

Claire Conceison

significant



other

STAGING

THE AMERICAN

IN CHINA



SIGNIFICANT

**OTHER** 



**Staging the  
American in  
China**

Claire Conceison



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*For my parents, Manuel and Anne Conceison,  
and for Bailey, my little pal*





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## Prologue



I don't feel like a foreigner, the way I do in Baghdad or New York. I feel like an ape, a martian, an *other*.

—Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*

Julia Kristeva's description of how it feels to dwell in the gaze of ordinary citizens in China is typical of the experience of many foreigners who spend time there. During my first stay in Beijing, in 1985, routine daily occurrences included being followed in the streets, being surrounded by a large crowd whenever I stood still, and being analyzed by complete strangers for the duration of bus rides—strangers who were unaware that I understood what they were saying. Their comments would range from guessing my nationality to discussing my weight and accouterment. It is difficult to describe the effect of this kind of daily experience to those who have never been exposed to it by living in China. Though one attempts to remain conscious of the fact that such treatment is prompted merely by genuine—even friendly—curiosity, the residual effects of such encounters over time can be quite negative: in my case, they ranged from being reluctant to go out alone in public unless absolutely necessary to imagining that my hundred-pound frame was actually “fat.”<sup>1</sup>

More than fifteen years later, despite the increased globalization of China's major cities and the exponential increase in the number of expatriate citizens living in them, similar practices endure. Although I am no longer surrounded by crowds whenever I stop moving in the streets, I am still frequently the object of persistent staring and pointing and of comments uttered with the assumption that I cannot understand them. Behavior that I once attributed to lack of exposure to “real live” foreigners now must be explained in other terms, for in China's major cities today foreigner-sightings are frequent and non-Chinese citizens are increasingly integrated into native environments. In 1985 there were separate monetary currencies for locals and visitors, along with several other political and institutional strategies that kept foreigners

systematically distanced from ordinary Chinese, and it was only recently that laws segregating expats and forcing them to live in overpriced foreigners-only housing units (by prohibiting them from renting Chinese apartments) were relaxed. Today, many of these fabricated barriers have dissolved, but routine gestures of “othering” remain intact.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the most common otherness experience of a foreigner living in China is when a small child walking along with an adult stops suddenly and points, shouting, “*Waiguoren!*” (foreigner, or outsider). In many cases, it is the adult guardian who first indicates the presence of the foreign Other to the child, who in turn responds by pointing and calling out. This encounter became so frequent during my residencies in China that I devised a strategy for coping with it: I would point back at the child and say, “*Zhongguoren!*” (Chinese person), thus diffusing with humor my discomfort.

The experience is not entirely unlike that described by Frantz Fanon, which has become somewhat of a trope of the humiliation of the colonized Other in postcolonial discourse: Fanon recounts the traumatic moment when a white child exclaimed, “Look, a Negro . . . Mama, see the Negro!” triggering in him a sudden bodily experience of “crushing objecthood.”<sup>3</sup> Homi Bhabha calls this moment in Fanon’s experience a “primal scene” and refers to Fanon’s own classification of it as theatrical, a drama that is enacted every day. Bhabha connects this visual emphasis to the “scopic drive” and “surveillance” strategies of the colonizer, who enacts the dramatic “act of disavowal and fixation” as a means of securing narcissistic self-identification akin to Jacques Lacan’s mirror stage (“the subject turns around the ‘pivot’ of the stereotype to return to a point of total identification”).<sup>4</sup> A similar dynamic takes place in contemporary China, where the government, though not a colonizer in the conventional sense, asserts its control as an authoritarian regime to internally “colonize” both its native Han and its minority and foreign Others in order to reinforce its narcissistic identification with an “ideal ego.” Bhabha emphasizes the phenomenon of “being seen,” connecting it to surveillance and the scopic drive:

The drive that represents the pleasure in “seeing,” which has the look as its object of desire, is related both to the myth of origins, the primal scene, and to the problematic of fetishism and locates the surveyed object within the “imaginary” relation.<sup>5</sup>

According to Bhabha, surveillance draws its power from a real or mythical “active consent” on the part of the object of its gaze, and it is the ambivalence of this consent that leads to the ambivalence of the stereotype and “that crucial bind of pleasure and power.”<sup>6</sup> Foreigners in China, subject to a

form of “othering” expressed through political rules imposed by the state and cultural attitudes held by ordinary citizens, can experience similar objectification to that of Fanon: an “othering” that triggers fragmentation, alienation, and objectification of the Self through the powerfully dominating gaze of the Other.<sup>7</sup>

The significant difference is that the American in China is often a “*significant* Other,” a privileged marginalized Other rather than a dominated colonized object—which results, of course, in a vastly different dynamic. The Chinese child who points and calls out often does so with delighted curiosity rather than actual fear like that professed by the child in Fanon’s scenario. Unlike Fanon in colonized Algeria, the foreigner in China is usually there by choice and is usually free to leave the country, though not necessarily free to come and go as she pleases. Travel within China is restricted, as the choice of residence had been until very recently. This is important to acknowledge in resisting the preceding comparison, as many are apt to do: after all, how can one dare to compare the feelings of a contemporary Caucasian American female in China to those of a colonized African male in French Algeria? Isn’t the latter’s anger at such humiliation justified, while the former’s is oversensitive and naïve, perhaps even hysterical? What about the fact that when a white American or European is “Othered” in China, it is as likely to be in the form of being pushed to the *front* of the line as to the back, or that one’s blonde hair is repeatedly touched and praised out of admiration and wonder rather than disdain? How can such innocuous humiliation be compared to that of Frantz Fanon’s?

In spite of the apparent dichotomy, at the core of all such encounters is the common denominator of racism—often intertwined with nationalism and nativism—and the power of racism, regardless of its manifestations, is rooted in hierarchies of power and oppression. The complexity of this “othering” in the case of contemporary China is evident in policies up until the late 1990s that separated foreigners’ residences from those of local citizens: primarily for purposes of monitoring *Chinese* citizens, these controls were based on the government’s desire to minimize opportunities for “spiritual pollution” and other negative influences from foreigners that might threaten political authority or cultural values. Guests of foreigners were forced to sign in, leaving documented evidence of contact, or to meet in a public area where visits could be informally “supervised” by doormen, phone operators, janitors, or shop cashiers from the residence work unit. Even as availability of alternative sites for less strictly monitored cross-cultural interaction increased, the official rules that governed protocol for visits of Chinese and foreigners to one another’s homes continued to mark such interactions. The gradual relax-

ation of such controls, which led to increased government-approved interaction between locals and foreigners, is reflected here in the onstage presence of foreigners in recent plays, such as *Student Wife* and *Swing*, along with the direct involvement of their American male actors in determining the ultimate shape and content of both productions.

