play exemplify how the modern system of the Republic comes out of, supports, and protects the imperial system. At the beginning of the play, a policeman takes advantage of this resurrection as a profit-making opportunity and comes to sell an imperial dragon flag to Fujude. Wearing a modern police uniform, but with a Manchu queue beneath his police cap, the policeman physically embodies the bizarre juxtaposition of the old and the new—both are relativized as paradoxical. This ambivalence is also manifested in the imperial flags sold by the police, which have transformed from the magnificent signs of the supreme power into "a bundle of wrinkled cotton crepe flags ... made of toilet paper" (He 139), not only shabby but also easily torn. The inevitable demise of

[113] See the intricate connections between Beijing modern police and Beijing Gendarmerie in Dray-Novey's article.

China's imperial system is vividly projected in these inauthentic and fragile dragon flags.

Besides dragon flag, another sign that signifies the restoration of the Qing is the queue, a Manchu hairstyle required by Qing rulers for all Chinese men to wear to profess their subservience to the Manchu government.[114] As Joshua Goldstein points out, "the queue did more than politically mark the Han male's body: it was a physical embodiment of a man's political subjectivity" (169). Wearing a queue marked a man as a political subject of the Manchu kingdom. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the majority Han Chinese, the queue marks the civilized Han Chinese's shameful subjugation to the barbarians. And in the eyes of foreigners, the queue was a laughable relic that manifested China's backwardness. For this reason, the queue was a target of the Han Chinese anti-Qing revolutions in the late Qing. After the 1911 revolution that overthrew Qing, successive Republican governments issued orders to prohibit wearing queues. Cutting queues thus became a symbol of revolution and fashionable forsaking of the old to follow the new.[115] In this way, the queue became a site of struggle between tradition and modernity. Whether a man wore it or not announced his cultural allegiance and political standpoint.

Thus, in the premier production of this play, directors Xia Chun and Gu Wei used this physical symbol to portray the personalities of different characters. Since

[114] The Chinese population is comprised of many ethnicities, within which the Han is the overwhelming majority that comprises over ninety percent of the population. Manchu is a minority, and the Qing was a Manchu kingdom that ruled over all of China.

roast duck is a high-class cuisine that only the wealthy can afford, most male characters who come to dine or do business in Fujude in Act I (set in 1917) wear queues in order to ensure their security and privilege in the restored Qing regime. Only waiters, chefs, apprentices, Lu Mengshi, and Tang Maochang do not wear queues. While the waiters, chefs, and apprentices do not care to follow this fashion because of their humble social status, Lu Mengshi, working as an accountant in another restaurant at the time, is a man of status. Thus, by not wearing a queue, Lu clearly declares his political choice to make historical progress and his spiritual integrity as a man of Han ethnicity. Tang Maochang, as Fujude's third-generation proprietor, is a Peking Opera practitioner. His not wearing a queue is his presumptuous posture as the legitimate heir and representative of the Han Chinese culture and kingdom dramatized in Peking opera. As the play progresses to Act II (set in 1920) and Act III (set in 1928), when the Qing's demise is certain, the only characters who still wear queues are the Qing court eunuch and chef Li Xiaobian'r (Li Little Queue). While the eunuch is one of the few unchangeable relics of the old regime, Li Xiaobian'r "wouldn't cut his pigtail off to save his life" (He 163) due to his social identity as a chef of Manchu-Han Full Banquet, the most magnificent Qing court banquet.

The policeman who comes to sell dragon flags to the restaurant at the beginning of the play doesn't miss the opportunity to gain more profit by examining the queue worn by Fujude's assistant manager, Wang Zixi. Seeing that it must be

[115] See Zhao Yinglan's introduction of cutting queues in the Republican era (1-5).

fake, the police officer asks, "Where'd you get such a fake-looking queue," as he yanks Wang's queue with his hand (He 139). Not wanting to get into trouble for wearing a queue made out of a horse tail, Wang bribes the policeman with a bag of baked meatballs. Wang's light-hearted conversation with a clerk from a secondhand clothes shop shows how businessmen see these constant surrogations of the social symbolic order as mere opportunities to do business:

> WANG ZIXI: You're from the secondhand clothes shop, aren't you? How's business, pretty good?
>
> CLERK: Fantastic! All the old clothes we took in last year when the Revolutionary Party was up in arms, we sold off completely in two days. It was getting so my boss was ready to strip them out of coffins.
>
> WANG ZIXI: Hey, I remember when you cut your braid off.
>
> CLEAK: (*Whispering*) I coiled it up inside my cap. When the revolution is on, I keep it coiled up; when the emperor comes back, I let it down again.
>
> WANG ZIXI: I get it, like a well rope. (He 146)

This ironic conversation exemplifies what Hayden White argues about the trope of irony in historical writing: "Irony tends to dissolve all belief in the possibility of positive political actions" (38). The clerk's sarcastic description of these frequent power surrogations as mere plays of signs reflects how common people during the Republican era see no difference between these apparently

different political regimes.[116] Although symbolic signs change, human behavior, cultural mentality, and social customs stay the same. No real social progress, historical justice, or significant transformation is brought by these power-seekers. As Goldstein argues, during the Republican era, "the urban public were, in their daily lives, coming to view this separation of representation and reality as a natural and crucial aspect of how the world was organized and rationalized" (170). The urban public in *The World's Top Restaurant* is dramatized as just having this attitude, not caring which symbolic order is presiding over society, but simply following whatever the fashion is in order to benefit from it. In this way, the play presents the incompetence of the power-holders in Republican Beijing in representing people's will, managing state affair, and regulating social life.

Nevertheless, no matter how empty this power juggling seems to be for the urban public, for those power-seekers it is a life-and-death struggle. Through the character Ke Wu, the descendent of a Manchu prince, the play dramatizes how Manchu aristocrats parade their regained power, status, wealth, and prestige. As Goldstein points out:

[116] After the Qing dynasty was overthrown in 1911, the imperial system was restored twice. The first time was in 1915 when Yuan Shikai declared himself the emperor of the constitutional monarchy. Previously, Yuan was a minister of Qing and an ally of Empress Dowager Cixi but later assumed the Presidency of the Republic in 1912 with the support of foreign imperialists. This restoration lasted only 83 days and was overthrown by the Republican army in 1916. Warlords like Li Yuanhong, Duan Qirui, and Zhang Xun—all of them Republican officials—then struggled for supreme power, with Zhang Xun staging another restoration farce in 1917 by placing the boy emperor Puyi on the throne as his puppet. Zhang Xun's restoration is the historical background of Act I in this play.

> The Qing empire was a qualitatively more performative society grounded in a presentational epistemology: officials and commoners were carefully distinguished by dress, habit, and social space; the state was created and daily recreated through the conscientious performance of ritual; the political and the cultural, nature and society, were seen, at least according to the elite ideal, as intrinsically linked, ordered, and enabled through *wen* (civil). (168)

By distinguishing social status through dress, habit, ritual, social space, and civil activities, the Qing rulers placed everyone in a certain social position, requiring them to behave according to appropriate codes in order to maintain the social hierarchy. Even eating activity must conform to this ritualized system of codes. In Act II, Ke Wu brags how the aristocratic hierarchy is manifested in the different dragon signs decorated on dishes: "The imperial dragon had five claws. Princes' dragons had four. The dragons of highest ranked officials had only three claws" (He 179). Transgressing one's designated signs means challenging the imperial authority. Ke Wu's family becomes bankrupt just because they use dishes decorated with five clawed dragons—thus offending "the imperial countenance" and resulting in the confiscation of all of their family property (He 179). This over-emphasis on signs of power reflects the vanity of that power.

But if no actual power exists besides those empty signs, the power-seekers can only manipulate signs to construct their social identities. The play dramatizes that the first thing Emperor Puyi does after he re-ascends the throne is to strengthen

his political coalition by conferring symbols of power. As Ke Wu boasts: "Eh, as soon as the emperor was on the throne he bestowed upon our father both the privilege of wearing the official peacock-feathered hat, and the sedan chairs covered in green wool. … [I]n consideration of my father's loyalty, he awarded him a purple python robe and peacock feather" (He 140, 141). Bestowing these imperial signs apparently aims to restore the previous power hierarchy. But, as Eric Hobsbawm argues, "the very appearance of movements for the defense or revival of traditions, 'traditionalist' or otherwise" indicates a break, discontinuity, and rupture with the past (7-8). The very emphasis upon these imperial ceremonies reveals the emperor's pathetic loss of power, as boasted by Ke Wu: "(*Stern as an important court official*) On the very first day, the emperor in one breath issued nine decrees, ordering Li Yuanhong to resign his position, but Li had the nerve to refuse the order. My father sent up a memorial to intervene, requesting the emperor to have Li Yuanhong take his own life" (He 140). Here, Ke Wu's boast unwittingly reveals that to Li Yuanhong, the Republican President at the time, the emperor already has no authority at all. Although the 12-year-old boy emperor uses number nine, a supreme number in Chinese culture, to enlist the support of heaven, this magic number does not restore his status as the Son of Heaven. This dramatic episode presents the power struggle between the Manchu aristocrats and the Republican officials at the time.

Puyi's identification with his predecessors follows the Qing court's rule to observe traditions. As Su Chung points out, "No one in any dynasty of China ever lived a more rigidly controlled life than the emperor of the Ch'ing [Qing]. Due to

strict observance of traditional conventions of the court, the freedom of the emperor was far less than that of an ordinary man" (15). If strict obeisance to conventions aims to guarantee the prolongation of the Qing system, this play dramatizes the paradox that sticking to the form of convention only leads to the loss of convention. Juliet Bredon, in her study of chief places of interest in Republican Beijing, thus describes emperor Puyi's lonely life in that imaginary world constructed by the performance of convention:

> Here in a small portion of the Imperial Palace the deposed Manchu Emperor lives, the lonely child called from his play to sit on the Dragon Throne, only to see his mighty empire shrink to this. In this tiny world he and his court keep up a semblance of the old regime. Edicts are issued under the old reigning title: princes make their obeisance to their monarch: eunuchs serve him in official robes. Curious this make-believe kingdom, curious and infinitely pathetic, too, this last stronghold of mystery in once mysterious Peking! (qtd. in Cameron and Brake, 195)

Although Bredon's description presents Puyi's authority as confined only within a small portion of the imperial palace, the play dramatizes Puyi's continued hold upon people's minds. Just like the still-standing Forbidden City,[117] the imperial traditions

[117] The Forbidden City is located in middle of Beijing. Since 1420 during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 A.D.) until the end of the Qing dynasty (1644-1912 A.D.),

still greatly influence how people think and behave.

In Act II, the play presents how the deposed emperor Puyi is still revered by the common people. Bored within the Forbidden City, Puyi tries to imitate his predecessors to reach out to his former kingdom, ironically, with the facilitation of modern equipment—the telephone. A huge fuss is caused at Fujude by an anonymous call received the day before, which placed an order for two ducks to be delivered to a Mr. Wu. The voice in the call is described by assistant manager Wang Zixi as "a young voice, sounded cultured" (He 167). But when apprentice Fu Shun sent the ducks to the designated place, it turned out that no one there ordered the ducks. As a residential area for the poor, it actually had no connection with fancy roast ducks that only the rich could afford. Fu Shun describes his delivery as not only confusing but also troublesome: "When I got there I saw it was a low-rent courtyard divided up into apartments, so poor they couldn't even afford corn muffins let alone duck. I went door to door asking for this Mr. Wu who'd ordered duck. The guys there just glared at me, and one young one said I was deliberately making fun of them. Said he was going to punch me" (Ibid.). Later that day when a palace eunuch comes to order ducks for the imperial palace, he explains that call as "the emperor's little joke" and compensates its cost with "two silver ingots" (He 174).

Besides presenting Puyi's boredom and naivety, the emperor's call dramatized in the play could also be interpreted as Puyi's absurd attempt to follow

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it served as the imperial palace of the emperor and his household, as well as the ceremonial and political center of Chinese government.

the imperial convention to bestow food on subjects, although on a much degraded level. Yi Yongwen, in his study of food in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, describes how Qing emperors always held extremely luxurious banquets to entertain envoys, officials, and citizens in order to show off their supreme authority, generosity, and elegance. These imperial banquets were held with glorious ceremony, meticulous regulation, and strict classification (289-312). Compared with those magnificent banquet ceremonies, Puyi's random order of ducks, not aiming to benefit the poor but only to deride the underprivileged, evidences Puyi's immorality and dysfunction. By making the eunuch compensate for his joke, the Puyi in this play identifies with two of his ancestors—emperor Qianlong and emperor Guangxu, who were said to have made adventures outside the Imperial Palace to dine incognito at restaurants and made eunuchs pay for their meals later. Nevertheless, while Qianlong and Guangxu dared to enjoy temporary freedom in the capital city of their kingdom, the Puyi in this play hides behind the thick walls and closed gates of the Forbidden City and is constantly threatened by the bombs of the Republican army. The pathetic image of Puyi evidences the unrecoverable demise of Qing.

The play also presents Qing court's decline through their dining activity. As Yao Weijun, a scholar on Chinese culinary history, argues, since the Qing court cuisine synthesizes the conventions of China's previous imperial cuisines, it is noted for unprecedented extravagance and unparalleled refinement. The weaker the Qing court becomes, the grander its banquet. Equipped with huge banquet management

offices and an amazing number of excellent cooks, Qing court dishes are made with the most expensive ingredients, prepared with extremely complex procedures, cooked by the best chefs, arranged in the prettiest patterns, and served with the finest utensils. Their superb level is unachievable by folk cuisine (171-86). While the Qing court holds banquets everyday, the most extravagant is the Manchu-Han Full Banquet, served at imperial ceremonies to bestow the emperor's favor upon officials. Combining the best dishes of Manchu and Chinese cuisine, the Manchu-Han Full Banquet comprises 108 dishes consumed through three dinners in a span of one to three days (Hong and Qiu 75-6). This famous banquet is explained by Fujude's chef Li Xiaobian'r in Act III, "The thirty-six star deities of heaven and seventy-two star deities of earth make one hundred and eight. It means that nothing in heaven or earth is left out" (He 172). Here, Li Xiaobian'r's explains the purpose of the Manchu-Han Full Banquet is to demonstrate the emperor's control over everything flying in the sky, living on the earth, and swimming in the water. At the same time, this banquet embodies the Chinese cultural ideal of maintaining organic unity between human beings and the universe.

Despite all these elaborate rules, chef Li Xiaobian'r describes the Manchu-Han Full Banquet as "just for show. There is nothing of substance to them" (He 192). This extreme case of Chinese culinary arts just departs from Chinese culinary traditions. Since Chinese food culture advocates eating only seventy to eighty percent full in order to prolong human life, the continuous consumption of large quantities of extravagant dishes as provided by Manchu-Han Full Banquet not only harms the

human body, but also ruins the enjoyment of the food. Furthermore, as Chinese culture scholar Wang Xuetai points out, serving large varieties of elegant dishes at the same time makes it hard for imperial chefs to maintain the perfect temperature, texture, and taste of the food. In addition, the Qing court stipulates all dishes to be prepared according to court cooking conventions in ingredients, processing, heat control, and mixing flavors, leaving chefs with no opportunity to develop their own talent and creativity (232-6). These restrictions make Qing imperial cuisine more an expensive display than actual palatable food, "more impressive for its scale than for its inventiveness or refinement" (Lo 22). In this way, the meticulous efforts and huge resources put into producing the exquisite imperial dishes were largely wasted.

This situation became even worse during the Republican era. In his memoir, the deposed emperor, Puyi, thus comments on the Qing court cuisine: "Of all the 'shows' which went on in the Forbidden City one of the most wasteful of material and labour was food. … One big tasteless spread. All show and no flavour! All elaboration and no substance! All expense and no result!" (qtd. in Lo 22, 24). Since Puyi spent most of his days in the Forbidden City as a deposed emperor, the Qing court cuisine he remembers should be during the Republican era.[118] His memoir reveals that, as in their other activities in Republican Beijing, the deposed imperial rulers destroyed the ideals of Chinese culture through their obsession with

[118] Puyi (February 7, 1906 – October 17, 1967) became the emperor of Qing in 1908 at the age of two and was deposed in 1912 at the age of six. He was driven out of the Forbidden City in 1924 at the age of eighteen. So most of the Qing court life within the Forbidden City he remembers should be during the Republican era.

consuming the best part of Chinese culture. The play contrasts the Qing court's failure to represent, practice, and develop Chinese food culture with Fujude's efforts to produce high-quality food. Dramatizing the Qing court's dependence upon Fujude to provide roast ducks aims to signify power shift, although Fujude still has to deliver ducks to the imperial palace by following strict prescriptions for time, location, permit, and procedure—a sharp contrast with that careless and confusing delivery of the ducks to the poor.

By dramatizing how people in Republican Beijing continue to perform ceremonies transmitted from the past, despite their loss of meaning and substance, the play tries to demonstrate how people still behave according to habitual patterns. This is also conveyed through the continued practice of the Manchu kowtow etiquette, which was abolished by the Republican law as signifying the Manchu rulers' suppression and enslavement of the people. The modern bow, stipulated by the Republican law as a more civilized and democratic etiquette, seems to be too unfamiliar to be actually practiced by the people. In Act II, when a eunuch and a Republican army adjutant—enemies from two opposing camps—encounter each other, they still carry themselves according to the order, gentility, and dignity that distinguished the life in old Beijing, no matter how intensely they are actually struggling for power at the present. The incongruence between the modern political sign and people's traditional mentality is revealed by the Adjutant, who, dressed in the Republican army uniform, first offers the eunuch an army salute, then a Manchu kowtow salute, saying: "That salute I just gave was from the Republic. But this is

from me" (He 174). The terrified and embarrassed eunuch, wearing the Qing court robe, hat, and a big queue, is not sure what kind of salute to return. Finally he gives a Republican army salute to the Adjutant. The ironic contrast and bizarre juxtaposition between the new/old uniform and the old/new etiquette present not only the huge gap between the symbolic order and the reality in Republican Beijing, but also the close ties between the traditional and the modern.