Thus, along with more blatant forms of discrimination, foreigners have long carried the awkward responsibility of somehow “polluting”—or, even worse, “endangering” (via documentation and suspicion that can resurface in times of political upheaval)—their colleagues and friends. Sometimes, the risk and inconvenience is not merely latent: this is the case with my visits to my “Chinese mom,” Lanny, a retired professor at the Institute for International Relations. The institute’s policy is that all visitors are stopped at the gate, but in practice, this is not the case: foreigners are stopped at the gate, while Chinese are not. In fact, during my many episodes of being detained at the gate while my seventy-year-old mom crossed the campus (sometimes in freezing temperatures) to escort me in, I watched for long periods while no one else was stopped for identification. In 1996, after more than a decade of visiting Lanny this way, I finally questioned the gatekeeper (who by then knew me from the previous five months of my weekly visits) about this policy: his reply was “*Mei banfa*” (There’s nothing to be done about it), the usual Chinese reply in such situations, followed by his assertion that he would make his own mother walk just as far in the cold if he had to. Even in 2002, with restrictions on interactions with foreigners significantly relaxed, I was still forced to wait at the gate while my mom—now seventy-five—crossed the campus to escort me. I am at present still forbidden to stay overnight in her home.

Despite such occasions when resentment is justified, the American or European living in Beijing or Shanghai, aware of his or her own nation’s imperialist history in relation to other nations (including China), must internalize “righteous anger” as an unavailable, indefensible option. Resentment at being treated as Other is accompanied by feelings of guilt due to recognition of this privileged status.

An example that illustrates this dynamic of privileged guilt is my attempt to purchase a “hard sleeper” train ticket from Beijing to Shanghai in 1995. I was immediately ushered to the “soft sleeper” ticket window and was refused the option of traveling by hard sleeper; when I objected, I was told that hard-sleeper tickets were sold out. As I suspected, this was not true (there were dozens of empty hard-sleeper bunks on the train), but clearly the train officials had wished to sell more of the pricey soft-sleeper compartments and knew foreigners were helpless in the face of their insistence. At moments like

this (which occur with great frequency), I feel resentment at this different, albeit “special,” treatment that is prompted solely by my race and alien status. This frustration, however, is accompanied by the knowledge that such paradigms were established through decades of practice by *foreigners themselves* who expected and demanded superior comfort and privileges. Thus, by virtue of my status as foreigner, I am complicit in my own “victimization,” unwittingly contributing to discrimination against myself.

This awareness of my “privileged marginalization” gives rise to feelings of guilt, which are heightened in any situation in which I actually desire the special treatment that I ordinarily find so distasteful. As a frequent resident in China, rather than a tourist or temporary visitor, I wish to blend in, something I can never do because of my physical appearance. It does not matter how long I live in China, how fluent my Chinese becomes, or how much I try to adapt to local customs—I will always be an outsider. In this regard, residence as a Caucasian Other in China differs significantly from the experience in Western nations: my sister who speaks flawless Russian, for example, can choose when to reveal or to conceal her foreignness while traveling in certain parts of Russia. It also clearly differs from the experience of minority citizens and noncitizen immigrants in the United States, particularly in urban areas, where ethnic diversity is so common that people of non-Caucasian races are no longer automatically assumed to be foreigners or immigrants.

Cornel West opens his 1993 book *Race Matters* with an anecdote illustrating the kind of racist treatment to which he is subjected on a regular basis as he commutes from Princeton, New Jersey, to New York City—treatment that in turn triggers memories of earlier, more acute racist encounters. Reading his account, I am reminded of a variety of moments during my residences in China: I remember being loudly referred to as “foreign devil” (*yang guizi*) by an elderly man at the opposite end of a crowded city bus; I recall the embarrassment I felt almost daily when young Chinese men would call out, “Hello,” “I love you,” or even, “Fuck you”—then laugh heartily—as I walked by; I am transported to street markets where I was always overcharged for my purchases . . . and then I pause to consider how harshly I might be criticized for comparing West’s experiences to my own. The residue of imperialist guilt passed down to me through generations of Westerners who have exploited China or demanded ridiculously privileged treatment tells me that I deserve it, that I have no right to complain, or that it is not ill intentioned. And somehow I find myself back in Frantz Fanon’s shoes—internalizing the very racism to which I am constantly exposed—and I question once again the legitimacy of my comparison.

It is when these daily experiences in the streets of Shanghai and Beijing (sites where official political ideology and popular culture intersect) were transferred into the more constructed environment of their theatres (where political ideology and popular culture are processed by intellectuals and artists) that my current project emerged. The first time I saw a Western foreigner embodied on the spoken-drama stage, I was immediately captivated: I was at once offended and intrigued, bothered and bemused by this distorted image of “myself.” The presence of foreigners on the Chinese stage, both in adaptations of Western plays and as occasional characters in native plays, struck me as an opportunity rich in potential for investigation of the issues of race and representation in modern Chinese theatre practice. I became particularly interested in the presence of Western (specifically American) characters in plays by, for, and about Chinese, which eventually became the topic of my research, although analysis of representation of foreigners in adaptations of Western drama ranging from early European classics to the avant-garde is likewise rich in possibility and long overdue.

My study focuses on a select group of plays produced during a fifteen-year period (between 1987 and 2002), written by Chinese playwrights who have inserted an American character and other representations of “the American” into their plays. I analyze these plays as both text and production, tracing motifs of cultural contrast, national self-interest, assertion of local identity in a rapidly changing global context, and a dynamic kind of “othering” that I categorize as Occidentalism.

China’s relationship with the United States shifted drastically during the years of my involvement with this project, from my initial exposure to and research on these plays beginning in 1990 to the completion of my writing in 2000 and of final revisions in early 2003. This makes the plays under examination here all the more relevant and significant. When my research began, Sino-American relations were attempting to recover from the Chinese military’s massacre of defenseless citizens in Tiananmen Square; today, it is recovery from events such as the American-issued NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and the more recent “spy plane” incident that is of crucial importance to restore harmonious diplomacy.<sup>8</sup> In spite of the similar (if reversed) political tensions between the two governments, one cannot help but contrast the drastically different popular sentiment of the Chinese people then and now. In 1989 millions of students and workers were demanding democracy with an American ideal in mind, exemplified by the familiar Goddess of Democracy that stood as a powerfully symbolic centerpiece to the nonviolent Tiananmen demonstrations. Ten years later, huge crowds including some of these same citizens rallied not in the square, but

outside the American diplomatic compound, angrily protesting the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade as part of NATO's military offensive in Kosovo.<sup>9</sup> Anti-American hostility among the Chinese people persists, and their insistence that the embassy bombing was not accidental (which the American government had consistently claimed) has been validated in the international media.<sup>10</sup>

During the height of the anti-American demonstrations in May 1999, protests were supervised by Chinese officials as tens of thousands of furious demonstrators chanted slogans such as "Down with American imperialism!"<sup>11</sup> This convergence of the establishment and the general Chinese population, together with the educated elite, in the recent anti-American campaign is in sharp contrast to the tension between official and unofficial sentiment that marked the pro-democracy movement of 1989. Significantly, phrases like "barbarian act" were used in 1999 to describe America's behavior, conjuring up negative images of the Western Other that date back hundreds of years (depictions of foreigners as barbarians, along with other tropes, will be discussed in chapter 1).

This anti-American sentiment and the rhetoric surrounding it was reinvigorated by the United States' bombing of Afghanistan in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. During my stay in China in 2002, it was numbing to hear some of my closest friends relate the pleasure ordinary Chinese citizens felt when they heard about the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. In May 2002 one young playwright said to me, "There are four things the Chinese people are happy about now: winning the bid for the 2008 Olympics, getting into the World Trade Organization, qualifying for the World Cup, and September 11." Opinions that surfaced in my discussions with colleagues about the then-recent events focused on America's self-determined role as world police and its neo-imperialist agenda that tries to justify its selfish consumption of economic resources by forcing its own version of democracy and human rights on sovereign nation-states entitled to their own systems and policies. As I completed final revisions of this manuscript, the United States undertook military action in Iraq, further reinforcing such Chinese perceptions. The fact that the Chinese *laobaixing* (ordinary citizens) and intellectuals nowadays share their leadership's view of the United States—and even express anti-American hostility that exceeds Chinese Communist Party rhetoric disseminated via official media—marks a crucial shift in Sino-American relations over the past fifteen years.<sup>12</sup>

The plays chosen for analysis in this project were originally written between the mid-1980s and late-1990s (with production dates in 1987, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2000, and 2002), when the dramatic shift in perceptions of



America (and the West in general) was also being reflected in other textual, visual, and cultural media. One example is television, which became the most powerful and widespread transmitter of images of the West during the 1980s (when it seemed there was scarcely a Chinese home or neighborhood, regardless of location or economic circumstances, that did not own one).

Two serialized programs that indicate the change in attitude toward the West from the 1980s to the 1990s are *River Elegy* (*Heshang*) and *Foreign Babes in Beijing* (*Yangniu zai Beijing*). The former adopted China's Yellow River (a deeply patriotic national symbol) as a metaphor for its corruption and backwardness in contrast to the openness and superiority of the West, represented by the vast blue ocean. This 1988 six-part documentary series, though controversial and politically risky, aired several times on national television to millions of viewers. When asked how such an antiestablishment program could have successfully aired not once, but repeatedly, cocreator Su Xiaokang replied that the sensational nature and popularity of the program drew eager advertisers, who paid large sums to the stations airing the broadcast; the Party's economic reforms of the 1980s thus directly helped to protect Su and his anti-Party enterprise.<sup>13</sup>

The television program's denigration of traditional Chinese cultural symbols such as the Yellow River, the Great Wall, the dragon, and Confucianism together with its contrasting excessive glorification of Western society and philosophy prompted harsh criticism from government officials, who attempted unsuccessfully to ban subsequent broadcasts after *River Elegy's* remarkable debut; but the very aspects of the series that angered officials drew praise from millions of enthusiastic viewers. Seizing on this dichotomy, Xiaomei Chen identifies the television serial as a primary example of use of the Occidental Other for "anti-official" discourse.<sup>14</sup> She summarizes the six-part documentary in terms of its use of symbolism to criticize China and glorify the West:

The dragon and the yellow earth are interpreted as representing cynicism, parochialism, conservatism, confinement, and land and ancestry worship in Chinese culture. The Great Wall . . . is also singled out for ridicule as a defense mechanism that secluded China from the rest of the world . . . , not a symbol of strength, glory, and enterprising spirit of the Chinese people. As a kind of culmination, all of the negative aspects of Chinese culture are finally traced to Confucian ideology, whose monolithic social system resists plurality and change. *He shang* thus concludes that the yellow earth and the Yellow River cannot teach contemporary Chinese people much about the spirit of science and democ-

racy, both of which are necessary for life at the end of the twentieth century. . . . *He shang* further shocked its viewers with a passionate account of an Occidental Other, which, it suggests, represents youthfulness, adventure, energy, power, technology, and modernity . . . openly embracing the outside world and “simultaneously transporting the hope of science and democracy” across the oceans.<sup>15</sup>

Zhang Longxi encapsulates *River Elegy*'s message by suggesting it can be interpreted as a reinscription of Orientalism, “creating the mythological image of an idealized West above the mythological image of a stagnant and decrepit Orient.” He attributes the public's overwhelmingly positive response to the program “not so much to the power of television as to the depth of anxiety that most Chinese feel about the present condition and the future destiny of their culture, their sense of urgency for a fundamental change so that the Chinese mainland will rid itself of poverty and weakness and emerge as one of the great nations of the world, which every Chinese has always wanted it to be.”<sup>16</sup> As both Chen and Zhang point out, the split reception of the program (and hence of its symbolism) between officials and ordinary viewers reflects the tension between these sectors of society in the 1980s regarding perspectives on the West in general, and the United States in particular.

By the mid-1990s this attitude of admiration and envy—even worship—among ordinary Chinese citizens toward the West had changed to one of disdain and condemnation. This trend is exemplified by the publication and widespread distribution of books such as *China Can Say No* (*Zhongguo keyi shuo bu*, 1996), in which the West is personified not as an inspirational model to emulate but rather as a neo-imperialist bully against which China must defend itself. Again, the television became the most influential vehicle for perpetuating this image: serials such as *A Beijinger in New York* (*Beijingren zai Niuyue*, 1993) and *Foreign Babes in Beijing* (1995) became monstrous hits that aired repeatedly for more than a year and were subsequently released on video.