Their dialogue shows more similarity and connection, rather than differences, between the surrogated and the surrogater:

> ADJUTANT: Is His Highness well?
>
> DIRECTOR: He is, thank you. And President Xu?
>
> ADJUTANT: He is, thank you. President Xu has the utmost respect for the Great Qing. He's always telling us we are acting as regents for the young monarch.
>
> DIRECTOR: You are altogether too modest. Nowadays the emperor believes in the Republic. Why, just the other day he held an audience with the great philosopher of the foreign camp, Dr. Hu Shih, and recited one of the professor's seven-word *jueju* poems. (*As if reciting a passage from the Four Classic Books*) "Picnicking on the banks of the Yangzi." That fellow's poem really is Manchu-Chinese with a foreign flavor. (*The two laugh uncomfortably*.) (He 174-5)

The two historical figures mentioned by the eunuch—President Xu Shichang and Dr. Hu Shih—are dramatized in the play to exemplify how people in the Republican era are ambiguously situated in the complex overlap of multiple social times. No one completely belongs to the traditional camp or to the modern camp. A top official in the former Qing court, President Xu was a close ally of the notorious Yuan Shikai, who became Republican President in 1915 by promising never to restore the monarchy system but declared himself emperor in December 1915. This play dramatizes President Xu's continuity of imperial practices by making the Adjutant quote his statement that "we are acting as regents for the young monarch." The play's negative portrayal of Republican officials echoes the theme of "True Story of Ah Q," a famous short story written by Lu Xun, the most revered writer of the May Fourth period. As summarized by Jonathan Spence, the "Ah Q" theme is that "the so-called 'revolution of 1911' had changed nothing of significance in the Chinese character but had just brought a new set of scoundrels into office" (318). From Lu Xun's point of view, although the revolution of 1911 overthrew China's millennia-long feudal system, it did not transform people's cultural mentality and habitual behavior. The same moral cowardice, backwardness, inertia, and apathy that characterized the traditional Chinese still remained. The newly gained political and military power only provided the new power-holders with convenient means to expropriate benefits and wealth for themselves.

Lu Xun's view may influence this play's presentation of Republican officials. Right after the eunuch leaves, the Adjutant asks Fujude's manager Lu Mengshi to

request from the eunuch something used by the emperor, because "Once the imperial household is gone, things like that become antiques, collectibles" (He 175). This dramatic episode refers to the historical fact that large amount of national treasures possessed by the Qing court were gradually stolen by foreigners and warlords since the late Qing. This is why even the ordinary adjutant in the play aspires to some accidental fortune. After Lu Mengshi bribes him with a gold ring, the Adjutant reserves tables at Fujude for his evening banquet. He warns Lu: "The fellow I'm inviting tonight is the commander of General Duan Qirui's bodyguard, and we have some important matters to settle. So if the service here isn't good, he'll find an excuse to start fighting" (He 176). When they come to dine that evening, waiter Chang Gui reports to Lu Mengshi, "Over at the presidential palace tables, they're all talking about fighting and killing and what all" (He 194). This characterization of the Republican officials as violent, corrupted scoundrels presents the new power-holders as without the intention or the ability to turn China into a modern nation.

If political rulers are all dramatized as rogues, what about the new cultural figures who introduced Western civilization to China? The eunuch in this play mentions Dr. Hu Shih's friendly relationship with emperor Puyi. As a celebrated iconoclastic intellectual of the New Culture Movement, Dr. Hu Shih was also politically conservative and believed in the gradual transformation of the political system, instead of abrupt social change. When warlord Feng Yuxiang drove Puyi out of the Forbidden City in 1924, Hu Shih submitted a memorial to oppose it. Hu Shih's paradoxical relationship with tradition exemplifies the contradiction and ambiguity

of the Republican era. No one could escape from the tight grip of China's past, including this radical Occidentalist who proclaimed his goal to re-evaluate all aspects of Chinese culture. As Hu Shih himself bitterly felt, "he was a member of a transitional generation that had obligations both to the past and to the future, and was doomed to make sacrifices for both" (Spence 316). Trying to mediate and compromise between the competing forces, Hu Shih unwittingly went back to the Confucian Doctrine of the Golden Mean,[119] which he himself vehemently criticized. This contradiction was also manifested in his literary creation and scholarly research. Although Hu Shih initiated the Vernacular Movement (1917-1919 A.D.) by advocating "the vernacular cadences of ordinary speech" (Spence 316) to replace archaic language in literary writing, he inherited the academic achievements of those old-fashioned scholars who remained loyal to Chinese traditions or the Qing court. At the same time, his vernacular poems were resented by traditionalist scholars.[120] This play refers to Hu Shih's ambiguous situation enmeshed within the complex network of tradition and modernity through the eunuch's sarcastic comment on Hu Shih's poem as "Manchu-Chinese with a foreign flavor" (He 175). Hu Shih's

[119] As "the central doctrine of Confucianism," the Doctrine of the Golden Mean advocates "moderation," "restraint," and the avoidance of all excesses, "the same as the 'nothing too much ideal of the Greeks'" (Lin Yutang 109, 110). It upholds compromise—taking the middle road—in order to maintain social harmony and order. This doctrine was vehemently criticized by the May Fourth intellectuals.

[120] See Lin Zhihong's analysis of Hu Shih's connection and separation from the Qing court and its adherents during the 1920s.

dilemma exemplifies the impossibility of completely enforcing Western culture in Republican Beijing.

Situated in this transitional period characterized by the interweaving of tradition and modernity, even the abdicated emperor Puyi tried very hard to break out of the restrictions of the Qing court conventions. Ignoring opposition from his imperial family, Puyi cut his queue, wore a Western suit, ate foreign food, and behaved independently. After the twelve-day restoration in 1917, the Republican government required him to get a modern education from Western tutors. He himself also had a strong interest in new culture and new literature.[121] The play dramatizes Puyi's attempt to form alliances with new historical forces through the eunuch's reference to Puyi's meeting with "the great philosopher of the foreign camp" (He 174). This reference reminds the audience of the famous Hundred Day Reform of 1898, when Emperor Guangxu collaborated with some progressive-minded Chinese scholars like Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, and Tan Sitong to carry out widespread reforms in order to modernize China against imperialist invasion. Nevertheless, this reform was obstructed by the Qing court conservative forces, led by Empress Dowager Cixi, who was afraid that the reform would weaken her authority and subordinate China to foreign countries. If that reform movement still aimed to rescue Qing, its failure destined the total collapse of the Manchu kingdom.[122] After its demise, all efforts at resurrection were already too late.

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[121] Ibid.

[122] See Jonathan Spence's chapter on the reform movement of 1898 (224-30).

Jean Baudrillard thus analyzes the process of power decline:

> As long as the historical threat came at it from the real, power played at deterrence and simulation, disintegrating all the contradictions by dint of producing equivalent signs. Today when the danger comes at it from simulation (that of being dissolved in the play of signs), power plays at the real, plays at crisis, plays at remanufacturing artificial, social, economic, and political stakes. For power, it is a question of life and death. But it is too late. (22)

Baudrillard's description applies to the decline of the Qing dramatized in this play. If all the magic rituals—luxurious banquets, imperial emblems, strict ceremonies, and formal etiquette—are conducted by the Qing court in order to legitimize its authority and deter challenge, opposition, or instability, when it couldn't stage its signs of power any more, all its efforts to remanufacture stakes by participating in the modernization process come too late to give it a new life.

The play presents the gradual passing away of the imperial past through dramatizing Puyi's gradual loss of his hold over people's minds. If in Act I and Act II people still simulate reverence for the deposed emperor, who continues to live in grandeur in the Forbidden City and enjoy all kinds of privilege, in Act III, after he is driven out of the Forbidden City to seek protection in a Japanese settlement in Tianjin,[123] all those old rules and regulations made by the Qing court become

[123] Tianjin is a port city adjacent to Beijing. In 1860 it became one of the treaty ports open for foreign trade.

outdated. When roast-duck chef Luo Datou continues to cite the emperor's rule not to transmit his roasting skill to apprentices, manager Lu Mengshi laughs: "The emperor's sitting in exile in a Japanese concession. And that rule should have been changed long ago" (He 206). Compared with Lu's reverence for the emperor in Act II, his change of attitude eight years later in Act III conveys the message that modern ideology like openness, democracy, and equal opportunity are gradually taking root and transforming social practice.

Furthermore, the play dramatizes how the Qing court members plan for their days outside the Forbidden City long before they are actually driven out. This message is conveyed through the eunuch, a tottering, bizarre figure who behaves like a ghost parading in the realm of the living. Played by Ma Enran, a resident actor at BPAT who also played landlord Qi in BPAT's premier production of *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana*, [124] this eunuch has the same high-pitched feminine voice, feeble movement, and weird manners as Qi's ghost. As castrated male servants in China's imperial palace, with a history of over three millennia, eunuchs represent human beings' physical and spiritual abnormality under autocratic feudal system. The play dramatizes this weird eunuch in order to present those diseased vestiges of the past that can never be cured, just like this eunuch's irrecoverable phallus, even in the modern era.

[124] After retire from Beijing People's Art Theater, Ma Enran played many film and TV roles, including a treacherous character in the 32-series TV play *The World's Top Restaurant* that is adapted from this play.

The play also dramatizes a Manchu aristocrat, Ke Wu, to portray the vicissitudes of the aristocratic class during the Republican era: when they recover their prestigious social status in Act I; when they go bankrupt in Act II; and when they transform themselves to become members of the new government in Act III. Ke Wu's dissipation in Act I exemplifies how the leisured Manchu aristocrats, living on government stipends, have degenerated from valiant conquerors of China into a bundle of incorrigible prodigals spending all day eating, drinking, playing, and smoking opium. Even the invasion of foreign imperialists, the uprisings of the Han Chinese, and the collapse of the Qing fail to wake them up from their decadent stupor. The stage direction sarcastically describes Ke Wu and his dining companion, gourmet Xiu Dingxin, as "looking totally incongruous with their surroundings, as if they've just popped out of a couple of coffins" (He 139)—specters of the dead who have already lost their legitimacy in the transformed present. But the dead still claim superiority over the living, as manifested in Ke Wu's demand of flattery from waiter Chang Gui in order to inflate his empty soul. Ke Wu's dependence upon gourmet Xiu Dingxin to guide him through his gastronomical journey is an ironic version of an aristocratic custom of hiring private tutors to teach Confucian classics and offer advice on political and moral issues. When waiter Chang Gui remembers an anecdote that Ke Wu once kicked over a dining table at a restaurant simply because the crab there was not prepared exquisitely, it becomes clear that dining activity is an important means for him to parade his power, taste, and wealth.

But Ke Wu's banquets do not last forever. In Act II, Ke Wu's family is already bankrupt and his poverty and humiliation form a sharp contrast with his wealth and glory in Act I. Wearing a threadbare gray robe, Ke Wu comes to beg a taste of roast duck, thus becoming a repugnant pest despised and repelled by everyone. His failure to request a free meal with an expired duck coupon signifies his inability to live on his previous privilege. Even his diet at home has been degraded. As he laments to Xiu Dingxin, who is now seeking a job at Fujude: "Mr. Xiu, all is over! That bronze skillet we used in winter to eat Mongolian fire pot was sold as bronze by Her Ladyship. And those wood mallets and little picks we used for eating crab have all been burned as firewood, and those pots of Buddha-climbing-the-wall wine we buried in the rear garden were dug up and carried off by Republican Anti-mutiny Army. I only got a smell of it, never a chance to taste it …" (He 184). Ke Wu's lament manifests that what he really cares about during these dramatic historical changes is neither the collapse of the Manchu kingdom nor his family's bankruptcy, but his inability to enjoy sumptuous food any more. Ke Wu's spiritual emptiness and moral corruption again signify the incorrigibility of the Manchu ruling class and the imperial system.

Ke Wu's failure to restore his dining privilege in Act II drives him to transform himself into an agent of the new ruling regime. Smoking opium, a habit acquired during his glorious days, now becomes a convenient means for him to seek new power. Imported into China by Great Britain, opium not only ignited the Opium War (1840-1842) that started China's semi-colonial period, but also penetrated all

aspects of Republican social life, greatly devastating people's health and weakening people's minds. As Zhao Yinglan observes, opium's expensive price made smoking opium a genteel activity affordable only by the wealthy and the honored. Thus, smoking opium became a necessary means to entertain guests, make friends, resolve conflicts, and do business (185-200). In this way, opium became a sign of superiority, like luxurious banquets. As Xu Chengbei points out, smoking opium in northern China was initiated by descendents of the banner-men (*Old Beijing: The Remaining Charm* 171).[125] The play dramatizes the Manchu aristocrats' active role in promoting opium through the character Ke Wu, whose father even hired a master to teach him how to smoke opium, so that he would stay at home, instead of going out carousing with prostitutes. Ke Wu declares the three advantages of smoking opium, taught by his master: "It prevents illness, dispels loneliness, promotes thought" (He 183). Through this episode, the play refers to the corrupted Manchu rulers' responsibility in subjugating China to foreign invasion and exploitation during the modern era.

As Chinese historian Zhao Yinglan points out, in addition to Manchu aristocrats' active promotion, opium's prevalence during the Republican era was also facilitated by the Republican government, which was lax in prohibiting opium due to the huge profits and taxes collected from the opium business. Consequently, bureaucrats, politicians, warlords, landlords, bandits, gangs, and the poor all participated in the opium trade (185-200). The play refers to this important historical

[125] Banner-men refer to those Manchu soldiers who fought in wars that led to the establishment of the Qing dynasty. They were called banner-men because they were organized into banner units, with each unit signified by a flag of a specific color.

phenomenon in Act II, when roast-duck chef Luo Datou protests that even the garrison commander is an opium dealer, who stores a chest full of opium at home and even rewards Luo's cooking with opium (He 203). The importance of opium inspires Ke Wu to join the Criminal Investigation Unit to prohibit opium, so that he can profit from abusing his power. Thus, the surreptitious opium trade by the Republican police is dramatized in the play to emphasize the continued presence of the imperial past within the Republican present, no matter how different the present claims to be.

C. Fujude: Reenacting the Dynastic Cycle

If this play portrays China's old and new ruling class as destroying the spirit and substance of Chinese cultural heritage, it presents China's hope for revival as depending on economic enterprises like Fujude. In order to dramatize Fujude as carrying on the orthodox Chinese traditions in the secular world after the demise of the imperial system, the stage direction describes the founder of the restaurant as starting his small peddler business in the late Qing with an ambition to serve the aristocratic class. "In 1938 a young man named Tang, with an accent he brought from Rongcheng in Shandong Province, laid a plank for a counter across two rocks and thereby established a stall selling raw chicken and duck next to the stone pavement of the imperial walkway reserved for the emperor" (He 137). While the specific location of his stall reveals this founder's intention to climb up the social ladder through his business, his surname Tang also has significant meaning since imperial China reached the peak of its prosperity during the Tang Dynasty (618-907

A.D.). That cultural memory provides this family with an imaginary order to identify their business. Tang Deyuan, Fujude's second-generation proprietor, tells his two sons that their grandfather named them "Chang" and "Sheng" for their meaning of "prosperity," in hopes that "the Tang family would hold on to this restaurant as a family business for generations to come" (He 159). In this way, the founder of the restaurant identifies with those founders of imperial dynasties, who transmitted supreme power to their descendents in hopes that their family empire would last forever.

Located right outside the main gate of the imperial palace, at "Zhengyangmenwai, or Southern Palace Gate District [also called the Qianmen District]," which "is worthy of the sobriquet 'At the feet of the Son of Heaven'" (He 136), the play presents the restaurant as a link between the imperial court and the secular society. On the one hand, situated on Beijing's central axis, the historically existing Southern Palace Gate led directly to the center of power within the Forbidden City. For this reason, around the Qianmen District gathered all government administrative offices and those Confucian scholars who came to take imperial examinations.[126] On the other hand, since the Southern Palace Gate connected the Inner City—where the imperial family and aristocrats resided—with the Outer City—which housed the common people, it was the gateway through which the upper-class lifestyle and culture came out to infiltrate the secular world. Large numbers of common folk worked at the restaurants, shops, teahouses, theaters,

and brothels in the Qianmen district to provide entertainments for diverse classes. Thus, these commercial businesses not only popularized high-class culture but also provided a mingling ground where various classes came together to interact with each other.

The play dramatizes Fujude as establishing itself on the same ethical principles that have guided successive imperial dynasties. Coming from the Shandong province, the birthplace of Confucianism, Fujude's founder behaves according to the Confucian ethics, as described in the stage direction at the beginning of the play: "His personality was amiable and his dealings honest, so that business grew until, with his hard-earned savings, he was able to buy a store beside the main thoroughfare, among the forest of shops in the Qianmen neighborhood, and founded the enterprise that would extend into the next century" (He 137). The amiable personality, honest dealings, frugality, and hard work as described in this stage direction are Confucian virtues supposed to be prerequisites for the prosperity of a dynasty or a business. Even the name of the restaurant—"Fujude," meaning "The Fortune of Accumulated Virtue"—declares virtue as the foundation of its profit-making. Throughout the play, this name, carved in the royal golden color, is hung high above the hall to show off the restaurant's inheritance of China's orthodox ideology. Roast-duck chef Luo Datou always brags about his valiant behavior of snatching this name-sign from the fire set by the Allied Army of Eight Countries that

[126] See Xu Chengbei's introduction of Qianmen District in *Old Beijing: Variations of Qianmen* 28.

invaded Beijing in 1900 and burned Qianmen. Without him, Fujude would not exist today (He 144). This anecdote clearly endows the preservation of this name-sign with the symbolic meaning of salvaging China's orthodox moral principles from the wreckage of Western imperialist forces.