Created in drama/soap opera format rather than in the documentary style of *River Elegy*, *Beijinger* and *Babes* became wildly popular with the general public throughout China. American expatriates in their acting debuts, such as Robert Daly (*Beijinger*'s David McCarthy) and Rachel DeWoskin (Jessie in *Babes*), became national celebrities, recognized virtually everywhere they went.<sup>17</sup> The roles they played, however, were anything but positive. Both Daly's David and DeWoskin's Jessie were aggressive Americans, sexual predators who pursued their own desires—wealth, power, and pos-

session of a Chinese person of the opposite sex—with flagrant disregard for social and moral codes of behavior. Such characters reflecting the anti-ideal, along with several other negative representations of Americans in both serials, were counterbalanced by Chinese characters (and, in the case of *Babes*, another American, Louisa) who embodied traditional Chinese virtues of patience, morality, passivity, diligence, modesty, and perseverance.<sup>18</sup>

During the same period that these literary and media images of America and Americans were shifting so substantially (mid-1980s to mid-1990s), a similar dynamic was occurring on China's spoken-drama stages. It is this concurrent trend that my project examines. In the case of theatre, the audience is not as numerous and widely distributed as the spectators of film and television, but theatergoers are concentrated in urban areas and are usually highly educated, making them quite likely to directly influence the course of future cultural and political interaction with the United States (whether through international travel or through educational, economic, or social interaction with expatriate populations in China's cities).

Thus, though the theatergoing population in China comprises only a slight percentage of the television- and film-viewing population, the influence of images emanating from the live stage is not inconsequential. Just as films, television serials, and published books, papers, and periodicals reflect attitudes about America, theatre is likewise a medium that creates and disseminates images to Chinese audiences. Furthermore, the ephemeral *live* embodiment of the foreign Other makes theatrical representation uniquely powerful in ways that differ from these widely circulated, processed mass-media forms.

The power of such live corporeal representation of the Other is summarized by David Prochaska in his comparison of halftime performances of Native American Indian mascots in collegiate athletic events to a group of Western tourists imitating local "Natives" in Papua New Guinea:

What is "playing Indian," "playing Native," "playing an Other," all about? It is about play, for one thing, in the sense of dressing up, masquerade, the Bakhtinian carnivalesque. . . . It is also about appropriation, in the sense of taking on, assuming an other's identity, taking another's identity. The implication here is replacing one with another, silencing another, speaking for another. Westerners playing New Guineans play to fellow Westerners; they do not play "Natives" in the presence of New Guineans. Such appropriation is ultimately predicated on power; power is the necessary prerequisite for appropriation.<sup>19</sup>

In contemporary urban China, Chinese actors dress up and masquerade as American foreigners on the spoken-drama stage, playing to fellow Chinese; however, the negotiation of power in these performances is not as clear-cut as in Prochaska's scenarios, due to a complex history of Chinese ethnocentrism and Western imperialism (and the emergence of a resident expatriate theatre patronage) that make appropriation an increasingly fluid and reciprocal process during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This book examines the variety of ways in which Chinese theatre artists take on the guise of—and thus replace, silence, and speak for—the American Other in contemporary spoken drama, along with how these practices shift when foreigners themselves begin to participate.

As will become apparent in the following introductory chapter, ideas about the United States are complex and deeply rooted in history, tradition, and cultural ethos, as well as more variable factors such as foreign relations developments, government policy shifts, and economic trends. All of these components come into play in the group of productions selected for analysis here, and they are manifested onstage in forms that range from intercultural idealism to neo-nationalism, xenophobia, and anti-Americanism.

The context common to all of them is the extreme opening to the West that occurred during the time period under examination—a phenomenon known as *chuguo re* (going-abroad fever), which includes both the travel of Chinese students, tourists, and entrepreneurs to foreign lands and, by extension, the flood of Western influence in all sectors of Chinese society. Although the Chinese government, fearing a brain drain, began to rein in its overseas citizens at the height of this trend—both invoking and contributing to rising tides of anti-Westernism in the process—the influence of Western culture on Chinese society in general, and Chinese theatre in particular, persists. One manifestation of this cultural interaction is the ongoing evolution of images of Americans on the Chinese stage. The Occidental Other continues to appear via the pens of Chinese playwrights, the visions of Chinese directors, and the performances of Chinese (and, now, foreign) actors—and thus continues to invite analysis by spectator, scholar, artist, and cultural critic.

My own exploration of these embodiments began as a spectator in a darkened theatre in Beijing and developed over many years through the reading of texts, observation of rehearsals and performances, interviewing of artists and critics, and a long process of consideration of what I observed, heard, and read in light of the insights of many other spectators, scholars, artists, and cultural critics. To all of these people, both friends and strangers, I am grateful. My greatest hope and intention in choosing this

project is to foster awareness of and appreciation for the domestically recognized but internationally underacknowledged Chinese artists and their works chosen for discussion in these pages. My aim is not to convince the reader that my own analysis is the only point of entry to these remarkable plays, but if my reflections here provide some access and understanding, and prompt further discussion and inquiry, then I have accomplished my purpose.

A return to Kristeva's emotional response to being "othered" as a foreigner in contemporary China serves as a fitting segue into the overview in the next chapter of China's relationship to and images of its Others throughout its long history. The historical evolution of these images moves from animalistic barbarian (Kristeva's "ape") to threatening alien invader ("martian") to their contemporary manifestation, a complex *Other*. As Kristeva intuited, this Other is not a mere foreigner in the casual, conventional sense but is loaded with signifying meaning. And in the case of the American, as we shall see in the plays investigated here, this figure becomes a very significant Other.<sup>20</sup>

# Setting the Sino-American Stage



China since the unification of 221 BC has clung to two great political myths: the unity of the Chinese empire and its superiority to all outsiders.

—John King Fairbank, *The United States and China*

With Hong Kong securely back in its possession and a booming economy accompanied by a recent surge of neo-nationalism, China crossed over into the new millennium with renewed visions of unity and superiority. The implications of this ethos for Sino-American political and cultural relations cannot be overstated, and yet, positioning China in the spectrum of post-modern subjectivity remains a daunting challenge. Crucial to our project of examining Chinese images of the American Other on the spoken-drama stage is recognizing the complex and shifting history of interactions between China and the United States, and understanding China's unique circumstances in the postcolonial age.

A central question that must be asked at the outset is one raised by Zhang Xudong in his analysis of the Western-theory craze that swept China's intellectual circles in the 1980s: "Is China a postcolonial nation?" He further clarifies, "That is to ask: Are contemporary Chinese cultural discourses too 'nationalistic' and potentially hegemonic to be included in that cultural frontier?"<sup>1</sup> Herein lies the paradox of China's simultaneous status as both ruler and ruled, a synthesis of roles that formerly alternated depending on historical context. Zhang concludes that postcolonial identity is not a viable option for China because of "indigenous Chinese discourse, universalistic in nature and hegemonic in potential."<sup>2</sup> This reasoning, echoing Fairbank's sentiments above, aptly describes the xenophobic cultural and political tradi-

tion in China that precedes colonialism, but it unfairly excludes China from postcolonial identifications because of its dual position on both sides of the power binary and because of its conscious, deliberate appropriations of Western influences. If hegemony is hierarchical, then China in its long history has had occasion to look both down from above and up from below; but if, as this project contends, hegemony and its postmodern cohorts (including “othering,” Orientalism, and Occidentalism) can be conceptualized as less vertical and more horizontal in their structures and contentions, then China’s unconventional colonialism and shifting subjectivity as both victim and oppressor do not preclude participation in postcolonial discourse.

In spite of Zhang’s assertion that Chinese intellectuals themselves rejected postcolonialism during the “cultural fever” (*wenhua re*) of the mid to late-1980s, I maintain that China *is* postcolonial, but in a rather complex and unorthodox sense of the term. Among historians both in China and abroad, China has long been referred to as “semi-colonial” because of the success of several Western nations in taking control of various regions during the late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, ranging from concessions in major cities like Tianjin and Shanghai to entire provinces. These colonialist traumas loom large in the Chinese collective memory, and as with other nations demanding and recovering from withdrawal of foreign colonial powers in the latter half of the twentieth century, China’s new nationalism is drawn largely from this experience and from the continued threat of foreign (particularly American) economic and cultural imperialism. In this regard, I would argue that China’s self-perception goes beyond a historicized “semi-colonization” and is very much postcolonial. Here I am in agreement with Edward Said, who lists China among nations where “reevaluation of the native particularity occurred [and] the denied or repressed essence emerged as the focus of, and even the basis for, nationalist recovery . . . an attempt on the part of the oppressed people, who had suffered the bondage of slavery, colonialism, and—most important—spiritual dispossession, to reclaim their identity.”<sup>3</sup>

Although China did not follow the typical pattern modeled in African nations and other societies, significant portions (including Hong Kong, Shandong, Tianjin, and Shanghai) were colonized by foreign powers, either through annexation or the establishment of international concessions, and Japan did succeed in occupying China from 1937 to 1945 as part of its imperial quest; the hundred years dating from the loss in 1842 to Britain in the first Opium War are collectively labeled “the century of humiliation” (*bainian guochi*), and the Chinese Communist Party has long referred to China’s situation as semi-colonial. A mere glance at the European architectural fa-

cade of the Bund in Shanghai provides an uncanny reminder of China's semi-colonization; a peculiar irony of this study is that the cosmopolitanism brought on by the colonial period would remain one of Shanghai's trademarks and be passionately reflected in its theatre—even that which overtly critiques the Western imperialist impulse.

The main thrust of Western colonization of China came during the “treaty century” (Fairbank's term) of 1842–1943, when the series of Unequal Treaties (beginning with the Treaty of Nanking at the end of the first Opium War) left China virtually carved up by various foreign powers into “spheres of influence.” There were over five hundred of these treaties, through which territories such as Macao, Malaysia, Burma, India, Vietnam, Laos, Korea, Taiwan and other islands, and parts of Tibet and Yunnan Province were “usurped,” “seized,” “coveted,” and “illegally occupied” by Britain, Portugal, France, and Japan. Also, Russia took more than 1.5 million square kilometers of land in northern China and later (as the Soviet Union) forced China to recognize independence for Outer Mongolia, stripping another 1.5 million square kilometers from their control. According to Maria Hsia Chang, the Chinese Empire traditionally was conceived as including China Proper, Outer China (Inner and Outer Mongolia, Manchuria, Tibet, contemporary Xinjiang, even northern parts of Korea and Vietnam, and during the Yuan dynasty all of Korea and Vietnam, Burma, Central Asia, Ukraine, Iraq, and Iran), and the tributary territories (Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Burma, Bhutan, Nepal, Taiwan, the East and the South China seas and the Bay of Bengal). Chang maintains that China's current nationalism is not only xenophobic and reactive, but irredentist (desiring to reclaim lost territory) due to its drastic reduction in size at the hands of foreign powers during and after the Qing dynasty.<sup>4</sup>

In chorus with other European nations, America demanded extraterritoriality (and freedom of residence and trade) for its citizens residing in the colonies and concessions of other treaty powers, and promoted the Open Door policy (ironically, partly in an effort to prevent out-and-out colonization of China), which seems particularly hypocritical since during this same period the Chinese Exclusion Act was in full force on its own shores, forbidding the entrance of most Chinese citizens to the United States, forcibly detaining them, and drastically limiting the freedom of those who eventually did succeed in immigrating. Not surprisingly, the antifoign Boxer Rebellion followed quickly on the heels of the Open Door policy agreement among the foreign powers (United States, Great Britain, Germany, Russia, France, Italy, and Japan).

The earliest spoken dramas performed in China, just after the turn of the



century, were understandably critical of China's feudal traditions that were perceived as having thwarted the nation's cultural and political development. Though imported from the West via Japan, and invariably linked to the May Fourth Movement (beginning in 1919), which prompted an influx of Western ideas, spoken drama in China is *not* a colonial product, as it was in India and many other countries. In both Japan (where it was called *shingeki*) and in China, spoken drama was deliberately imported by native students and intellectuals living overseas who were impressed by the ability of the newly encountered European style of theatre (different from classical Chinese *xiqu* in form, content, and technique) to address pressing domestic social problems of the day. Contrary to being imposed on China from without by a foreign cultural elite (as was the case elsewhere in colonial contexts), spoken drama was introduced and developed by Chinese themselves, used with tremendous effect to combat Western imperialism, and subsequently employed as a vigorous propaganda tool during the War of Resistance against Japan (1937–1945).<sup>5</sup> With America's support of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) and, later, the onset of the Korean War, spoken-drama plays became increasingly anti-American.<sup>6</sup>

Within this anti-imperialist resistance, however, was also a recovery and rearticulation of antiforeign hostility that long preceded the colonialist aggressions to which they were a direct response. Antiforeign sentiments did not begin with nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonialism: ethnocentrism and xenophobia were key ingredients in Chinese cultural identity well before the formulation of the nationalism of which they are now major components.<sup>7</sup>

As reflected in the nation's very name—not “China,” as we call it (a borrowing from the Ch'in [Qin] dynasty), but *Zhongguo* or “central kingdom”—the Chinese Self is centralized and all Others are peripheral and outside (as reflected in the common term for foreigner, *waiguoren*, meaning “person outside the kingdom/country”). Ta Jen Liu begins his study of Sino-American relations with this reminder:

For more than three thousand years the Chinese considered themselves the geographical and cultural center of the world. They believed their emperor to be the only legitimate political authority in the world, and viewed themselves as the highest expression of civilized mankind . . .