These virtues are inherited by Tang Deyuan, Fujude's second-generation proprietor. In Act One, Tang Deyuan is a very good, respected manager who cares for the business and insists upon providing high-quality ducks for the customers. Knowing that his two sons are two worthless prodigals, Tang Deyuan imitates Liu Bei, the emperor of Kingdom Shu during the period of Three Kingdoms (208-280 A.D.). Liu Bei invited Zhu Geliang to be his prime minister and, at his deathbed, entrusted Zhu to assist his idiot son Liu Chan to manage the kingdom. Tang Deyuan at his deathbed also invites Lu Mengshi to be Fujude's new manager, entrusting Lu to assist his two sons to manage his family enterprise. He not only appreciates Lu's wisdom, but also agrees with Lu's opinion that, "We all take our chances living by what we can sell, not by bullying or cheating. Whether we succeed at business depends on our abilities" (He 153). Thus right at the beginning of his career at Fujude, Lu is expected to play the role of Zhu Geliang, an icon of both wisdom and virtue in Chinese history.

The symbolic function of the restaurant as epitomizing Chinese empire is also manifested in its auspicious geomantic features. In Act I, when the restaurant is in serious crisis, its old proprietor Tang Deyuan invites a geomancer to inspect its geographic location to see whether it is in harmony with the natural environment of

the site. As Evelyn Lip points out, as one of the oldest Chinese traditions, geomancy [*feng shui*]

> is the art of placing, siting and orienting a building so that the building is in harmony with everything that surrounds it, and the art of finding balance in nature and harmony in the home and working environment. It addresses cultural and social issues of a particular society and makes reference to the natural, metaphysical and cosmological influences. … As the old saying states: *feng shui* is the combination of '*tian ling di li ren he*' (if the heavenly influences are auspicious, the geographical features are beneficial, and the actions of man are in harmony with the social, cultural and political situations, then the *feng shui* is auspicious). (61)

From Lip's explanation we can see that *feng shui* also pursues the Chinese cultural ideals of harmony, balance, and order between human beings and the environment.

Lip describes *feng shui* as "the understanding of how the geographical features of a site and its topography affect buildings internally and externally. … It was such an integral part of Chinese architecture that the principles and rudiments of building were based on its concepts of symmetry, balance, hierarchy of height, walled enclosures and auspicious orientation" (62). The reason for Tang Deyuan to call on a geomancer is to make sure that the building of the restaurant meets these standards. The geomancer describes the location of the restaurant as a "truly precious spot," because it "fronts on a thoroughfare, with a high wall in the rear" (He 153). In

this way, the restaurant mirrors the emperor's dragon chair, which has a screen in the rear as a foil to the emperor's majesty and faces a broad space wherein his subjects are kneeling. It also mirrors the Forbidden City, which has Jingshan—Beijing's highest mountain—to the north as a big screen, and faces a large thoroughfare—Chang'an Street—to the south. In the same way, the restaurant is a metonymy of the Beijing city, which has the backdrop of Yan Mountain to the north and faces the broad land of China to the south. Since the location of the restaurant already indicates its potential to rise to the highest level, the geomancer predicts that if the restaurant adds a high building on top of the present floor, "then you've got two lanes on each side as carrying poles, to make your edifice into a sedan chair, an eight-man sedan chair. Then nothing can stop you. You'll have all the luck in the world!" (He 153).

Since "an eight-man sedan chair" is used to carry people of high social status, the geomancer's description predicts a great future for the restaurant if it adds another floor. Although the geomancer practices a traditional trade, his advice already shows the transformations of that traditional trade by the introduction of modern democracy and equality. As Kenneth H. C. Lo introduces, all private buildings in Old Beijing were one-story buildings because "none was allowed to rival even remotely the height of the Imperial roofs" (18). Seen in this light, the geomancer's advice for Fujude to heighten the building shows the disintegration of this taboo once the Qing collapsed, despite its short-lived restoration in 1917, when Act I is set. It reflects an important social transformation that allows for an economic

enterprise like a restaurant to challenge and replace the supremacy that only the imperial palace enjoyed before. In this way, the economic enterprise run by the common folk is dramatized as shouldering the promise of prosperity for China in modern era. In fact, after the restaurant is built up in Act II, its red lacquered pillars, beautifully decorated beam, exquisitely carved window lattice, golden signs, calligraphy hangings, hardwood furniture, sacrificial altar, red candles, and symmetrical structure make the restaurant resemble a Chinese palace.[127]

If the geomancer predicts a potential great future for the restaurant, it needs a strong leadership to fulfill that potentiality. However, the third generation of its proprietor—Tang Maochang and Tang Maosheng—are more like those decadent Manchu aristocratic descendents who corrupt their inherited empire. The historical cycle of dynastic decline repeats itself at Fujude. Immersing themselves in entertainments, the two young masters have no interest in managing their family enterprise. Buying in cheap, sick ducks and being stingy with employees' wages, they squander money in their hobbies. At the same time, they present themselves as the embodiments of the "two pillars of Chinese masculine identity – the *wen* of culture and the *wu* of military prowess" (Goldstein 54). *Wen* is presented in Peking opera as performed by Tang Maochang, and *wu* in martial arts as practiced by Tang Maosheng. However, the play dramatizes their performances of Chinese masculine identity as more superficial postures than carrying any substance. Like the Qing

[127] This observation is based on the set constructed for the premier production of this play in 1988 at BPAT. The design team comprised Huang Qingze, Fang Kunlin, Yan Xiumin, and Feng Qin.

imperial rulers, the more incompetent they are in managing family enterprise, the more they need these performances to construct their masculine identity and legitimate superiority; the more traditional China is threatened by modern forces and foreign imperialists, the more it needs these performances of national culture to simulate the continuity of the old social structure.

The highly performative nature of the Qing dynasty and Republican social life stimulates Tang Maochang to perform his masculinity, superiority, national culture, and imperial past through Peking opera, a performing art that was very popular and highly esteemed at the time. Like roast duck, Peking opera was patronized by the Qing court. As Joshua Goldstein points out, "For the Qing court, dramatic performance was a regular component of imperial celebrations, seasonal festivities, and monthly rituals" (20). Empress Dowager Cixi was a great Peking opera fan and patron.[128] As with roast duck, court favor made Peking opera a signifier of elegance, luxury, and exquisiteness, with which the aristocratic class and the wealthy were eager to identify. Furthermore, Peking opera's combination of various regional theatrical forms, attraction to diverse social classes, usage of official Beijing dialect, and high artistic quality "crowned [it] with the undisputed designation of *guocui* – national essence, treasure" and made it "a pillar of national culture in the Republican era" (Goldstein 289, 292). Since Peking opera was "an object of national recognition and pride," the most famous Peking opera star was also a social celebrity, and "a national cultural icon" (Goldestein 207, 263). Due to

the honor associated with Peking opera, it provides a perfect format for Tang Maochang to perform his elegant culture, genteel taste, material wealth, and social esteem.

Peking opera's exclusive immersion in the quintessential ancient Chinese tradition also suits Tang Maochang. When social environment and cultural heritage gradually began to be changed by modern forces, Peking opera's attempt to preserve the disappearing imperial past was

> most obvious in the radical construction of its content that began abruptly around 1920. By the 1920s face paint, role types, and Chinese musical accompaniment were all established as exclusively Chinese forms of representation, incompatible with non-Chinese content. … [T]his delimitation on Peking opera's representational range was articulated as a positive affirmation of its fundamentally national essence. (Goldstein 164-5)

By exclusively performing Chinese history, culture, and art, Peking opera constructed an imaginary aesthetic world in which the audience could ensure their Chinese identity during a time when the traditional Chinese community was losing its ground. This was particularly important for the upper class, whose privileges relied on the continuity of the ideology, morality, and hierarchy transmitted from the imperial past. Since Fujude's political structure is dramatized as imitating the

[128] Empress Dowager Cixi was the de facto ruler of the Qing Dynasty for 48 years from 1861 until her death in 1908.

imperial system, Tang Maochang's obsession with Peking opera reflects his desire to maintain his status as Fujude's legitimate supreme ruler.

In purporting to represent the nation's essence, Peking opera refrains from presenting the transformations brought by modern forces. As Goldstein argues, in the 1920s and 1930s, "Peking opera was seen as somehow *in* modernity but not *of* it" (3). Although modern media and technology facilitated the popularity of Peking opera, its content and aesthetic form did not synchronize with the modern world. Its theatrical style of elaborate aestheticism and "nonmimetic, ornamental distortions of reality" (Goldstein 171) helped to construct an isolated, spectacular, illusionary theatrical world of the past no longer existing in the present. Just like those imperial rituals, Peking opera not only provided the leisured wealthy class with entertainment, but also helped them evade the chaos and crises brought by the drastic historical changes, making them feel secure and elevated in an increasingly insecure and troubled world. Peking opera's neglect of modern reality corresponds to Tang Maochang's neglect of his incompetence in managing Fujude and of the intruded modern ideology's challenge to his inherited privilege.

The orthodox Confucian morality that safeguarded the traditional social hierarchy and the status of imperial rulers was also propagated by Peking opera. Qi Rushan, a famous Chinese theater scholar of the early 20th century, "believed that Confucian values like filial piety, loyalty, and chastity were the lifeblood of Chinese society, on which the strength and unity of the modern nation depended, and that Peking opera was the ideal tool for inculcating these values" (Goldstein 179). Peking

opera's standard themes, melodramatic plots, and stereotypical characters enabled it to convey absolute values. "Filial piety, loyalty, and chastity"—used by older generations to control younger generations, rulers to control subjects, and men to control women—were ideological pillars of Chinese imperial society naturalized in Peking opera. For those of the old ruling class who wanted to safeguard the traditional social order and their inherited privilege, promoting Peking opera was promoting those ideological values that would ensure their status.

These ideological values are also necessary for Fujude's proprietors to protect their self-interests. Tang Deyuan requires his two sons to have filial piety to devote themselves to the family business; Tang Maochang and Tang Maosheng require their employees to be loyal to them; they require women to be chaste and stay at home. However, these values are losing their control over people's lives. Tang Deyuan's two sons have absolutely no interest in the family enterprise; Lu Mengshi finds ways to get out of the interference of two young masters; and the prostitute Yuchu'r, as Lu Mengshi's lover, plays a significant role in managing and developing Fujude. The disintegration of these values in the social reality reflects the collapse of China's traditional social order and the infiltration of modern ideologies like individuality, democracy, and freedom. However, these values' loss of validity in reality makes it even more important to confirm and advocate them on stage. For Tang Maochang, performing these values through Peking opera allows him to present himself as the inheritor of the orthodox Confucian morality.

As Tang Deyuan's eldest son, Tang Maochang is the legitimate heir of the family enterprise according to the imperial tradition. He consciously reminds people of his status by attaching a large jade stone to the front of his melon cap, as if attempting to make it resemble a crown.[129] His first entrance on stage is when he comes to Fujude, singing an operatic line from *Temple of Sweet Dew* [*Ganlusi*]: "Liu Bei was a descendent of the Prince of Jing, great-great-grandson in the bloodline of the emperor himself" (He 153). In the Peking opera *Temple of Sweet Dew*, this line is sung by Lu Su, an official in Kingdom Wu during the period of the Three Kingdoms (208-220 A.D.), to tell the mother of Sun Quan that Liu Bei is a descendent of the royal family of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. – 220 A.D.).[130] The claim of Liu Bei's loyal lineage wins the favor of Sun Quan's mother, who saves Liu Bei's life and marries her daughter—Sun Quan's sister—to Liu Bei. The ideology imbedded in this operatic line is crucial to give Tang Maochang undisputable authority in the restaurant, although he only undermines its business. In this manner, Tang Maochang models himself on the Manchu aristocrats, whose bloodline entitles them to all the privileges in the Chinese empire, although they only corrupt that empire.

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[129] Attaching a large jade stone to the front of his melon cap is not written in the play script, but a staging choice in premier production.

[130] The Three Kingdoms were the three major rival states after the de facto loss of power of the Han Dynasty emperors. These three rival kingdoms were Wei (headed by Cao Cao), Shu (headed by Liu Bei), and Wu (headed by Sun Quan). They all claimed legitimate succession from the Han Dynasty. The stories of the Three Kingdoms were the topics of many operas, folk stories, novels, films, TV series, and video games. The most famous was the *Romance of Three Kingdoms* [*Sanguo yanyi*], written by Luo Guanzhong during the fourteenth century.

Seeing his life as a Peking opera performance, Tang Maochang always behaves as if he were performing a role. His ostentatious behavior again reflects the inflated theatricality of Republican society. Due to the huge incongruence between stage presentation and social reality, Tang Maochang's enactment of Peking opera roles in real life causes trouble to Fujude's business. In Act II, when the impoverished Ke Wu brings an invalid duck coupon to try to get a free meal at Fujude, everyone refuses his request except Tang Maochang, who appreciates Ke Wu's knowledge about carriage racing and Ke Wu's praise of his opera singing. Comparing Ke Wu's bankruptcy to the misfortune suffered by the hero Qin Qiong in the Peking opera *Qin Qiong Selling the Horse* [*Qin Qiong maima*], who has to sell his precious horse to pay a petty bill, Tang Maochang sings Qin Qiong's line and allows Ke Wu to eat free duck. Ironically, Ke Wu has nothing in common with the hero Qin Qiong, but more closely resembles the impostor who cheats Qin Qiong out of his horse. It is no wonder, then, that when Tang Maochang resumes his position as Fujude's manager at the end of the play, Ke Wu also regains his status as an honored guest of Fujude. If the collapse of the Qing empire and the quick downfall of the successive Republican governments largely come from the power-holders' over-emphasis on performing their power instead of actually fulfilling their duties, this cycle is re-enacted in Fujude's vicissitudes.

As an authoritative "senior male" role and the most important role in Peking opera during the late Qing, *laosheng* helps Tang Maochang to construct his heroic masculine identity. Goldstein comments on the relationship between gender and

performance in Peking opera: "the social dynamics of gender performance played a central role in Peking opera's ascendance: the dominating presence of the *laosheng* actor (who took the roles of older male characters, models of late Qing masculinity) was crucial to the form's social and cultural elevation" (6). The foreign invasion and internal turmoil of the late Qing created a special social need for military spirit and heroic masculinity to strengthen national confidence and unity against crises. "[T]here was indeed an integral link between China's shift from empire to nation-state and shifts in representational practices in Peking opera. Peking opera's consolidation under the leadership of *laosheng* performers coincides with a period of relentless internal and external crisis for the Qing (1850-1911 A.D.), followed by the meteoric resurgence of *dan* performers at the dawn of the Republic in 1912" (Goldstein 50). This link between the collapse of China's imperial system and the transformation in Peking opera practices verifies the social function of *laosheng* role. If the parasitic Manchu rulers felt especially weak and threatened, *laosheng* characters' strength, determination, integrity, heroism, and wisdom established an ideal other for them. In the same way, if constructing military masculinity on stage could not save Qing from demise, Tang Maochang's performance of *laosheng* role also does not ensure his authority at Fujude.

Because running restaurants, theaters, bathhouses, barbershops, and brothels were regarded as the five most humble professions [*wuzihang*] in traditional Chinese society, Tang Maochang may feel a special need to climb up the social ladder by entering the theatrical world of Peking opera, whose ascendance in social esteem has

lifted it out of this humiliating rank. Because *laosheng* characters are typically upright and honored senior male figures who behave gravely and solemnly on stage, "A great *laosheng* radiated dignity, inspiring reverence and respect" (Goldstein 54). These characteristics are just what Tang Maochang needs. The play presents that Tang Maochang has performed such roles: patriotic officials like Qiao Xuan in *Temple of Sweet Dew* and Zhao Lian in *Temple of the Gate of Doctrine* [*Famensi*]; military heroes like Qin Qiong in *Qin Qiong Selling the Horse*, Yang Yanhui in *Silang Visits His Mother* [*Silang Tanmu*], and Lin Chong in *Running at Night* [*Yeben*]; wealthy merchant Liu Shichang in *The Black Pot* [*Wupenji*]. By performing these venerable characters on stage and off stage, Tang Maochang attempts to cast himself in a favorable light, not realizing what a bad performer he really is.

Tang Maochang fails to gain the social recognition of his heroic masculinity not only because of his poor acting skills, manifested in Lu Mengshi's disapproval of his singing, but also because of the transformation in *laosheng* performance itself. Since the late nineteenth century, when the most venerable *laosheng* performer Cheng Changgeng died and was succeeded by Tan Xinpei, the masculine *laosheng* performance began to be transformed by femininity, paralleling the gradual semi-colonization of China. Shumei Shih addresses the intimate relationship between colonialism and femininity in her book on modernist literature in semi-colonial China:

> [C]olonialism both upholds the ideal of masculinity and withholds it from the colonized in order to maintain its own power and position.

> Since sexuality is a vital aspect of the social realm that needs to be incorporated into the structure of domination, masculinity is held up as a trope of power. Sexual and political domination accompany each other in many colonial situations. … [P]olitical and socioeconomic dominance symbolize the dominance of men and masculinity over women and femininity. (137)

Shumei Shih's argument points out that in the colonial discourse, masculinity is a trope of political and socioeconomic dominance. If Oriental nations and cultures were imagined by Western colonialists as feminine, the feminization of the masculine *laosheng* performance reflected China's acceptance and internalization of its dominated position. It signified China's loss of self-confidence, strength, superiority, integrity, and independence—the qualities traditionally represented by masculinity—while taking on a role of increasing servility, dependence, superficiality, and immorality—the qualities traditionally represented by femininity. Thus, similar to other imperial signs dramatized in this play, although Peking Opera was meant to be an embodiment of Chinese tradition, it was already revised due to the historical reality of colonial modernity.

This transformation is obvious in the contrast between Cheng Changgeng's performing style and that of Tan Xinpei, with whom Tang Maochang in this play maintains a close relationship both in art and in life. As Goldstein points out, Cheng Changgeng achieved a god-like status in the theater world by playing male lead roles such as Guan Yu—the paragon of loyalty, integrity, uprightness, and heroism—and

by establishing a behavior model of honesty, rectitude, selflessness, and austerity in the professional world (17-18, 50-51). Hong Zhu and Qiu Huadong, two Chinese cultural critics, explain the importance of Cheng's performance within the historical context of the late nineteenth century. Cheng reached the peak of his career during two opium wars (1839-1842, 1856-1860 A.D.), which started China's humiliating semi-colonial period. Cheng's serious, dignified, and imposing performances and his upright, honest, noble personality catered to the need for heroes during national crises. At his deathbed, Cheng predicted that after his death Tan Xinpei would dominate the theater world, but Tan's performance style would indicate the end of Chinese heroism and the death of the Chinese nation (86). Tan's replacement of Cheng reflected the transformation of the national situation and the gradual loss of Confucian moral idealism in people's minds. As the other imperial signs dramatized in this play, their continued performance in society did not mean the preservation of tradition, but showed the significant changes resulting from the transformed historical situation. In this way, the cycle of dynastic degeneration also manifested itself in Peking opera performance. Tang Maochang's imitation of those degraded surrogators, instead of the original models, indicates the repetition of the same cycle at Fujude.

Goldstein compares Cheng and Tan in these aspects:

> Unlike Cheng's clarion voice, Tan's was usually described as overcast or mournful. … Where Cheng's singing was robust and straightforward, Tan adapted the more flowery *dan* melodies and

> integrated them into his *laosheng* style, evoking feelings of mourning and pathos in his listeners. Unlike Cheng, Tan rarely performed the role of Guan Yu, not out of inability but because his subtle and unorthodox singing style seemed to clash with Guan Yu's blunt and guileless heroism. But in striving for ornate and marvelous turns of phrasing and melody, Tan earned a reputation as the most gifted improviser in Peking opera history. (51)

If adding flowery ornateness and subtle, marvelous turns to the *laosheng* performance reflected the social preference for feminine charm to compromise the thorough, straightforward morality, heroism, and masculinity as embodied by traditional *laosheng* characters, the "feelings of mourning and pathos" evoked by Tan's singing style express the sense of disaster resulting from the loss of those masculine ideals. As A. C. Graham points out, in ancient Chinese tradition, the politically significant states were described as *yang*—the masculine elements in the Daoist cosmology—and the politically insignificant states were described as *Yin*—the feminine elements in the Daoist cosmology (27-8). Thus, the loss of ideal masculinity in Peking opera performance—the embodiment of Chinese cultural essence at the time—was closely related to the decline of the nation since the late Qing.

In Act One, Lu Mengshi describes Tang Maochang's voice as "clouds covering the moon" (He 154), a phrase usually used to describe the voice of Tan Xinpei, thus Tang Maochang's singing style is similar to Tan Xinpei's. Furthermore,

the play dramatizes Tang Maochang's tutor as Yu Shuyan, another *laosheng* performer in the Tan Xinpei school, thus Tang Maochang's singing should also evoke "feelings of mourning and pathos." In this way, it is no wonder that Tang Maochang's intention to construct his masculine identity through performing the *laosheng* role is not successful. His failure is made obvious in Act II, when Tang Maochang holds a banquet to entertain his tutuor, Yu Shuyan. At the request of his guests to perform a Peking opera role, Tang Maochang offers to perform the official Zhao Lian in *Temple of the Gate of Doctrine*. However, his guests ask him to perform a female role, the prostitute Su San in *Su San's Journey* [*Su San qijie*]. Tang Maochang avoids this humiliating role and finally performs the maid in *Red Maid* [*Hong niang*]. This dramatic episode not only refers to the historical resurgence of *dan* performers during the Republican era, but also indicates Tang Maochang's failure to present himself as the embodiment of Chinese masculine identity in the eyes of the public. Tang Maochang's failure parallels the failure of Manchu aristocrats in the larger social realm, pushing his family enterprise to repeat the same dynastic cycle in Chinese history.

In addition to a similar singing style, Tang Maochang also maintains a close relationship with Tan Xinpei in daily life. In Act II, Tang Maochang comes back to Fujude after collaborating with Tan Xinpei in a carriage race, and Ke Wu boasts that his grandfather also collaborated with Tan Xinpei in carriage races during the days when Ke Wu's family was wealthy and powerful. By highlighting Tan Xinpei's intimate relationship with corrupted aristocrats and leisured wealthy, the play depicts

Tan's immorality in life, which contrasts with the *laosheng* characters he performs on stage. As Goldstein indicates, "Tan was wily, an avid gambler, and rumored to be a loan shark," known for "his limitless ambition and delight in parading his individual privilege. …Tan was a pioneer of individualistic, star-centered troupe management, almost charming in his brazen arrogance" (52). Neglecting dramatic etiquette, Tan "was notorious for pulling the rug out from under his colleagues, creating several incidents that have become part of Peking opera lore" (Ibid). These descriptions show Tan as a morally debased figure. As the Chinese saying goes, the quality of the performance is the quality of the performer. Tan Xinpei's lack of moral rectitude in real life corresponded to his degradation of *laosheng* role in performance. This transformation again reflects the dissolution of orthodox Confucian ethics that characterizes all aspects of Republican society dramatized in this play and causes problems to Fujude's development as well.

The collapse of orthodox Confucian ethics also led to the rise of *dan*—a male Peking opera actor artfully performed a female role—during the first two decades of Republican era as the new national icon and embodiment of cultural essence. Catherine Vance Yeh analyzed that an important historical reason for the rise of *dan* was that,

> when seen in the context of national politics—and Peking opera and its actors were inevitably part of that space—the 'senior male' figure quite naturally evoked ironic associations and ended up being seen as an empty propaganda for the ineffectual warlord/politicians, if not

> outright as a satire on them. Seen as a potential symbol set to rally the confidence and the fighting spirit of the nation, the *laosheng* could only remind people of the sorry state of affairs in reality. (212)

The strong-willed, awe-inspiring *laosheng* characters' losing validity and relevance to social reality made the public turn to the visual beauty and elegant eroticism of *dan* characters as embodying the refinement and sophistication of Chinese culture, revitalized and updated to the modern world—a contrast to the violence, corruption, and inefficiency in social reality (Yeh 212-34). Seen in this way, Tang Maochang's guests might see the same incompetence in Tang Maochang's enactment of *laosheng* characters, and their request for him to perform a female role reflects a strong social interest in the cultural sophistication and sexual appeal as embodied by *dan*, which, as Yeh argues, became a suitable self-image of the Republic during a time of internal turmoil and foreign invasion (213-4).

Yeh also argues that, at the same time, the rise of *dan* reflected the social democratic process, which became possible only after the collapse of the traditional cultural hierarchy and social order; the rise of modern forces, such as media, photography, and modern literature; international influences and tastes, especially from Japan. While *dan* performers previously were the private sexual objects of wealthy and powerful men in the nation's capital, now they became public national flowers enjoyed, appreciated, loved, and desired by people of diverse classes both at home and abroad. *Dan* performers' capability to transcend boundaries and limitations in performance and social influence signified the social democratic

process. Since *dan* had more aesthetic beauty and physical grace, fuller persona, richer emotion, as well as more complex psychology, *dan*'s replacement of *laosheng* reflected the collapse of monolithic social hierarchy and value system as well as Republican society's openness to new, unorthodox ideas, representations, possibilities, and challenges (Yeh 205-39). This democratic process is also reflected in this play in the Qing court and Republican officials' frequent patronage of Fujude, in lower-class's capability to elevate their social status and formulate connections with the higher class through their expertise, in Fujude's capacity to bring together people of diverse classes, professions, ethnicities, and genders to enjoy the banquets previously monopolized by the aristocrats, as well as in Fujude's developing new dishes, services, and management methods to cater to the need of the public. In this sense, the rise of Fujude in the catering trade parallels the rise of *dan* in Peking opera performance—both reflecting modernity's transformation of Chinese tradition.

Not only has the civil aspect of Chinese masculinity failed to be performed by Tang Maochang through Peking opera, the military aspect of Chinese masculinity has also failed to be performed by his younger brother Tang Maosheng through martial arts. As an honored Chinese tradition, martial arts played a significant role in mass uprisings against imperialist invasions since the late Qing, such as the Boxer Rebellion from 1898-1901. Forming a contrast to the weak state government, the strength, courage, and skills imbedded in martial arts were especially important to boost national confidence, spirit, and unity during the crises. Guided by Confucian ethics, Chinese martial arts also pursued the ideals of harmony, order, and justice in

society. A true martial arts master was expected to help the weak, punish the wicked, respect the virtuous, and restore justice. However, all these ideals are missing in Tang Maochang's practice of martial arts, which is more a show of superficial skills than a presentation of its true spirit. Like his elder brother, Tang Maosheng views life as a show and always poses himself as a master.

If Tang Maochang first enters the stage singing an operatic line, Tang Maosheng's first entrance is by jumping over Fujude's wall. The stage direction thus describes his costume: "He is dressed up in martial arts clothes: gray satin pants, a wide silk sash around his waist, with a green peony embroidered on the tassel" (He 155). Although this attire is not as exquisite as his brother's, the silk sash and embroidered flower still show off his wealth and taste. Tang Maosheng also demonstrates his martial skills by teaching waiter Chang Gui how to catch flies with chopsticks. While catching flying arrows with chopsticks is a superb self-defense technique, Tang Maosheng's surrogation of arrows with flies proves how he degrades such serious arts into frivolous play. This degrading is even more apparent when he demonstrates how his martial arts teacher can draw flies onto himself by breathing. Tang Maosheng's most valiant act is his practice of "slicing off flesh to save a parent" (He 160),[131] which he brags of to his sick father to show his filial piety—which only quickens his father's death. Ironically, it was also his birth that caused his mother's death. Afraid to offend the strong and powerful, Tang Maosheng

[131] "Slicing off flesh to save a parent" is a superstitious practice to fulfill filial piety. This practice believes that slicing off a piece of a child's flesh to boil it together with a parent's medicine can help cure the sick parent.

does not hesitate to bully the weak, including the impoverished Ke Wu. Indifferent to both the family enterprise and its employees, Tang Maosheng not only frequently squanders money, but also violates the martial arts principle of honor and trust by undermining the manager, Lu Mengshi. Like his elder brother, although his livelihood relies on the continuity of traditional Chinese society, he does not contribute to its preservation. Fujude's decline in the hands of its owners reenacts the same dynastic cycle repeated in Chinese history. It sends a powerful message about China's continued autocratic political system in the modern era, which makes Chinese society unable to get out of the nightmare of Chinese history.

D. Workers at Fujude: True Creators of Chinese Culinary Arts

If Fujude's proprietors profane Chinese heritage, the play presents those who work at the restaurant, including its managers, chefs, waiters, and apprentices, as true inheritors and developers of the substance, spirit, and promise of Chinese traditions. If the Chinese cultural ideals of harmony, order, and balance are lost in the larger society, people who work at Fujude try to establish it within the restaurant through its food and operation. The achievements they have made confirm the similarities between the best aspects of ancient Chinese values and the best of modern Western values. However, different from the Maoist cultural representations, which cast a completely positive light on the working class, *The World's Top Restaurant* depicts each of the workers as being limited by the past, making it difficult for them to construct their identities in the transformed present.

The person who leads the restaurant to fulfill its great potential is its manager, Lu Mengshi, whose predicted destiny of sitting in a sedan chair coincides with the restaurant's predicted future as resembling a sedan chair. As Lin Yutang points out, "Fatalism is not only a Chinese mental habit, it is part of the conscious Confucian tradition" (199). This belief in destiny also comes from the Chinese cultural principle of harmony and unity between human beings and cosmic forces: as human life is influenced by cosmological forces, one must follow heaven's instructions. Fujude's assistant manager, Wang Zixi, a former classmate of Lu, describes Lu Mengshi as enjoying the blessings of heaven: when Lu's mother gives birth to him, "she had visions of people blowing horns and beating drums and a sedan chair carried by eight men, with a boy inside, nice and fat" (He 149). The sedan chair envisioned by Lu's mother coincides with the geomancer's description of the restaurant's location. Wang also describes Lu's facial features as indicating fortune: "a square face with heavy brows, really lucky-looking" (Ibid.). All these auspicious signs predict that Lu is destined to become an esteemed man, and Fujude is the right place for him to fulfill the Mandate of Heaven. It is no wonder, then, that Lu is touched by the coincidence between his mother's vision and the geomancer's prediction, and after becoming the manager of Fujude, he tries his best to make it the top restaurant in the capital.

What Lu's mother envisions at his birth is a typical scene of celebration when a Confucian scholar passes the imperial examination to become a government official—the dream of all Chinese scholars in traditional society. In order to make

her son fulfill this promise, Lu's mother searched all over the marketplace for a jade decoration shaped like a sedan chair. Since jade signifies virtue in Chinese culture, Lu's mother expected her son to become a virtuous official. Keeping the jade decoration with him at all times, Lu is frequently reminded of his mother's expectations. Since China's traditional imperial examination was terminated in 1905, Lu has no opportunity to become a government official through examinations. But the release of social talents, energy, and resources into the economic field made business-doing a promising way to earn the honor, wealth, and power traditionally enjoyed only by officials. As Zhou Ning argues, the end of imperial examinations, practiced in China for 1,300 years to select civil officials, marked an important turning point in China's transformation from an imperial society to a modern society, as the common people's strengthened economic power threatened the authority of imperial rulers (scholar.ilib.cn). Fujude's development reflects this decentralization of power from the political field to the economic field, from central government to the folk world during the Republican era. In fact, Lu's drastic change of his humble status in becoming Fujude's manager reenacts an archetypal plot in classical Chinese theater, in which a young scholar's life transforms dramatically from one of obscurity and poverty to glory and wealth after passing an imperial examination.

After becoming Fujude's manager, Lu Mengshi utilizes many political and military strategies passed down from the past, just like a prime minister manages a country. If Tang Maochang only performs tales from Chinese history by imitating the appearance of historical figures, Lu Mengshi actually embodies Zhuge Liang, his

ideal other, in the modern age, devoting all his heart and intelligence into developing the restaurant but never thinking of usurping the throne. In Act II, Lu Mengshi re-enacts Zhuge Liang's "Empty Fort Strategy" to drive away the creditors. As fictionalized in the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, in an expedition against Kingdom Wei, Zhuge Liang found himself in a city wherein there were only a few soldiers, but a large enemy army led by Sima Yi was advancing towards the city. Having no way to escape, Zhuge Liang decided to play the "Empty Fort Strategy" to ward off the enemy. Ordering all city doors to be left wide open and several civilians to sweep the streets, Zhuge Liang climbed the city wall to calmly play a zither, with two teenage boys standing on either side in attendance. Knowing the suspicious nature of his enemy Sima Yi, who also knew Zhuge Liang as a very careful strategist rarely taking risks, Zhuge Liang successfully made Sima Yi suspect an imminent ambush and withdraw his army. In Act II, when Fujude has no money to pay off the debt from adding on to the building, Lu Mengshi manages to ward off the creditors by staging a scene in which he is buying multiple sacks of white flour and displaying rolls of silver-coins on the counter, although there is nothing but dirt in the sacks and rolls. This staging of prosperity successfully convinces the creditors of Fujude's bright future, so they choose to extend the due date of the payment in order to continue doing business with Lu.

If Lu Mengshi stages this new "Empty Fort Strategy" as if he were staging a Peking opera performance, the analogy also lies in the emptiness that characterizes both. Just as Peking opera tries to capture an illusionary imperial past that no longer

exists in the present, Lu stages Fujude's prosperity, which is also nothing but a phantom. Thus, his next step is to attract as many customers as possible in order to make Fujude's wealth a reality, not just an empty show. He not only establishes connections with social celebrities and the upper class, but also guarantees the high quality of the food, broadens the variety of dishes, provides excellent service, and bribes power-holders. Lu even releases misinformation to mislead the rival restaurant Quanyingde, which has played tricks in order to compete with Fujude. All these measures mirror the social reality of the 1980s, when China's economic boom led to the establishment of many new companies. The similarities between business world and the battlefield revived a strong interest in studying the war tactics of ancient China, which had been widely recognized as one of the most brilliant achievements of Chinese civilization. Dramatizing how Lu successfully applies them in running a business in the Republican era suggests the continued effectiveness of these ancient heritages in the economic development of the 1980s, when the play was created.