This sinocentric world view survived even foreign invasion and occupation, since the Chinese were invariably able to subdue or assimilate their conquerers in a generation or two.<sup>8</sup>

This sense of superiority and the assimilation impulse that strives to maintain China's constructed perception of unity are both consistent elements of

its nation formation processes, its articulation of cultural and political national identity, and its interactions with peoples outside of China throughout its history up to the present day. These two concepts—of constructing unity and articulating superiority—can be used as points of entry into all official (state orchestrated, supervised, or approved) cultural production, and much of the politically resistant cultural production that counters orthodox ideology can be read as a critique or deconstruction of these two overriding xenophobic impulses.

Furthermore, this agenda has been applied not only to China's interactions with foreigners, but to containment of its own territorially separated and minority populations *within* the nation as well. Fairbank indicated in 1983 that both the Nationalist Party (KMT) of Taiwan and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) of the mainland "assert tenaciously . . . that only one China is conceivable . . . and that this one China of the Han Chinese rightly includes . . . the Mongolian, Tibetan, Uighur Turkish, and many other ethnic groups."<sup>9</sup> More than a decade later, cross-strait tensions that were reignited by the visit of the Taiwan president Li Denghui (Lee Teng-hui) to the United States in 1995, the spy-plane incident off the coast of Hainan Island (in 2001), and the ascension of Taiwan along with mainland China to the World Trade Organization (WTO) indicate that Beijing's one-China philosophy remains healthily intact. In her discussion of the Chinese fascination with and classification, domestication, and representation of its own minority cultures, Louisa Schein emphasizes the resemblance of its practices to Western colonialism and questions whether such strategies are borrowed from the West or are products of "an indigenous history of othering 'barbarian' or less 'civilized' peoples that dates back many centuries."<sup>10</sup> This question can likewise be applied to the plays under discussion here, in which the representing (or "othering") of Americans emanates from various impulses that include a long-standing tradition of overpowering and distancing the foreign Other, emulation of Western practices of domination and oppression, and direct reactions to Western imperialism (in which the two gestures are essentially combined).

What Fairbank urges us to keep in mind is that China's self-perception as "victim" and the government's continuous rhetoric of anti-imperialism and anticolonialism are based on the fact that no matter what China's *attitude* toward the outside Other has been throughout history, mutual contact was always initiated by the foreigner: "the West expanded into China, not China into the West."<sup>11</sup> Along with acknowledging the reminders of Xiaomei Chen, Maria Hsia Chang, and others that China itself has a long imperial history with its own visions of empire extending throughout Asia, I will also

argue that this passive dynamic shifts when the Chinese government begins to send students overseas to gain knowledge, learn Western ways, and use them to benefit China's modernization effort. For the most part, however, this reminder of Fairbank's is an important one: even in its times of most self-assured superiority, China's response to the Western foreigner is just that—a *response*—to contact initiated by the West, which thus casts the Western Other in the role of aggressor and positions the Chinese Self as victim. In this way, China exhibits what Albert Memmi has called “the colonialist delusion”—in which the colonized's racism is “not based on a belief in the inferiority of the detested group but on the conviction . . . that this group is truly an aggressor and dangerous . . . In brief, it is not aggressive but defensive racism.”<sup>12</sup>

This paradigm that colors the West as invader and China as passive penetrated object, though useful for Chinese leaders to invoke in efforts to step up patriotic fervor, is not entirely accurate. The power dynamic of the dyad is not a vertical axis with the Western invader elevated but, rather, a horizontal balance that alternately positions one nation above or below the other, somewhat like a seesaw. Throughout its long imperial history, the scales were tipped in China's favor by a combination of the “heavenly mandate” designating China's ruler the universal sovereign and the rigid system of political and social ritual dictated by the Confucian principle of *li* (roughly equivalent to “ceremony”) demanding that all “visitors” (invaders) from beyond the central kingdom pay tribute to the emperor, figured as a suzerain.

The tribute ritual called for benevolence from the emperor and submission from the visitor, in the forms of gift giving and kowtowing. Chinese cultural superiority was expressed in particular through the reception of the visitor's kowtow (*ketou*): this physical enactment was not a simple bodily prostration, but three distinct and prolonged kneelings, each followed by three full prostrations with the head touching the ground. So heavily did it signify the inferiority of its agent and the dominance of the Chinese court that several foreign “invaders” refused to perform it, leading to the failure of their diplomatic missions.<sup>13</sup> Ironically, while the foreigner resented the humiliation signified by this action, the “emperors and their officials were affronted by the very notion that they should deal with these Western ‘barbarians’ on a basis of equality.”<sup>14</sup>

Fairbank's comparison of the imperial tribute system, which persisted through the nineteenth century, to the unequal treaties that followed, enhances our conception of a seesaw of alternating hegemonies:

To understand the one-sidedness and inequality of the unequal treaties which the Western powers imposed upon the Chinese empire, one must look at the ancient tribute system which China first imposed upon Western visitors. This old Chinese system was just as unequal as the treaty system that supplanted it.<sup>15</sup>

Contemporary scholars disagree as to the origin of the tribute system— dating it from as early as the Zhou dynasty (eleventh century BC) to as late as the Ming (1368–1644)—and have also called into question former assumptions about the symbolic versus material aspects of its practice (Fairbank, for instance, maintained that the efficacy of tribute for the imperial government was cultural rather than economic whereas benefits for the visitor were largely material in terms of trade and precious gifts, while later scholars have challenged this interpretation and argue that the system was more concretely dualistic in nature). James Hevia provides an excellent summary of these debates in his introduction to *Cherishing Men From Afar*, while also critiquing the commonly held view of “tribute and imperial audiences with foreign emissaries as symbolic, and the rites themselves as highly rigid formal appearances that only occasionally mesh with an external ‘reality.’”<sup>16</sup> I am in agreement with Hevia in his contention that “ritual practices themselves produce power relations,” that these relations are not unidirectional, and that “older ritual forms might be appropriated to say or do new things.”<sup>17</sup> The imperial tribute system asserted the superiority of the Chinese emperor not only symbolically but materially and corporeally, engaging foreign emissaries in an exchange of ritual behavior determined by Chinese agency in which the foreign presence performed its inferiority both in the goods it presented as tribute and in the bodily practice of submission. Varying widely from the Western conception of guest and host, the former requested permission to enter the imperial court rather than being invited by the latter, the relationship implied no sense of equality (in guest ritual, the emperor was *huangdi* [supreme lord], while guests were *fanwang* [lesser lords]), and behavior was guided by moral principle rather than manners or etiquette.<sup>18</sup>

The cultural and material embeddedness of antiforeign xenophobia (both symbolic and functional) that was played out in the tribute rituals is most persuasively evidenced in its linguistic prevalence—the extensive circulation of ethnocentric expressions in the Chinese language from early imperial times right up until today. In much the same way that the nation is still called “central kingdom” by anyone referring to it in Chinese, numerous objects and descriptive terms connoting negative images of the foreign are em-

ployed regularly in contemporary Chinese speech, reinforcing national superiority in their reiteration in both a symbolic and material sense; much like ritual acts, speech acts also produce power relations in and of themselves.