Another aspect of Lu Mengshi's management that reflects the need of the 1980s is his clear specification and strict enforcement of rules, which were generally neglected in traditional Chinese society. As early as the Warring States Period, ancient Chinese philosopher Han Feizi (280-233 B.C.) proposed managing the country according to the principles of law. However, after Confucianism was established as the sole legitimate state ideology in the Han Dynasty (202 B.C. – 220 A.D.), law was gradually compromised, because Confucianism emphasized

humanity, benevolence, and virtue, instead of the iron principle of law. Lin Yutang thus explains why the Chinese dislike the system of law:

> For a system, a machine, is always inhuman, and the Chinese hate anything inhuman. … Instead of a government by law, they have always accepted a government by "gentlemen," which is more personal, more flexible and more human. … [T]he personal system seems always to have better suited the Chinese humanist temper, Chinese individualism and the Chinese love of freedom. This trait, the lack of system, characterizes all our social organizations, … and the failure invariably goes back to the intrusion of the personal element, like nepotism and favoritism. For only an inhuman mind, "an unemotional iron face" can brush aside personal considerations and maintain a rigid system, and such "iron faces" are not in too great public favor in China, for they are all bad Confucianists. Thus has been brought about the lack of social discipline, the most fatal of Chinese characteristics. (113-4)

Lin Yutang's comments point out that the Confucian order and harmony were produced at the cost of compromising social justice and human equality. In the 1980s, this lack of an efficient legal system and of strict social discipline was widely recognized as having greatly hindered China's development. Therefore, it is significant that *The World's Top Restaurant* dramatizes Lu as a manager with an "iron face," who establishes clear rules for his employees, yet is open and fair in

meting out awards and punishments. Being concise in every detail of the business and making everyone responsible for one's behavior, Lu does not make allowances for anyone, including the assistant manager Wang Zixi, who was his childhood friend and introduced him to Fujude. In order to avoid partiality and favoritism, he rejects the nepotism that has dominated Chinese society, and forbids the customary practice of having family members and relatives work at Fujude. Presenting Lu Mengshi in this way establishes him as one of the earliest to adopt modern management methods in order to ensure strict enforcement of the law and fair competition.

Coming from Shandong province, the cradle of Confucianism, Lu Mengshi also manages the restaurant by creatively adapting Confucian moral principles, delving up their potentiality to establish universal equality. As John Fitzgerald points out, since the nineteenth century, "the revolutionary principle of equality took root and spread with astonishing speed through elite discourse and popular culture" (22). Intellectual Kang Youwei "merged the Confucian principle of human-heartedness (*ren*) with a Buddhist ideal of undifferentiated compassion and a Mohist concept of universal love (*jianai*; *boai*) to promote the ideal of universal equality" (34). These humanitarian values of Chinese traditional culture are developed by Lu Mengshi to establish a working environment at Fujude that enhances individual integrity, social equality, and economic prosperity in modern times. Dramatizing traditional ethics' positive role in developing a capitalist economy reflects the revival of neo-Confucianism in the 1980s, which was stimulated by the recent rapid economic

growth of several East Asian countries and areas traditionally regulated by Confucianism, such as South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. As Wakeman points out, Confucianism stipulates that "the sage ruler fulfilled heaven's mandate by cultivating his own moral propriety. If an emperor observed the Confucian rites (*li*) of social intercourse by being filial to his parents, attentive to his ministers, and paternalistic to his subjects, then the empire would prosper and civilization flourish" (56). Manager Lu Mengshi in this play exactly follows these Confucian rites in his effort to establish a harmonious and efficient working order within the restaurant.

In Act II, when chef Luo Datou backstabs the new chef Li Xiaobian'r, Lu criticizes Luo Datou: "There are two things about people that matter, as far as I'm concerned. At home they should be filial towards their parents; outside they should treat their associates fairly" (He 197). Lu carries out his own principles by honoring his dead mother's expectations of him and by caring for his employees sincerely, helping them in need. Lu's concern for his employees also comes from his humble family background and the tragic life of his father, a waiter who dies due to the humiliation from his boss. Lu also sends money to waiter Chang Gui's family when they are in financial crisis, and he promises to take good care of Chang Gui, who suffers a stroke at the end of the play. He even offers jobs to the former employees of the bankrupt rival restaurant Quanyingde so that they can continue to make a living. His compassion for his employees forms a sharp contrast with his bosses Tang Maochang and Tang Maosheng. Depicting Lu Mengshi in this way conveys a

message that Confucian ethics of benevolence and humanity help to establish harmonious human relationships and a prosperous society.

Besides benevolence and humanity, Lu also upholds the Confucian virtue of human integrity. Inviting people with special skills and knowledge of culinary arts to work at the restaurant and respecting their contributions, Lu explains to Xiu Dingxin that he hopes to earn social respect for restaurant workers: "We can't let people look down on restaurant staff like us; that's what I've always wanted. … We ourselves have to respect each other first, then they won't dare not to" (He 193). Since Chinese traditions rank working at restaurants as one of the most humble professions, Lu makes humiliating terms like "lower ninth-rate" taboo in Fujude. When he donates money to the apprentice Cheng Shun to hold a grand wedding ceremony, he declares: "Let's make the decorations bright, let's have horses and sedan chairs, bands and all—whatever it takes to make this an occasion, let's have it. Let's show anyone out there who still won't recognize it that even the apprentices of Fujude are worthy of respect!" (He 205). Since Confucianism has been vehemently attacked by modern iconoclastic intellectuals as maintaining feudal hierarchy, violating human rights, and cultivating slavishness and servility, *The World's Top Restaurant* reinterprets Confucianism as being in synch with modern enlightenment values in order to explore the possibilities of creatively transforming Chinese traditions to serve China's modernization project.

Not only does Lu conduct himself according to Confucian ethical principles, Lu also requires his employees to behave honorably. Those who do not have self-

respect will also lose Lu's respect. Roast-duck chef Luo Datou complains to waiter Chang Gui about his problems with Lu:

> LUO DATOU: I've been on good behavior ever since Lu Mengshi started here as manager, haven't I. So why does he always look down on me?
>
> CHANG GUI: It's the eating and the drinking, the dope and the bragging. That's what he looks down on.
>
> LUO DATOU: Hey! What chef in this business is any different?
>
> CHANG GUI: That's the point, really. Manager Lu doesn't want other people to look down on us in this business. (He 165)

Here, waiter Chang Gui explains that the reason for Lu to treat Luo harshly is to rectify Luo's dishonorable behavior and teach him personal integrity. Lu's open confrontation and criticism of Luo cause Luo to frequently backstab him. However, at the end of the play when Luo is going to be taken away by the police for storing opium, Lu volunteers to be a hostage in order to protect Luo from being maltreated by the police. Dramatizing Lu's paternalistic caring for his employees presents the Confucian collective values as beneficial to improve the social morale of the modern age.[132]

Like China's traditional scholar-officials, Lu Mengshi pursues the same

[132] As John Fitzgerald points out, the universal principle of equality was transformed in the specific cultural context of Asia, producing "a stress on the community over the individual, on duties over rights, and on hierarchy over egalitarianism, three features said to be paradigmatic of Asian modernities" (22).

Confucian ideal of acquiring immortality in life through making great achievements. In this respect, Lu overturns the traditional Confucian hierarchy that subordinates businessmen to scholar-officials, peasants, and craftsmen. Lu's self-confidence reflects the increasing importance of the economy and commerce during both the Republican era and the 1980s. Cherishing lofty ideals and high aspirations for himself, Lu does not squander money on entertainment, but invests in real estate in his hometown, making his family distinguished and honored. He declares to his employees: "Can't people who work in restaurants invest in real estate? Are we just supposed to spend our money on eating and drinking, whoring and dope, and be degenerates? I have a mind to buy the Prefecture of Jinan, and then I'll buy the Qianmen Tower!" (He 205). Since "the Prefecture of Jinan" and "Qianmen tower" are important government buildings of political significance, Lu's declaration demonstrates his confidence in the value of his career and his potential to play an important role in the nation's politics.

This dramatic episode echoes an interesting event during the 1980s, when doing business to make money became the hottest pursuit throughout China. In his book on the historical vicissitudes of the Qianmen area in Beijing, Xu Chengbei writes that in the 1980s, a group of successful peasant entrepreneurs from Anhui province proposed to buy Qianmen Tower to exhibit their economic achievements during the New Era, but the proposal was not approved by the government (*Old Beijing: Variations of Qianmen* 81). This parallel further proves how this Republican entrepreneur in *The World's Top Restaurant* speaks in the voice of the 1980s,

making the play a mirror to the economic reform of the 1980s. Due to the fact that both eras immediately followed the collapse of monolithic political systems, the stimulations and obstacles to Fujude's development offer valuable models and lessons to people of the 1980s. Endowing Lu Mengshi with the courage, confidence, and aspiration of a contemporary entrepreneur, this play exemplifies how the needs of the present determine the artistic appropriations of the past.

Nevertheless, although Lu Mengshi carries out reform to keep up with the progress of history, he also struggles between the demands of tradition and those of modernity. Many seemingly progressive measures are still deeply rooted in the habitual mentality of the past. Although he strives to earn social respect for himself and his employees, he still endorses social inequality by catering to the taste of the upper class and discriminating against "low-level" entertainments, such as *laozi* and *huagu*. In Act III, he fires an apprentice for violating the house rule that "Employees may not attend *laozi* performances or *huagu*" (He 205), due to the low social esteem these performances hold, although he does not object to their attending the more socially accepted Peking opera performances.

Both *laozi* and *huagu* were extremely popular forms of entertainment in Republican Beijing. Unlike Peking opera's origination and patronage by the Qing court, *laozi* is a form of folk singing originated in "backward" northwest China and popularized by beggars during the Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD). In the Qing Dynasty, the professional *laozi* singers, usually poorly dressed, turned folk stories and legends into *laozi* songs. During the Republican era, *laozi* became one of the

most popular performing arts in Beijing. Since *laozi* performers were mostly women, who commonly had a second profession as courtesans, many audiences went to *laozi* performances largely to flirt with them (Dong 194-6). *Huagu*, also called *fengyang huagu*, was a type of flower drum song performed mostly by women also. Spread by people who fled the disaster-ridden Fengyang area to beg for a living by singing flower drum songs, *huagu* became a signifier of poverty and begging. The contents of *huagu* were mostly love stories with obscene scenes and bawdy language.[133] Although it seems that Lu Mengshi forbids his employees from attending these low-class performances due to their obscenity, his regular relationship with the prostitute Yuchu'r, who becomes "pretty much a half-time manager" (He 200) of Fujude, undermines his lofty pretense. Lu's endorsement of the standard and privileges enjoyed by the upper class supports the traditional hierarchical social structure, instead of challenging it.

Dramatizing the limitation of Lu's reform presents how the most progressive-minded entrepreneurs in Republican Beijing still cannot break out of the restriction of the imperial past. This also reflects the contradictions of the 1980s, when the tardy progress in political, ideological, legal, and cultural reform caused obstacles to providing a truly open, democratic, and equal environment for economic development. Although theoretically there was opportunity for everyone to become a

[133] See the entry for "huaguxi" ["flower drum play"] in *Xiqu cidian* [*Dictionary of Traditional Operas*], 216, and the entry for "fengyang huagu" ["fengyang flower drum"] in *Zhongguo dabaikequanshu: xiqu quyi* [*China Encyclopedia: Traditional Operas and Folk Arts*], 75.

self-made entrepreneur, special favor from people with political power was crucial to the development of the enterprise. The Confucian dictum that "courtesy should not be extended to the commoners and punishment should not be served up to the lords" (Lin Yutang 211) helped create a tradition that elevated the upper class above the regulation of the law. *The World's Top Restaurant* dramatizes this lack of legislation for the privileged class by presenting Fujude's two young masters demanding more profits than specified in the contract. In Act III, when Fujude becomes the top roast duck restaurant in Beijing, Tang Maochang and Tang Maosheng take its management right back from Lu in order to keep its profits entirely to themselves. Dramatizing how Fujude's biggest obstacle comes from its own corrupted owners, not from external forces such as imperialists, rivals, or politicians, the play presents China's ultimate problem as its internal mechanism.

Fired at the peak of his achievement, Lu re-enacts another tragic cycle in Chinese history: those officials who had helped the emperor the most in ascending to the throne were always deposed or killed by the emperor due to their potential threat to his authority. As the Chinese saying goes, "After the flying bird is shot, the good arrow should be hidden; after the wily hare is dead, the chasing dog should be cooked." The logic revealed by this saying hindered Zhu Geliang, Lu's historical model, to fulfill his ambition of unifying China, largely due to Emperor Liu Chan's suspicion of his loyalty. Lu also could not carry out his plan to further develop Fujude due to his bosses' suspicion of his loyalty and chef Luo Dadou's blackmail.

Vice-manager Wang Zixi and accountant Xiu Dingxin comment on the futility of Lu's effort:

> WANG ZIXI: Ai, you never know where interference will come from. You can plan everything all out perfectly, and still it will all fall apart.
>
> XIU DINGXIN: It's too much pressure to take. The place can't survive with one man doing all the work while eight others tear it down. (He 209)

Their comment sums up the cycle that, the lack of a democratic system in China leads any effort to make historical progress to its doom. Lu's final words when he leaves the restaurant voice his protest against social injustice: "(*Looking up at the building he has erected*) We got as far as building this place like a sedan chair; I just never got to ride it" (He 219). His reflection recognizes that he has fallen into the same destiny that captured those officials, whose responsibility was only to make contributions but not to enjoy the success.

The couplet he sends to Fujude before returning to his home in the countryside expresses his peaceful resignation to his destiny: "Such a precarious building – who is the owner, who is the guest? Just a few old rooms – sometimes fit the moonlight, sometimes fit the wind" (He 220). If the first part of the couplet still questions who is the true owner of this enterprise, the people who inherit it or the people who build it, the second part of the couplet already resigns to the peacefulness in nature. His quick adjustment to the vicissitudes of life benefits from Daoism, "a

philosophy which counteracts the positivism of Confucius, and serves as a safety-valve for the imperfections of a Confucian society" (Lin Yutang 55). Lin Yutang humorously summarizes that "[A]ll Chinese are Confucianists when successful, and Taoists when they are failures. The Confucianist in us builds and strives, while the Taoist in us watches and smiles. Therefore when a Chinese scholar is in office he moralizes, and when he is out of office he versifies, and usually it is good Taoistic poetry" (Ibid.). These two philosophies also guide Lu's life. If Lu suffers during his striving for the Confucian ideal of self-fulfillment, Daoism soothes his wounded soul by acknowledging the futility of human efforts. If he cannot establish a harmonious human community, he can find harmony in his eternal home: nature. Thus, Confucianism and Daoism, as complementary couples that have sustained the Chinese mind through the vicissitudes of history, are presented in this play as continuing to provide spiritual nourishment to people in the Republican era.

Lu Mengshi's couplet is sent to Fujude by Yuchu'r, a prostitute who plays an important role in Lu's career. Reflecting the prosperity of the prostitution business during the Republican era, this play presents all female characters in this play as prostitutes from the Eight Lanes [*Badahutong*], the famous red-light district in Republican Beijing. Dramatizing prostitutes as customers of this prestigious restaurant reflects the social acceptance of these women who have broken away from the Confucian relational identities of "husband and wife" and defined themselves

according to the essentialized categorical identities of "men and women."[134] The play especially dramatizes a prostitute Yuchu'r, who bears no stereotypical trace of a humiliated sex worker, but has wisdom, vision, talent, and a sense of egalitarianism that challenges the orthodox Confucian hierarchical ethics. The stage direction describes this woman, who violates the Confucian virtue of chastity, as not very beautiful but intelligent and graceful. "Yuchu'r is actually not pretty so much as her looks have a certain charm and intelligence, dressed smartly as she is in a quietly refined, pale blue short jacket and pants" (He 164). Endowed with intelligence, charm, and grace, Yuchu'r mirrors those talented courtesans in Chinese history, who played important roles in Chinese literature, music, painting, politics, and romance.

The culinary art that distinguishes Yuchu'r also characterizes most Chinese women. However, Yuchu'r goes out of the confinement of home and develops her cooking skill in the public realm to such a superb degree that she becomes famous. Waiter Chang Gui explains Yuchu'r's relationship with the imperial court: "A prince

[134] As John Fitzgerald points out, "In the New Cultural Movement the egalitarian ethic entered into common sense among young mobile urban Chinese as a sensible way of apprehending the world" (152). "In contrast to hierarchical ethics, the egalitarian ethic favours categorical identities over relational ones—categories such as race, nation, citizen, men, women, peasants, and proletarians over relations of ruler and minister or husband and wife. … In assigning value to people, hierarchical and egalitarian ethics operate as systems of classification as well as systems of rank. Classes or categories (*deng*) are specified before they are arranged hierarchically (*dengji*) or equally (*pingdeng*). The kinds of categories specified for equal or hierarchical treatment are not however interchangeable. Hierarchical complementarity and egalitarianism operate through different classificatory regimes, hierarchy typically drawing on flexible relational classifications that prescribe superior and inferior roles in a given relationship (husband/wife), and equality operating around broad categorical classifications that ascribe certain characteristics to whole categories of people (men/women)" (Fitzgerald 37-8).

in the imperial palace tried her cooking and said she was the best. That's why he gave her the name Yuchu'r [jade chick]; it's a pun in the imperial palace kitchen, Yuchu'r. He thought she's that good" (He 164). This relationship not only elevates Yuchu'r out of the rank of ordinary prostitutes to that of a skillful craftswoman, but also reinforces the restaurant's connection with the imperial court. According to Su Chung, the Qing Dynasty's imperial cuisine was mainly developed from the cuisines of three different parts of China: Shandong, Manchuria, and South China represented by Suzhou and Hangzhou (18-9). Coming from Suzhou, a "heaven on earth" with beautiful natural scenery and an elegant cultural tradition, Yuchu'r describes her hometown dish—"Gold and Jade Fill the Hall"—in its complex preparation process, delicate material, and beautiful design. She also takes innovative measures to create an elegant dining environment in Fujude, such as displaying tuberoses on the banquet tables. Yuchu'r also advises Lu to cook duck entrails. Previously discarded by Fujude as unworthy parts of the duck, the entrails have been picked up by a woman peddler to be cooked into snacks and sold at the brothels. Yuchu'r's proposal to add brothel dishes to the aristocratic Complete-Duck-Banquet menu parallels the gradual integration of the upper class and the lower class during the Republican era. While Yuchu'r's ability to distinguish herself through her cooking skill manifests the democratic process of Republican society, her profession as a prostitute exemplifies the existing oppression, exploitation, and injustice towards women.

This gender inequality is obvious in Yuchu'r's relationship with Lu Mengshi. Although Yuchu'r is unconventional enough to encourage Lu to transcend social

hierarchy by acquiring autonomous management rights from his two worthless bosses, she still plays a traditional subordinate role to support and care for Lu unconditionally and self-sacrificially. Their unorthodox romantic relationship demonstrates the weakening of the ties of traditional family and the emergence of a new type of relationship based on love, sympathy, understanding, and company of soul. However, Lu's final return to his wife and son in his hometown signals how the strong power of tradition draws people back to repeat the same destiny in Chinese history. Typical of arranged marriages in feudal society, Lu has no attachment to his wife in the countryside, who follows the Confucian ethics for women in every way but still fails to get her husband's respect. Humiliatingly describing his wife as ugly, Lu values her only after she gives birth to a son—the most important way for a wife to acquire status in family. His wife's total absence in the play, representing the obscurity and silence of those neglected housewives in Chinese history, forms a sharp contrast with Yuchu'r's frequent presence and influence in Fujude. However, Yuchu'r's being left alone at the end, while manifesting her independence and strong will, shows women's continued lack of opportunity to fulfill their wishes during the Republican era.

While Lu Mengshi and Yuchu'r are expelled from the restaurant because of their outstanding achievements, paradoxically, the assistant manager Wang Zixi, a mediocre worker, maintains his secure position at Fujude. Abiding by the Confucian doctrine of the golden mean—that is, staying in the middle, being flexible, and always compromising, Wang is described by chef Luo Datou as "slippery" (He 163).

Since Wang always shifts responsibilities to others, he does not offend or threaten anyone, thus he stays out of trouble. In a hierarchical society like China where there has been no legal protection for human rights, this type of person is crucial to maintain the existing status quo and is good at self-protection as well. As Lin Yutang argues, "[T]he Chinese suffer from an overdose of intelligence, as shown in their old roguery, their indifference, and in their pacifism, which so often borders on cowardice. But all intelligent men are cowards because intelligent men want to save their skins" (78). Wang Zixi is such an intelligent coward, whose stable life is exemplified in the breakfast he buys every day without fail. His contentment in routinely having this snack symbolizes how the harmony, balance, and stability of Chinese society rely on mediocrity.

If Wang Zixi ensures his position by sticking to the principle of mediocrity, headwaiter Chang Gui's excellent work does not elevate him from his humble status, no matter how hard he tries. Following the Confucian moral principles of moderation, pacifism, geniality, patience, benevolence, and righteousness, Chang Gui strives to establish a harmonious working environment in Fujude by tolerating insults, helping colleagues, mediating conflicts, and remaining amiable and submissive all the time. He describes his life in this way: "Throughout my life, I'm not allowed to swear back even if I'm cursed, not to fight back even if I'm beaten. Even if I'm crying inside, I must keep a smiling face. All I've done is for my family …" (He 211). However, although his service is so outstanding that "Everyone knows who Chang Gui is, from the president on down to the man on the street" (He 212), Chang Gui fails to earn

respect for himself and his family. His son cannot apprentice at a prestigious silk store exactly because of Chang Gui's humble status as a waiter. Dramatizing Chang Gui's tragic failure to improve his family manifests the continued social prejudice against people of the lower rank. The modern consciousness of human equality has not taken root in people's minds yet.

This social prejudice requires Chang Gui to loyally obey the behavior codes designated for his social rank, even when he is insulted. As Lin Yutang argues, "As it is, this capacity for putting up with insults has been ennobled by the name of patience, and deliberately inculcated as a cardinal virtue by Confucian ethics. … The Chinese also inculcate it consciously as a high moral virtue" (47). However, this play dramatizes how this "high moral virtue" of patience does not solve conflict or maintain harmony as expected, but leads to further insult. In Act III, several foreign customers, angry with Chang Gui's refusal to let them bring dogs into the restaurant, call him a dog and beat him. Enduring this humiliation, Chang Gui loyally continues his service, but collapses soon after. Chang Gui's death at the hands of foreigners symbolically refers to the multiple inequitable treaties Chinese government has signed with foreigners since the late Qing. By enduring insults and sacrificing national interests, Chinese government has hoped to buy peace in order to continue its rule. However, national crises and the rapid collapse of successive political regimes proved the dysfunction of this Confucian cardinal virtue in modern times.

Chang Gui's death scene shows how his sense of loyalty is engraved into his soul. Chang Gui collapses while delivering the foreign customers' orders. Although

convulsing violently, he persistently holds out five fingers. No one knows what he really means. Only after he says with great difficulty that the foreign guests upstairs want five ounces of white wine does he lose consciousness. Here, Chang Gui re-enacts an episode in *The Unofficial History of Scholars* [*Rulin waishi*], a satirical novel written by Wu Jingzi (1701-1754 A.D.) in the Qing Dynasty. In the novel, Yan Jiansheng, a wealthy but extremely thrifty man, acquires an official title not by passing imperial examinations but by donating money. When he is dying, he is too weak to speak, but he persistently holds out two fingers. No one knows what he really means until his wife finally realizes that these two fingers refer to the two wicks burning in the lamp at the moment. Her husband is unwilling to die because the two wicks waste oil. Only after his wife promises to take one wick out does he nod his head and die. While this anecdote in the novel satirizes the foolishness of this fake scholar, Chang Gui's death scene in *The World's Top Restaurant* also criticizes the pointlessness of Chang Gui's loyalty. Furthermore, if Yan Jiansheng's frugality in *The Unofficial History of Scholars* still benefits his family, Chang Gui's loyalty only serves foreign imperialists. Through such connection and contrast, the play conveys a message that the entrenched stupidity and servility in the imperial system will only lead to destruction in modern times, when forces from all over the world encounter and struggle with each other for survival.

But the work of the restaurant relies on waiters like Chang Gui and accountants like Wang Zixi. As Lu Mengshi says, "A restaurant stands or falls on three things: its waiters, its cashier-accountants, and its cooks. Take one away and

you might as well pull down one of these pillars" (He 208). If genial and docile people like Chang Gui and Wang Zixi help maintain the traditional social hierarchy, the hot-tempered roast-duck chef Luo Datou, although rebellious and troublesome, also serves the upper class with his superb cooking skill. Proud of his ability to serve the aristocrats, he boasts that his cooking style belongs to the emperor school: "Chefs are divided into two schools. One is the emperor school, which is particular about color, fragrance, flavor, appearance, slow cooking over low heat, preserving natural juices and flavors. And one is the bodhisattva school, which is particular about small servings, quick cooking over high flame, heavy on oil and rich flavors, emphasizing genuine benefit" (He 165). From what he describes, the dishes of the emperor school are not only pleasant to see, smell, and taste, but are also healthy. Taking much effort to prepare and requiring refined taste and leisure time to enjoy, they are only suitable for the upper class. The dishes of the bodhisattva school, due to their economy, efficiency, and rich flavor, cater to the busy working class. These dishes have no place in prestigious restaurants like Fujude, but only belong in obscure restaurants and marketplaces. Luo Datou's identification with the emperor school of cooking manifests how the bankrupt imperial court still represents a superiority with which people want to connect. When Luo Datou competes with Li Xiaobian'r, Luo claims that "My teacher was Venerable Sun, duck chef in the imperial palace," and Li declares that "One of the guys I apprenticed with is the chef for the present Emperor Xuantong" (He 171, 172). Their brag shows the continued reverence for the orthodox imperial heritage during the Republican era.

Fujude's elite culture forms a sharp contrast with the popular culture enjoyed by the ordinary people of Beijing. Chef Luo Datou contemptuously refers to chef Li Xiaobian'r's performance of his knife work "chopping meat on silk" as "the sort of stuff at Tianqiao" (He 72), as something cheap and unworthy. If Fujude models itself on the imperial court, Tianqiao, a marketplace established in 1917 by the Republican government for the common folk, was a much more modern world. In contrast to the ceremonies, etiquettes, rules, and classifications at Fujude, Tianqiao was a carnivalesque place characterized by openness, freedom, flexibility, and crudity. "[E]xtremely popular with the working class in particular[,] Tianqiao cast a spell over ordinary Beijing residents. For them it represented hope, freedom, and a sense of belonging" (Li et al. 149). If the working class had no access to prestigious restaurants like Fujude, they felt comfortable and powerful at Tianqiao, a world of anonymity, disorder, and equality. Selling cheap, mostly secondhand, remade items and holding pay-as-you-like physical-oriented performances such as *laozi* and flower drum songs, Tianqiao is described by Dong as being characterized by "recycling" (205), reusing old items of the past to create new values in the present.

Unlike Fujude's recycling of orthodox Chinese traditions and conformity to the prevailing social order, the world of Tianqiao in some unique way "represented the end of the status distinctions of the old world without the order and rules of the new world of department stores and amusement centers" (Dong 207). Dong's description of Tianqiao presents a world without order, rules, and status. Neither the old nor the new social hierarchies apply here:

> At Tianqiao, social status did not guarantee receiving better merchandise – or, to put it differently, the act of shopping would not confer social status. This denial of status differences amounted to a threat to the social hierarchy based on stratification. Stratification meant categorization, order, and thus stability. Ignoring or inverting stratification allowed people to play with status and to cancel and obliterate the categories, leading to a sense of disorder, instability, and also festivity. Status was constantly being dissimulated and turned fluid. Everyone could be, and necessarily would be, cheated. High social status would not bring better luck in the shenanigans; conventional social categories might be exaggerated, mocked, or defied, and no penalties could be applied. (192)

From Dong's description we can see that Tianqiao provides an alternative space in which nothing was revered or discriminated against. If the social hierarchy in Fujude eventually does not produce harmonious order and continued prosperity, Tianqiao proposes a possibility for a future when harmony is based on social equality.

Fujude's final failure to renovate the exceptional Chinese traditions in the modern age is summarized by the character Xiu Dingxin, a scholar and a gourmet from a family that "has produced three generations of officials" (He 210). Xiu's vicissitudes epitomize the transformation of Chinese scholars in the Republican era. In Act III, Xiu elaborates on how his name is closely related with cooking and politics. While his surname Xiu means "renovate," his given name Ding means

“cauldron”—“the name of a utensil used for cooking,” “the symbol of established power, the emblem of empire” (Ibid.)—and xin means “new.” Literally, his name means “illustrious cooks”—“those who remove the old and establish the new, those who renovate” (Ibid.)—and high officials. Degenerated into a gourmet companion to Ke Wu’s Manchurian aristocratic family, Xiu is as corrupted and profligate as them in Act I. In Act II, after Ke Wu’s family goes bankrupt, Xiu comes to Fujude to work as a maître d'hôtel, cashier, and accountant. Even then, he still believes he is superior to the other employees, despising them as belonging to the “lower ninth-rate.” However, in Act III, after eight years of working at Fujude, he recognizes the values of chefs and holds them in the highest regard, calling them “the instruments of renewal” and defining their skills as “the grace of genesis, the miracle of harmony, the accomplishment of renovation” (He 210). Xiu’s transformation exemplifies how the collapse of imperial system mingles different classes together and reformulates human relationship.

Xiu Dingxin’s exceptional knowledge and appreciation of food represent the epicurean tradition in Chinese food culture. As Lin Yutang argues, “No food is really enjoyed unless it is keenly anticipated, discussed, eaten and then commented upon” (338). Lin Yutang’s argument can explain why the Chinese have a habit of anticipating, discussing, eating, and commenting upon food, thus China can be called “a nation of gourmets.” However, the superb delicacy and complexity of Chinese food culture are accessible only to the upper class. According to an old Chinese saying, “You do not know the art of dressing and eating unless the three generations

before you in your family were all from high social post[s]" (Chen 11). This saying argues that mastering "the art of dressing and eating" requires elite culture, refined taste, leisure time, and abundant wealth. Liu Junru summarizes the epicures' contribution to Chinese culinary arts: "It was through their documentations that the skills and secrets of the chefs could be passed down through the ages. Aided by their superb art appreciation levels and cultured tastes, Chinese culinary techniques entered the realm of art" (116-7). The function of epicures is exemplified by gourmet Xiu Dingxin in this play, who not only elaborates on the history, cooking, and characteristics of eel noodles, but also comments on the innate connection between Chinese culinary arts and Chinese written characters, as well as the art of mixing flavors. Xiu compares Lu Mengshi's management of Fujude to a cook's mixing flavors and a prime minister's governing the country. Xiu's analysis elevates the philosophical, political, cultural, historical, and aesthetic values of Chinese culinary arts.

In Xiu Dingxin's comments, Lu Mengshi is like a chef, trying to use Fujude as a spatula to cook a delicious dish, and Lu's employees are like five basic flavors: chef Li Xiaobian'r, due to his talent for mixing flavors, is salty, since salt is the most important flavor in cooking; Xiu himself, because of his decline from an official family to an accountant, is bitter; chef Luo Datou, given his sharp, troublesome character, is pungent; waiter Chang Gui, due to his sad, difficult life, is sour. What is missing is the sweet flavor. Among the people of Fujude, only two young proprietors Tang Maochang and Tang Maosheng lead a sweet life, but they do not support Lu's

management at all. On the contrary, by exploiting Fujude's profits and firing Lu Mengshi, they undermine its prosperity and obstruct its development. Seeing the inevitable decline of Fujude, Xiu Dingxin sighs: "I'm watching what kind of dish he can come up with. Not much …" (He 211). Without sweetness, the imbalance of flavors leads to the result that Lu is unable to make a delicious dish, no matter how hard he tries.

Xiu Dingxin sees Fujude's decline as repeating the general pattern of China's dynastic cycle, which is summarized by Frederic Wakeman as "after the political and military vigor of its youth …, a mature middle age of peace and stability …, to be succeeded by feebleness and eventually fatal decline" (59). If Fujude's process of becoming the top restaurant in Beijing occurred during its vigorous youth and mature middle age, then it is inevitable that it will follow the cycle of life to meet its decline in old age. This belief that everything in the world undergoes constant change is the central idea of Daoism. No matter the political system, social structure, or cultural heritage, it must transform itself along with history in order to renew its energy, otherwise, it will only meet its doom. However, since the privileged class is unwilling to lose their guaranteed interests, Lu's effort to reform and renovate Chinese cultural heritage through the business of Fujude is obstructed by those stubborn forces of the past. After Lu returns to his rural home and Chinese agricultural traditions at the end of the play, those rulers in Act I—the policeman, Ke Wu, Tang Maochang, and Tang Maosheng—come back to Fujude. Xiu Dingxin also resigns, leaving an epigram to point out the theme of the play: "There's never been a

banquet in this world that didn't come to an end" (He 220). When the play ends with "a familiar tune for concluding Peking operas" (Ibid.), along with it ends the grand show of Chinese cultural heritage and the hope to transform and reinvigorate the Chinese traditional community in old Beijing.

E. Beijing and Shanghai: Tradition and Modernity

When the curtain finally draws on that palace-like restaurant that has produced the magnificent banquets of Chinese imperial society, it is 1928, the year when Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) unified the Republican government and moved its capital to the southern city of Nanjing. From then until 1949, Beijing lost its centuries-old status as China's cultural center to Shanghai, and its status as national political center to Nanjing. Beijing was designated as the "center for traditional Chinese culture" (Dong 8), where the remnants from the imperial past were especially preserved and capitalized on for the purposes of tourist attraction, museum exhibition, and cultural study. In her book on Republican Beijing, Dong introduces how "new intellectuals" from Southern China wrote about the nation's old capital at the time. As described in their writings, poverty was omnipresent in old Beijing; Beijing's streets were deplorable; "Beijing was dirty, inspired feelings of loneliness, and harbored unbearable social inequality"; Beijing city was old, a "dead city," and lacked the energy for change; Beijing was "a piece of barren desert," "provoking thoughts of the past all the time," and epitomizing "the four thousand years' doom of our ancient country"; the city administration was inefficient; "Beijing lacked order, general urban planning, and a sense of 'public spirit'"; the concepts of "Republic"

and "law" were empty; characterized by a "sense of leisure and slowness," people in Beijing "were too comfortable to think about the nation. Shanghai was becoming the economic center of the whole country, and Beijing's time of prosperity was over"; "[T]he revival of China had to depend on the Yangtze River region; Beijing was no longer playing a vital role in the nation" (267-73). The writings of these new intellectuals present Beijing as the deplorable historical remains of dead traditions, excluded from the nation's modernization process. In this sense, Lu's failure to develop Fujude by adapting traditions to the transforming social circumstances symbolizes the failure of Chinese elites to save Beijing from the doom of the past.

In contrast to Beijing, Shanghai at that time represented the vigorous development of commercialized and industrialized modern Western culture. Shumei Shih thus describes the city of Shanghai during the Republican era:

> it was a city with a hierarchized, multiracial social structure; it was a semicolonial city integrated with global economy and politics through the efforts of an economy-driven Euro-American imperialism and a territorially and economically ambitious Japanese imperialism; it was a city of sin, pleasure, and carnality, awash with the phantasmagoria of urban consumption and commodification; and it was also a city of fragmentary political and ideological control that provided a measure of "freedom" from strict ideological domination. (232)

From this description we can see that Shanghai's semi-colonial politics, global economy, carnal pleasures, urban culture, and fragmentary political and ideological

control formed a sharp contrast with Beijing's imperial remains, military warlords, local Chinese, domestic economy, rural influence, monolithic social structure, and strict political and ideological control. In this sense, transferring the center of China from Beijing to Shanghai signifies China's further transformation towards colonization, commercialization, modernization, and Westernization.