The earliest antiforeign expressions articulated Han chauvinism; they were used to mark differences between the Han “race” and the nomadic peoples encroaching on their dynastic borders. The earliest such words include “*hu*” and “*yi*.” Dating back at least as early as the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220), everything outside the Han empire was referred to as *hu*.<sup>19</sup> In contemporary usage, *hu* connotes recklessness, as in *hushuo* (nonsense) or *huhua* (wild talk).<sup>20</sup> *Yi*, meaning “outsider,” was joined with *ren* (person) to form *yiren*, or “barbarian,” and remained the official moniker for foreigners until the British demanded in one of the mid-nineteenth-century Opium War treaties that the term not be used in any written documents.<sup>21</sup>

The phrases with the most staying power today are those that came into usage during the period when China was most clearly dominated by, and thus resistant to, the West: the era of colonization from the mid-1800s to the mid-1940s. It was at this time that Western people first settled on Chinese soil and lived in Chinese cities, and was thus the first time that not only elite rulers but ordinary Chinese citizens had the opportunity to interact with—or at least observe—Western foreigners in the flesh. Fairbank describes the impact of this initial cross-cultural contact on late-nineteenth-century citizens this way:

In the Chinese view, the Western barbarians were outlandish in their physical characteristics, generally uncouth and smelling of mutton fat. In slang they have been called “foreign devils” (*fangui* or *yang guizi*), “big noses” (*da bizi*), or “hairy ones” (*maozi*). The official history of the Ming had described in some detail the Portuguese method of boiling and eating little Chinese children. Nineteenth-century mission orphanages were thought to make medicine out of children’s eyes and hearts. Foreign diplomats seemed to the mandarins wily and inscrutable, unpredictable “as dogs and sheep.” Peasant mothers used to shield their babies from a foreigner’s unlucky glance and especially the black magic of his camera. All in all, the white peril in nineteenth-century China was a good deal more sinister than the yellow peril of the 1900s in America.<sup>22</sup>

Specifically, for example, Americans were called *meiguo guizi* (devils from the beautiful country), and Dutch settlers in Taiwan were called *hongmao guizi* (red-haired devils).<sup>23</sup> Hair and eye color, degree of hairiness, and size of nose all continue (along with skin color) to be the most common racial markers of

difference from the Chinese perspective, as is evidenced in costume and makeup choices in the plays included here and reflected in contemporary nicknames for foreigners, including the ever-popular *da bizi* or “big nose,” an epithet that has endured since the colonial period. A typical indication of the unquestioned acceptability of this latter term in the Chinese-language mainstream media is the headline used by a Chinese journalist (in an English-language weekly paper with an all-Chinese staff) about the need for doctors at a Beijing clinic to learn more foreign words because of the increase in Western patients: “Hospital Locale Draws ‘Big Nose.’”<sup>24</sup>

Just as news media in the United States often portray a negative view of China, official press organs in China regularly publish negative information about Americans; in the latter case, there is a tendency toward presenting the sensational through seemingly factual polls and statistics, such as in these selected examples:

When the U.S. is mentioned, the Chinese will immediately think of: 1) powerful, wealthy, and world police (40.4 percent); 2) drug abuse, unemployment, homelessness (7.5 percent); 3) famous scenic places (6.1 percent); 4) Motorola, IBM, and other high tech and name-brand products (5.0 percent).<sup>25</sup>

Many Americans lie to each other . . . 91 percent lie daily; 20 percent say they can't go through a day without lying.<sup>26</sup>

The USA has a propensity to meddle in global affairs, probably due to its innate characteristic, or due to its superpower status . . . Marx said imperialism will die, but not necessarily within several hundred years.<sup>27</sup>

What is even more troubling than the content of these news items is that so many of these stories about Americans appear with such frequency and circulate among such a vast readership. SinoFile Information Services Limited selects and translates such excerpts from newspapers throughout China; thus, it is safe to assume that these “truths” about Americans and their homeland are reaching millions of Chinese readers. Dozens of them are reprinted in each weekly issue of the *Beijing Times*, an English-language newsletter for expatriate businesspeople.

As reflected in the latter of the examples, America at the close of the twentieth century was once again perceived as an aggressive bully by a China that just a decade before was eagerly emulating its fashions, consuming its products, and adopting its ideas. During the 1980s a “Western studies fervor”

prompted proliferation of foreign scholarship in translation and China was generally more receptive to the West than ever before.<sup>28</sup> This pro-American sentiment made a substantial reversal in the 1990s, however, prompted by unsettling developments in Sino-American relations, along with a carefully orchestrated propaganda campaign by the CCP that packaged Chinese nationalism in anti-American wrappings.

In contrast to the decade preceding it, but not unique from a historical point of view, official and unofficial sectors of Chinese society mutually reinforced a “neo-imperialist” image of the United States.<sup>29</sup> The tremendous impact of the anti-American movement was largely due to this convergence of three sectors of society (the establishment, the intellectuals, and the masses) that had been at odds in the 1980s:

The Chinese cultural arena in the 1980s was described as the manifestation of the tension between official policies on literature and art and the elite culture of the intellectuals. In contrast, the late 1990s can well be delineated as a dynamic triangular relationship—typified by both cooperation and conflict—between the three forces of official culture, elite culture and popular culture.<sup>30</sup>

China’s perception of the United States can be divided into three levels: the official, academic, and popular perspectives. For years, there was a marked spread among these perspectives, with the official perspective the most harsh towards Washington, the popular perspective the most positive, and the academic perspective highly divided. Since 1989, however, one of the most significant developments affecting China’s relations with the United States has been an apparent convergence of the three perspectives in favor of a more critical view on America in general and its China policy in particular.<sup>31</sup>

It is indeed Washington’s position on several issues related to Chinese foreign policy that has instigated this convergence of official and unofficial xenophobia, as reflected in the first example from the Chinese press, above, which lists “world police” among the immediate associations Chinese make when America is mentioned. The actions of the U.S. government in response to the events in Tiananmen Square in 1989 can be read both as an indicator of American disregard for state autonomy (by Chinese “official” culture/perspective) or as an ironic failure to serve effectively as “world police” (by “unofficial” citizens); either way, it was only the first in a chain of events that has stockpiled the resentment of the Chinese public and its supervisory bureaucrats. Contrasting that view of failure to intervene more than

a decade ago is the perception of America's premature intervention in the former Yugoslavia in 1999, when a hasty NATO military offensive resulted in the "unintentional" bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. The "world police" in one brief decade has gone from being slow on the draw to trigger-happy, and in the meantime has cast stray bullets into unwelcome territory by attempting to influence Chinese policy on Tibet, Taiwan, and human rights—as well as trying to keep Beijing out of the World Trade Organization and the Olympics out of Beijing.