Nevertheless, the bustling cosmopolitanism and splendid modernity developed in Shanghai did not provide the Chinese with a sense of national regeneration. As Shumei Shih points out, "the ambivalent attitude towards nationalism expressed by the so-called 'treaty port men'—deemed a 'new kind of Chinese' who promised to act as indigenous agents for the remaking of China along Western lines—was part of a Shanghai cosmopolitanism that, for the time being, bracketed and deferred nationalism for the purpose of incorporating metropolitan Western and Japanese cultures" (234). Shanghai people's willingness to act as indigenous agents for the remaking of China along Western lines forms a sharp contrast with the people working at Fujude as dramatized in this play, who devote themselves to preserving, transforming, and invigorating Chinese traditions. To many people of the Republican era, the invasion of Western influences into Shanghai brought a sense of national doom, instead of national salvation.

Furthermore, in the writings of some new intellectuals, Republican Shanghai was a city of darkness. Shanghai was characterized by superficial prosperity, hollowness, tediousness, money-worship, vulgarity, deformity, evilness, arrogance, and dishonesty (Dong 276-8). These impressions of Shanghai show that

Westernization and modernity did not necessarily bring social improvement, but depravity and corruption no less contaminating than the diseases that had plagued traditional Chinese society for millennia. Thus, as Leo Ou-fan Lee points out, Chinese leftist writers and communist scholars depict Republican Shanghai as "a bastion of evil, of wanton debauchery and rampant imperialism marked by foreign extraterritoriality, and a city of shame for all native patriots" (4). Seen in this light, Fujude's preservation and development of the Chinese culinary arts, Confucian morality, military strategy, and local economy as dramatized in this play have the significant meaning of establishing national confidence, cultural pride, moral integrity, and territorial completeness for all Chinese.

This need to strengthen confidence in the national culture was also widely felt in the 1980s, a period similar to the Republican era in its cultural cosmopolitanism and the struggle between tradition and modernity. In both eras, the trend of Westernization stimulated people to find modern values in Chinese traditions. As claimed by Liang Sicheng (1901-1972 A.D.), a famous Chinese architect who had studied in the United States: "there is a basic similarity between the ancient Chinese and the ultramodern" (3).[135] The "Neo-Confucianists" of the Republican era advocated "creative reformulation of Confucianism, asserting that it is only with a high level of self-knowledge and self-determination that Western culture can be appropriated" (Shih 168). The Chinese Culturalist School of the 1980s also believed

[135] Liang Sicheng was the son of Liang Qichao, a famous scholar and journalist who, together with Kang Youwei, initiated the Hundred Days' Reform of 1898 during the Qing Dynasty.

that Chinese culture had "a built-in capacity to appropriate foreign elements while reinforcing its own principal values and characteristics," to constitute "an epistemological and axiological alternative to the 'modern' confined by Euro-American capitalism" (Zhang 45). These two schools all advocated the creative renovation of Chinese culture in order to strengthen national confidence and counterbalance the social diseases brought by capitalization and modernization.

The examination of Chinese culinary arts in this play functions to explore the underlying structure of Chinese culture. As George Orwell argues: "It could plausibly be argued that changes of diet are more important than changes of dynasty or even of religion" (82). Since diet is an underlying shaping force of human personality, morality, behavior, politics, history, and culture, changes in diet reflect more fundamental transformations than the changes of dynasty or ideology, which are dramatized in this play as more superficial surrogation of symbolic signs than any significant change in reality. Just as the policeman says at the end of the play when he comes to sell another new flag of another new ruling regime: "Never mind who's manager, you still have to cook duck. Never mind whether it's an emperor, or a president, or a rebel Taiping, or a generalissimo, they all have to eat duck. They say you can change mountains and rivers a lot easier than human nature" (He 220). What the policeman points out is that, no matter who rules over the society, people will continue their habitual lifestyle and cultural mentality, as proved by their continued production and consumption of Beijing roast duck. Thus it is very important to

examine Chinese cultural principles, to revive their exemplary values, redeem their promised hopes, and discard their decadent parts.

In the 1980s, when the whole nation was undergoing rapid Westernization in every aspect of life, Beijing lost more and more historical sites, including its old-brand shops and restaurants. Fast-paced modern life and Western-style fast food gradually transformed people's diet and Chinese culinary arts. The world-famous Beijing roast duck restaurant Quanjude, the historical prototype for the Fujude in this play, was one of the few remaining old-brand Chinese restaurants that, to a large extent, preserved the authenticity and excellence of Chinese culinary arts. By staging its imagined historical vicissitudes in BPAT's traditional realistic style with Beijing flavor, the play catered to the prevalent nostalgic, romantic reminiscences of old Beijing, that archetypal Chinese community full of charm, mystery, and magic. As Li et al. point out, in the 1980s, "The contemporary wave of nostalgia and regret repeats on a larger scale the nostalgia and regret that were felt in the Republican period itself" (169). If characters in this play construct various symbolic signs of imperial society in order to preserve a world that is collapsing under the attack of colonial modernity during the Republican era, the Chinese traditional culture presented by this play had already lost much of its presence in social life by the 1980s. Thus, the messages and questions posed by this play sounded an urgent warning to the audience of 1988, especially when we consider the nation-wide student movement that called for further reform in the following year of 1989. While the failure of the reform effort dramatized in this play paralleled the nation's shifting of its focus to the

commercial culture of Shanghai in 1928, China in the 1990s and 2000s was also characterized by commercialism and materialism. The sincere ethical, cultural, political, and humanistic explorations conducted by this play—and the intellectual discourse of the 1980s in general—basically came to an end, together with the end of that passionate decade.

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V. Conclusion

China in the 1980s was imbued with the passionate desire to build a strong modern nation and a sincere belief in cultural discourse as a means of creating social transformation. The profound intellectual exploration and enthusiastic cultural activity made the decade the most dynamic, open, and progressive period since the establishment of the PRC. During this transformation from an enclosed ascetic society to a globalized and commercialized country, China experienced widespread modernization, search for cultural roots, and critical reexamination of Chinese history and tradition. The lively interaction among these diverse cultural trends during the decade is reflected in the three theater works I examine in my dissertation. Contributing to creating an anti-heroic, humanistic modern discourse, these plays participated in the mission of the decade to reflect upon the past, construct the present, and imagine a different future.

A major trend of the literature of the 1980s was to reflect upon the historical traumas of the political movements of the PRC period and advocate widespread social reform. These three plays of the late 1980s reflected this dominant trend by deconstructing the theoretical bases of the Maoist revolution. Reversing Maoist emphasis on the grand class struggle as the motor that pushed history forward along the Marxist historical route, these plays dramatized trivial necessities of life, local customs, accidental events, and individual aspirations as the primary factors determining human behavior and influencing historical development. Blurring the boundary between the antagonistically opposed feudal ruling class and proletarian

class in the Maoist discourse, these plays characterize members of each class as stimulated by self interest and personal desire, not by common feeling based on class status or by patriotic concern for the nation. The glorious proletarian heroes in Maoist literature and art are transformed in these plays into flawed characters who inherit the problematic cultural tradition transmitted from the feudal era. Selfish, parochial, ignorant, and mean, they are presented as being responsible for the nation's repetitive historical disasters and failure to modernize. Dramatizing how history is unable to struggle out of the fatalistic cycle, these plays deconstruct Maoist literature's optimistic confidence in historical justice and historical progress.

At the same time, Maoist legacy continued to exert influence over intellectual creation during the decade and deeply affected how these playwrights presented the past. Despite sharply criticizing the defects of the working class, these plays also eulogize their diligence, perseverance, capability, and contribution in shaping history. The feudal ruling class—aristocrats and landlords—are uniformly portrayed in a negative way, as corrupt, incompetent, and evil. The Maoist morality of benefiting the people is still the major criterion that evaluates characters and events. Although the collective is criticized as negating individual autonomy, these plays confirm its undeniable value in strengthening community bonds. Furthermore, even if writers and artists were not confined by the Maoist equalization of human nature with class nature, they still could not get rid of the habitual way of dramatizing characters and circumstances as representing archetypal experiences of groups rather than unique individuals. As Mao indicated in his "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and

the Arts" in 1942: "life as reflected in artistic and literary works can and ought to be on a higher level [than reality], more powerful, better focused, more typical, nearer the ideal, and therefore more universal than everyday life" (133). Still influenced by the Maoist instruction and the stereotypes in traditional Chinese theater, these three plays of the 1980s continued to portray characters as extensions of external social and historical circumstances, instead of being motivated by the unique complexities of the individual psyche. The psychological activities in these plays are not truly spontaneous and irrational, but rational and humanistic, with clear political, moral, and ideological messages that protest against the current social symbolic orders. While not created as political tools, these plays' subversion of Maoist discourse, and advocacy of reform and open door policy nonetheless legitimize the reversal of power dynamics by the new political regime.

Going beyond reflecting upon the Maoist era, these plays search for the root of modern historical events in the long lineage of traditional Chinese culture. Dramatizing how certain aspects of Chinese traditions, such as Confucian moral principle, Daoist reverence of nature, culinary arts, military strategy, and folk performing arts, continue to sustain the nation in modern time, these plays emphasize the importance of preserving and adapting Chinese traditions to the transforming circumstances. At the same time, these plays criticize those traditions that hinder the nation's development, such as authoritarian politics, patriarchal practice, petit-peasant economy, feudal customs, and defective cultural habits—such as submission to authority, conformity to convention, backstabbing, passivity, and conservativeness.

Dramatizing how these traditions undermine the nation's successive modernization projects, these plays urgently call for reforms to creatively transform the nation.

This spirit of reform was animated by the rejuvenated Western Enlightenment discourse that was imported into China during the early twentieth-century. After being subjugated to the nation's struggle for independence and survival during the previous decades, the Enlightenment values of individualism, humanitarianism, democracy, freedom, and human rights are promoted in these plays as inherent values of a modern society. Advocating a Western modern system as necessary to guide the nation out of its historical backwardness, these plays call for development, prosperity, civilization, rationality, science, and technology to support the state project of Four Modernizations and the power-holders of the New Era—reformers, intellectuals, and entrepreneurs. Reversing the Confucian and Maoist concern against pursuing self-interest and material benefit, these plays confirm individual autonomy as contributing to national prosperity and stability.

At the same time, these plays show the influence of postmodernism in their lack of absolute confidence in the grand narrative of modernity to push history forward towards a utopian future. The Enlightenment concepts of irreversible time and continuous history, as canonized in China's modernist discourse, are deconstructed in these plays by fragmentary time, juxtaposition of past and present, and cyclical history. Focusing on history's complex effects upon specific spaces, these plays dramatize the ambivalence and anxiety during China's modernization projects of industrialization, urbanization, and commercialization under political

monopoly. Successive historical surrogations are presented in *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana* as causing traumas to individuals, and *Sangshuping Chronicles* does not guarantee a bright future for the nation to emerge from a disastrous past. In *The World's Top Restaurant*, the modern political regime is presented as being no different from the collapsed feudal system. The persistence of the past within the present, sometimes under new disguises, undermines the nation's pursuit of the new and the modern.

Chinese tradition, Maoist ideology, Western modernity, and postmodernism coexist in the dramatic styles of these plays. Successive traumatic experiences led to frequent changes in the representational pattern of Chinese theater. As Ban Wang argues, "trauma shatters a culture's repertoire of representational and expressive means. These means are the virtual lifeline by which we live, perceive, and understand the world around us" (113-4). Chinese theater of the 1980s deepened the examination of history by avoiding the melodramatic formula that characterized traditional Chinese theater and socialist realist plays. The subtle emotions, complex characters, ambiguous morals, and open endings of these plays leave no one group as solely responsible for historical atrocity. Instead, each character is dramatized as the product of social conditions and the victim of historical vicissitudes. If melodrama "is a symptom of a culture's need to 'forget' traumatic events while representing them in an oblique form" (Kaplan and Wang 9), these plays' efforts to avoid the melodramatic format reflect the need to remember the nation's traumatic experiences through a clear, open, relative, and sophisticated theatrical form. Registering the

ideological openness and diverse cultural trends of the decade, the heterogeneous dramatic styles of the 1980s testified to the collapse of previous symbolic orders and the urgent necessity to establish new symbolic expressions.

Realistic theatrical style, imported into China from the West during the early twentieth-century, continued to be practiced in Chinese theater during the 1980s in order to mimic historical reality on stage. However, in most cases, the authority, order, naturalness, neutrality, and authenticity presumed by the realistic style were not sufficient to present a chaotic history and spiritual crisis. The surrealistic techniques of classical Chinese theater, combined with a postmodern sensibility—distortion, exaggeration, absurdist montage, symbolic set, expressionistic method, and episodic structure—were creatively utilized in order to explore reality from multiple viewpoints and through diverse layers. The objective, fixed, and consistent public version of reality mixes with the subjective, shifting, and schizophrenic private realities. Rationalized, homogeneous public time and space also mingle with the fragmented, heterogeneous private times and spaces.[136] As Ban Wang argues, "The grotesque effects formal and generic dislocations as opposed to the generic features of socialist realism. The fantastic is deployed to demystify the 'iron laws' of the real and history. The schizophrenic breaks up the image of the unified, sublime subject of the State" (15). Grotesque thoughts, fantastic illusions, split subjectivity, anxious souls, and frustrated desires—all these break realistic illusion, demystify

[136] According to Frederic Jameson, pastiche, i.e., "the transformation of reality into images" and schizophrenia, i.e., "the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents" (119) are two features of postmodernism.

progressive history, undermine the sublime, and transgress the boundaries established by normal perceptions and dominant cultural discourses.

Contradicting the legitimate history of the period dramatized, these plays present dispersed histories and forbidden memories through dramatic circumstances outside the regular social order—carnival, insanity, dream, hallucination, and metatheatrical events. These surrealistic methods reveal the power mechanism in the production of historical discourses as personal understandings of history, not absolute, objective historical truths. In *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana*, Uncle Doggie's personal memory challenges the sanctioned reality of each historical stage, revealing its transience and relativity. The power struggle between multiple forces renders historical process full of inconsistencies and disharmonies as the cost of historical development. In *Sangshuping Chronicles*, metatheatrical performances expand historical references by constructing cultural imaginaries that subvert the prevailing reality. The similarities beneath successive surrogations present the failure of the Maoist revolution to radically transform the nation. While *The World's Top Restaurant* is performed in a strict realistic style, it deconstructs the prevalent social reality through presenting social life, character behavior, and theater performances as self-contradictory, ironic performative acts, whose intended meanings do not match historical reality.

As a decade when spiritual pursuit and cultural values were honored with respect, the 1980s was unique in modern Chinese history. The nation-wide enthusiastic support for the student movement on Tian'anmen Square in 1989

testified to the profound influence of intellectual discourse during this decade.[137] While intellectuals' over-enthusiastic passion for changing the nation might have been naive and their cultural debate simplistic, it signified the innocence of the nation at the initial stage of its reform and opening up. Looking back from the present, when material wealth is more ardently pursued than humanistic values, the 1980s is remembered as a romantic, sincere, and idealistic period full of tremendous changes, glorious dreams, and aspiring struggles. Although the decade itself has become historical past now, people's nostalgic reminiscence and reflection upon it,

[137] The student movement in 1989 was a result of China's crisis in 1989, when government corruption, financial inflation, political paralysis, social demoralization, declining productivity, increased population, conspicuous consumerism, and widening gap between the rich and the poor intensified social resentment towards the government. Appointing themselves the roles to lead and educate the masses, some democratic politicians, intellectuals, and students demanded Western democratic system as the "Fifth Modernization." 1989 started with some intellectuals' petitions for political reform and freedom of speech. In April, the death of Hu Yaobang—the beloved former CCP General Secretary deposed for being slack in forbidding "bourgeoisie freedom"—instigated spontaneous mass mourning on Tian'anmen Square. University students quickly became the major force of this mass movement. They asked the government for a fair evaluation of Hu and opposed against government corruption. After the government defined the student movement as an anti-CCP, anti-socialist political upheaval, students staged widespread demonstrations, parades, and hunger strikes in Beijing and dozens of other cities, requesting government to enforce democratic system, eliminate corruption, and hold dialogue with students. They established a statute of the Goddess of Liberty on Tian'anmen Square as a symbol of this democratic movement. Students won nation-wide support from people of various professions. Due to their lack of effective tactics, unified organization, and central leadership, students failed to form a political alliance with workers, peasants, and military forces, nor to conduct peaceful and rational dialogue with the government for political reform. Within the government, there were also conflicts and disagreements between reformers and conservatives. The movement was finally cracked down on June 4, 1989 by the government military intervention and subsequent punishment of those political opponents. (See Li Honglin's introduction to the movement in 391-9).

as evidenced by the number of memoirs and studies published in recent years, prove its lasting influence.[138] Theater, as a memory machine, vividly restores history—not only the history it dramatizes, but also the historical circumstances in which the history is dramatized. From these theater works set in the twentieth century, we can most acutely feel the historical pulses of the moment of their writing, China in the 1980s, which would continue to vibrate far into the future.

[138] These memoirs and studies include: *Return to the 1980s* [*Chongfan bashi niandai*] (2009); *The Multiple Faces of Literary History: Further Discussions about the Literary Events during the 1980s* [*Wenxueshi de duochong miankong: bashi niandai wenxue shijian zai taolun*] (2009); *When Scholar met Scholar: A Big Debate in China during the 1980s* [*Dang xiucai yuzhe xiucai: bashi niandai zhongguo de yichang dalunzheng*] (2009); *Re-read the 1980s: and the Literature of the New Century* [*Chongdu bashi niandai: jianji xinshiji wenxue*] (2009); *A Study of Chinese Literary Phenomenon during the 1980s* [*Zhongguo bashi niandai wenxue xianxiang yanjiu*] (2009); *A Person's 1980s* [*Yigeren de bashi niandai*] (2009); *Book Series of the Studies on the 1980s* [*Bashi niandai yanjiu congshu*] (2009); *Literature Lectures: "1980s" as a Method* [*Wenxue jianggao: "bashi niandai" zuowei fangfa*] (2009); *A Memorandum for the History of Chinese Literature during the 1980s* [*Zhongguo bashi niandai wenxue lishi beiwang*] (2009); *Get Out of the Way: Let Me Sing for the 1980s: Fragments of Memory* [*Shankai: rangwo gechang bashi niandai: jiyi suipian*] (2008); *Looking through the 1980s* [*Bashi niandai kanguolai*] (2008); *The Hormones of the 1980s* [*Bashi niandai he'ermeng*] (2007); *My 1980s* [*Wode bashi niandai*] (2007); *In Search of the 1980s* [*Zhuixun bashi niandai*] (2006); *The Cultural Consciousness during the 1980s* [*Bashi niandai wenhua yishi*] (2006); *Interviews about the 1980s* [*Bashi niandai fangtanlu*] (2006); *Long River of Memory—Reminiscences of the 1980s: 1980-1989* [*Jiyi changhe: huaijiu bashi niandai: 1980-1989*] (2005); *The Real Record of Beijing: Impressions of the 1980s* [*Shilu Beijing: bashi niandai yinxiang*] (2004); *Those Innocent Years* [*Women de bashi niandai*] (2004); *The Same Song: 100 Classical Songs during the 1980s* [*Tong yishouge: bashi niandai jingdian gequ yibaishou*] (2004); *Fourteen Walks along the Yellow River: Field Study Report on the Folk Arts of the Yellow River Area during the 1980s* [*Huanghe shisizou: ershi shiji bashi niandai huanghe liuyu minjian yishu tianye kaocha baogao*] (2003); *A Scene with Wolves: Reading Chinese Literature of the 1980s* [*Youlang de fengjing: du bashi niandai zhongguo wenxue*] (2001).

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Appendix

A. Synopsis: Uncle Doggie's Nirvana *(A Multiple-scene Modern Tragic-Comedy)*

The action of the play takes place in "the Present, with flashbacks" in "a small village by the side of the mountains" (Jinyun, *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana* 92) in northern China. Scene One is set in "one night in the 1980s" (93). Chen Hexiang, a 70-odd-year-old peasant nicknamed Uncle Doggie, is trying to set fire to an old grey brick arch—originally a grand gate that opened to landlord Qi Yongnian's large family yard and later allotted to Uncle Doggie by the CCP. Qi's ghost suddenly appears behind his back to argue with him, laughing at Uncle Doggie's failure to finally own the arch and become a landlord. Uncle Doggie retorts back that he did become rich once by "owning" thousands of acres of land. While they are arguing, Uncle Doggie's son Chen Dahu and his wife—Qi's daughter Qi Xiaomeng—appear on the other part of the stage discussing their plans to tear down the arch tomorrow to make way for their stone factory. Scene Two flashes back "to the civil war between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, 1946-9" (96), when Uncle Doggie proudly recollects and enacts how he stayed to harvest sesame from Qi's land when everyone had fled away from the war. Scene Three is "after the civil war, in the immediate years after the Liberation" (97). Landlord Qi comes back to ask for sesame from Uncle Doggie, who refuses to give it up and mentions how he was once hoisted up on the arch and whipped by Qi. While they are quarreling, Li Wanjiang, a

Communist revolutionary, comes to announce that the area has been liberated by the CCP and all the private property of landlords will be confiscated and distributed to peasants. Uncle Doggie asks Wanjiang to distribute Qi's arch to him and Wanjiang agrees. At this time, Su Lianyu, a traveling barber and a neighbor, comes to report that Uncle Doggie's wife has been killed by a bomb but his son Dahu survives. Scene Four returns to the present time. Doggie reminisces about his two wives and embraces his arch, and his son Dahu informs him once again that the arch must be torn down tomorrow. Scene Five flashes back to "the start of the implementation of the Land Reform Policy (1950-2)" (102), when Lianyu leads Uncle Doggie to propose marriage to a nineteen-year-old widow Feng Jinhua. Scene Six is set "a year or two after Scene 5" (106), when Uncle Doggie celebrates his ownership of Qi's arch and Lianyu sells a piece of land, originally Qi's family property, to Uncle Doggie at an incredibly low price, asking the deposed Qi to function as a scribe to prepare the sale document. Scene Seven is set in "the mid-1950s, during the height of the movement, introduced in 1954, to collectivize agriculture" (113). Uncle Doggie laments "in the ancestral burial ground of the Chen clan" (Ibid.), reporting to his dead father his bitter process of being forced to lose the family land and horse to join the collective. In Scene Eight, set in "the late 1950s, during the Great Leap Forward, in the days of communes, famine, and natural disaster" (116), Uncle Doggie becomes insane and cannot recognize his wife Jinhua. Lianyu, now a cadre of the production brigade, encourages Jinhua to steal from the brigade land. In Scene Nine, set in "a few days after Scene 8, in the dark night" (119), Jinhua is caught

stealing corn from the communal land by Wanjiang. Jinhua throws herself into the arms of bachelor Wanjiang. In Scene Ten, set "a few months after Scene 9, in the late 1950s" (122), Wanjiang and Jinhua are holding their wedding, and Uncle Doggie accidentally comes to the wedding scene but seems unable to recognize that the bride is his former wife. But he tries to take special care of his former horse, which is now a property of the production brigade. In Scene Eleven, set "a few years later, at the start of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76)" (126), with Wanjiang's special permission, Uncle Doggie plans to claim some wasteland on Windy Slope beyond the village and cultivate it as his own. Qi's ghost appears to tell Uncle Doggie how he was beaten to death during the Cultural Revolution and how bitter he feels that all his lifelong frugality has come to nothing. Dahu brings his lover, Xiaomeng, to meet Uncle Doggie, disguising her true identity as Qi's daughter. Uncle Doggie asks them to kneel in front of the arch to take three vows, in order to make sure that the arch will remain Chen's family property forever. Scene Twelve is set "three years after Scene 11, during the Cultural Revolution" (131) when Uncle Doggie leads an idyllic life on Windy Slope but is threatened with another political campaign: "Cutting off Capitalist Tails." Uncle Doggie protects Xiaomeng from being criticized as a landlord's daughter, and Jinhua protects Uncle Doggie's harvest from being confiscated by Wanjiang. Scene Thirteen is "back to present" on the "Morning of the day in Scene 1" (135). Wanjiang comes to return the land and horse to the 72-year-old Uncle Doggie, who is invigorated to compete with Qi again. In Scene Fourteen, set on "the same afternoon" (140), Uncle Doggie returns home, planning to continue

farming and build a large family yard exactly like Qi's, but only to find that the arch is going to be torn down the next day to make way for his son's factory. Uncle Doggie desperately tries to obstruct the plan but gets support from no one. Wanjiang comments on the rapid changes of the present times and announces that he will resign from his position of village head the following day. Scene Fifteen is set "a short time later" (147): Uncle Doggie sets fire to the arch. In Scene Sixteen, the arch is swallowed by fire. Uncle Doggie swaggers off the stage and the sound of a bulldozer comes in. Dahu runs off to Windy Slope to search for Uncle Doggie.

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B. Synopsis: Sangshuping Chronicles

The action of the play takes place from 1968-1969, at the peak of the Cultural Revolution, on Loess Plateau—the heartland of China and the birthplace of the Chinese nation and civilization. The stage is composed of a huge revolving table that represents the vast Loess Plateau, shaped like Daoist Diagram of *Yin* and *Yang* and mirrored at a distance by a bottomless old well left behind from Tang Dynasty. In the Prelude, Li Jindou, the leader of Sangshuping production team, urgently calls Sangshuping villagers together to chant a ritual song to the heavens, asking the "Black Dragon," the dark rain clouds that will ruin the ripening grains, to move southward. But villagers from the south curse them back and pray to the "Black Dragon" to move northward. Despite their prayers and curses, the rain mercilessly pours down and scatters them away. A modern chorus comes on stage to sing a modern-style theme song that will be sung frequently throughout the play.

In Act One, several commune cadres come to the village to estimate the Sangshuping production team's yields for the year, upon which the cadres will base the quota that the villagers will have to turn in to the state. Team leader Li Jindou tries his best to beg the bullying cadres to estimate a smaller yield so that the villagers can save some food for themselves. The villagers do get some allowance only after an urban intellectual youth, Zhu Xiaoping, stands up to the cadres, telling them that his father is a high-ranking official in the city. The next scene takes place at a labor market, where Li Jindou transforms from victim to victimizer when he shrewdly manages to acquire seasonal farmhands for very low pay. Yu Wa, one of

the farmhands, turns out to be a good musician and singer. His singing particularly attracts Xu Caifang, Li Jindou's widowed daughter-in-law. Caifang's effort to pursue free love is ruthlessly crushed by Li Jindou, who wants her to marry his disabled second son. At the harvest celebration, Caifang and Yu Wa sing a traditional opera together and fall in love. But Li Jindou leads a group of villagers to attack the couple, and they nearly beat Yu Wa to death. Left with no way out, Caifang sends Yu Wa to escape alone, promising to wait for him to come back.

In Act Two, 12-year-old Yue Wa is married off as a child bride so that her 28-year-old brother Li Fulin can get married. Li Fulin has become mentally impaired with "sex mania" because his family was too poor to buy him a wife sooner. However, once Li Fulin finally gets married, he cannot accept his bride, Chen Qingü, because of his fond memories of his sister, Yue Wa. No matter how hard Qingnü tries to win Fulin's favor, Fulin cannot consummate the marriage; instead, he beats her and cries for his sister. Since the dowry Qingnü's parents got by marrying her off was already spent on a wife for her brother, and her plea for divorce is denied by higher-up officials, Qingnü loses hope and goes insane. At the instigation of some village lads, Fulin tears off Qingnü's pants in public in order to demonstrate that he has masculine control over his woman.

Act Three begins with a political criticism meeting to denounce a "murder suspect," Wang Zhike, as a class enemy. Wang is accused of murdering a cloth peddler many years ago, but he pleads innocence. Wang Zhike is an outsider in the village, who moved to Sangshuping when he married a woman from the village.

After his wife and father-in-law died, he changed his son's surname from Li to Wang. Li Jindou and the other villagers try to expel him from the village so that his cave and food rations will go to the Li family clan, which dominates the village. But Wang is determined to stay near his dead wife and father-in-law. Realizing that he will not be able to persuade Wang to move out, Li Jindou and the other village cadres send Wang to prison. Meanwhile, the commune cadres demand that an ox be served for dinner to some upper level officials. The kind-hearted stockman Li Jinming is driven so desperate and mad that he leads the villagers to beat the ox to death.

In the Epilogue, Li Jindou breaks one of his legs trying to save the village fodder from a collapsing cave. He begs Xu Caifang to marry his disabled second son to continue his family line. When Caifang refuses to obey, Li Jindou orders the marriage to take place that very night. Caifang responds by throwing herself into the well. The play ends with the disabled Li Jindou sitting on the well, crying silently, as the modern chorus takes the stage to sing the theme song, asking: when will the Dragon in the East wake up?

C. Synopsis: The World's Top Restaurant

The play is comprised of three acts, all set in the Fujude restaurant in Beijing during the warlord period of the Republic of China. Act I is set in the summer of 1917, when warlord Zhang Xun led his "queue-army" to support the deposed boy-emperor Puyi of the Qing Dynasty to re-ascend the throne. The play presents this restoration as more a short-lived farce than a reestablishment of power. However, the restoration provokes the widespread change of social symbolic signs in the capital city of Beijing: queues, court dress, and dragon flags that represented the late Qing Dynasty are restaged to replace the symbols of the Republic of China. The restaurant business especially flourishes, as the Manchu aristocrats hold magnificent banquets to celebrate the restoration. Ke Wu, the descendent of a Manchu prince, comes to dine at Fujude, together with his gourmet companion Xiu Dingxin. Waiter Chang Gui tries his best to flatter Ke Wu, who boasts about the emperor's favor towards his father and his all-day leisure activities.

Although Fujude's business seems to be flourishing, it is actually experiencing a serious crisis. Tang Deyuan, Fujude's second-generation proprietor, is suffering from illness, so he turns the management of the restaurant over to his two sons. However, neither has any interest in taking over the family business: the elder son Tang Maochang is a Peking opera fan and the younger son Tang Maosheng is a martial arts devotee. They spend all of their time and resources pursuing their hobbies, and pay no attention to the restaurant, except when they frequently withdraw money from the accountant. Mr. Qian, a legal and business agent, leads

several creditors to collect the restaurant's debts. Seeing that the restaurant is in danger of going bankrupt, its assistant manager Wang Zixi recommends that his former classmate Lu Mengshi be Fujude's assistant manager. When Lu Mengshi comes to visit, he talks about his plans for running the restaurant and wins Tang Deyuan's approval. At the same time, a geomancer comes to inspect the location of Fujude. He predicts that as long as Fujude adds up a second story on to the present floor, it will resemble a sedan chair carried by eight men and prosper. This eight-man sedan chair coincides with what Lu Mengshi's mother envisioned at Lu's birth. Seeing that the restaurant has no future in the hands of his two sons, the dying Tang Deyuan asks Lu Mengshi to be the assistant manager of Fujude.

Act II, Scene I is set in 1920 on the opening day of the new building. After giving orders to the apprentices regarding the day's work, Wang Zixi goes off to buy his daily breakfast of "shredded turnip cake." Knowing that Lu Mengshi hired a new chef Li Xiaobian'r to cook hot dishes, roast duck chef Luo Datou boasts about his own cooking style and vows to find problems with his competitor. Lu Mengshi inspects the work of his employees and takes careful account of the business. His lover Yuchu'r, a prostitute and a superb chef at brothel, provides invaluable help to Lu in both his business and his life. But her relationship with Lu becomes more uncertain after Lu's wife in the countryside gives birth to a son. The new chef, Li Xiaobian'r, comes to work, and Luo Datou tries to compete with him. A eunuch from the imperial palace kitchen comes to Fujude to order roast ducks for the palace. An Adjutant from the Republican presidential guard also comes to reserve banquets

for the Republican officials. The encounter between the eunuch and the Adjutant is farcical, revealing the similarities and close relationship between the old and the new rulers. Lu finds ways to win favor from the power-holders in order to secure more business for the restaurant. Business regent Mr. Qian leads several creditors to ask for the payment of debt again, but this time Lu Mengshi stages a scene to display Fujude's feigned wealth and prosperity. Ke Wu, who is now poor due to his family's bankruptcy, comes to ask for a free meal of roast duck. He is driven away and his former gourmet companion, Xiu Dingxin, comes to work at Fujude as an accountant.

Act II, Scene II takes place that evening. Many customers are dining at Fujude, including the Republican presidential guards and a Peking opera master, Yu Shuyan, who Tang Maochang asks to be his tutor. Waiter Chang Gui skillfully directs the entire dinner service. Xiu Dingxin discusses the principles of Chinese culinary arts with Chang Gui. Yuchu'r advises Lu to add a new dish of duck entrails to the Complete Duck Banquet and her innovations help him to break free of the controlling young proprietors. Luo Datou sabotages chef Li Xiaobian'r by throwing away Li's ingredients, but Chang Gui helps Li overcome the crisis. Lu Mengshi criticizes Luo Datou, who makes a fuss in front of Tang Maochang's guests. Angry at losing his face to his guests, Tang Maochang orders his employees not to talk to him about restaurant business any more.

Act III is set in 1928 on the opening day of the New Year, when Fujude has reached the height of its prosperity and is well-known throughout the capital, whereas Fujude's rival restaurant Quanyingde closes its business. Tang Maochang

comes to demand more money than what the contract has stipulated. Several rogues come to ask Yuchu'r to cook dishes for them. Ke Wu, now a member of the Criminal Investigation Unit, asks for duck for free but is driven off by Lu Mengshi. Lu fires one employee for attending the *laozi*, a low-class theatrical performance, while donating money to another employee to hold an extravagant wedding ceremony. Lu plans to further develop the restaurant's business, but Tang Maosheng also demands more money and orders waiter Chang Gui to go work in his Tianjin branch. While Lu is deeply frustrated by these interferences, Luo Datou complains about Lu to Tang Maochang. Xiu Dingxin compares the management of a country or a restaurant to cooking a dish, and predicts that Lu cannot make a delicious dish. Chang Gui is sad because his son cannot apprentice at Ruifuxiang silk store because he is just a humble restaurant waiter. Humiliated and beaten by several foreign customers, Chang Gui subsequently suffers a stroke. The two young masters decide to take the business back from Lu Mengshi, but when Ke Wu leads the Criminal Investigation Unit to arrest Luo Datou for storing opium, only Lu Mengshi steps up to proclaim Luo's innocence. Lu Mengshi leaves with the police and Luo Datou regrets that he has been unfair to Lu. Ke Wu demands more free duck.

In the Epilogue, Tang Maochang and Tang Maosheng become the managers of Fujude, and Wang Zixi continues to be the assistant manager. Lu Mengshi has gone back home to the countryside, and Xiu Dingxin resigns from his work as well. The policeman comes to sell the flag of a new ruling regime again. Yuchu'r brings a set of couplet plaques made by Lu to hang at the restaurant's entrance, and Xiu

Dingxin adds a horizontal epigram to balance the couplet out: "No banquet in the world lasts forever" (He 220). The curtain draws at the end of the play with a concluding tune for Peking opera, covering everything on stage except the couplet.

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