Some of the anti-American rhetoric is so strong that it immediately harkens back to China's colonial period, invoking images of Uncle Sam nearly identical to those that criticized his unwelcome "invasions" of Asia during the first half of the century. One excavation of past associations was the documentary film that garnered highest awards in 1996, entitled *A History of War: To Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea*.<sup>32</sup> The second half of this title, "*kangMei yuanChao*," was the catchphrase for the entire campaign against the American agenda in Korea, and was invoked as the title of the "great living newspaper" play in 1952 that was one of the grandest spectacles of both theatre and propaganda ever staged in China.<sup>33</sup>

With all the striking and unsettling similarities, the significant difference between the anti-Americanism at mid-century and at present is that the current movement is not being promoted primarily by the government, but also in large part by ordinary citizens and intellectuals, especially returned students from the United States. As of 1997 more than 270,000 Chinese students and scholars had traveled overseas to study or do research since 1978, the majority of them to the United States; and although only 90,000 of those citizens had returned, their voices were being heard loud and clear.<sup>34</sup> Their tenure abroad at a time when America was being "tough on China" (here again at all three levels of society: in government foreign policy, news media/academia, and public sentiment) had inspired renewed patriotism that often found expression as overt nationalism upon their return. So inseparable was the connection between the two by 1995 that former ambassador James Lilly actually equated Chinese nationalism with anti-Americanism, and many political scientists today continue to identify anti-Americanism as a key component of China's nationalism.<sup>35</sup>

Tong Lam, in his essay proposing a reexamination of Chinese nationalism in terms of internal tensions in China, nevertheless reinforces the overwhelming presence of the United States in its composition.

Any visitor to the People's Republic of China today would be struck by the sheer number of newspaper articles, television programs, books,



and magazines that discuss U.S. military power and China's global political, military, and economic strategies vis-à-vis the United States . . . [the] strange coexistence of hate and love for what the United States does and what it represents has in effect been a prominent feature of the Chinese cultural landscape throughout the 1990s.<sup>36</sup>

He reminds the reader that the government's Beijing bid for the 2000 Olympics "repeatedly emphasized the twenty-first century as the Chinese century (in contrast to the twentieth century as the 'American century')," and he concludes that even though a more multifaceted vision of Chinese nationalism is necessary, complexities are consistently overlooked in its formulation:

[D]espite the tension and incongruity between the official and popular forms of Chinese nationalism, the content underneath is strikingly homogeneous and monolithic. Expressions of Chinese nationalism, regardless of whether they are spontaneous, state-sponsored, or commercially driven, are all articulated in terms of the simple East-West or China-U.S. binary opposition.<sup>37</sup>

The shift from a positive captivation with all things American during the 1980s to a virulent anti-Americanism during the 1990s was reinforced by other aspects of China's increasingly confrontational neo-nationalism:

Contemporary Chinese patriotic nationalism is a volatile mix of potentially troublesome attributes that social scientists have identified to have a high propensity toward aggression. Those attributes include an ethnic-racial conception of nationhood; a reactive nationalism that nurses memories of China's historical humiliation at the hands of the imperialist powers; a collective sense of victimhood and insecurity; xenophobic narcissism; a preoccupation with power; cultural-moral relativism; an illiberal worldview; an irredentist resolve to reclaim lost territories; and political authoritarianism.<sup>38</sup>

Displays of this aggressive patriotism were manifested in a wide variety of cultural products of the 1990s, including spoken dramas, as well as films, television programs, magazines, and books. Two of the most popular were the television serials *A Beijinger in New York*, which aired repeatedly throughout 1993 and 1994, and *Foreign Babes in Beijing*, which was first broadcast in 1995 and was rebroadcast five times in 1996, airing three times a day during its fifth run. Geremie Barmé, Lydia Liu, and others have written extensively on *Beijinger*,<sup>39</sup> while *Babes* has received very little scholarly attention. The twenty-part evening soap opera featured eight foreigners cast in

prominent roles: leads Karin Sigmund (from Germany) and Rachel DeWoskin (U.S.) portrayed American exchange students Louisa and Jessie, who fall in love with and marry Chinese brothers Li Tianliang and Li Tianming. While Louisa completely assimilates to local customs and emulates the ideal Chinese woman, Jessie is a “pushy, rich supervixen” and “spoiled, wealthy American student who seduces a married-with-child tour guide, pays his wife off and takes him back to the United States.”<sup>40</sup> Countless articles appeared in the Chinese press about the series and its foreign stars, and several major Western English-language newspapers and magazines also published articles, including the *Washington Post*, the *International Herald Tribune*, the *National Enquirer*, *Good Housekeeping*, the *New York Times Magazine*, and London’s *Sunday Times*.<sup>41</sup> The focus of most of the articles in English was on the negative stereotypes of foreign women perpetuated by the series, particularly in DeWoskin’s character of Jessie. When asked by one interviewer to identify scenes in the series that “accurately depict her own life as a foreigner in Beijing,” DeWoskin could not name any,<sup>42</sup> and to another reporter she explained: “They [Chinese people on the street] whisper ‘*disanzhe*’—which is Chinese for ‘mistress’ . . . I have laughed so many times in the face of Chinese journalists’ favorite question: ‘So, Jessie is a typical American girl, right?’ My response is always, ‘Yes. Most of us are temp-tresses, home wreckers and China scholars.’”<sup>43</sup> The articles also situate the wildly popular series in the context of concurrent Chinese neo-nationalism and indicate aspects of the plot that assert Chinese superiority over Western culture, such as Louisa’s assimilation, the successful use of Chinese medicine (and failure of American treatment) to cure cancer, and the justified physical assault of an American foreign student by the Chinese male lead (who subsequently wins Louisa’s affections).

Employing Memmi’s strategy of “countermythology” (in which the colonized contests a negative myth inscribed by the colonizer with a positive one of his own making),<sup>44</sup> a group of young journalists collectively authored a runaway best seller called *China Can Say No (Zhongguo keyi shuo bu)* in 1996. The book condemned the United States for its political, cultural, and economic imperialism and suggested that China should be prepared for armed conflict.<sup>45</sup> This book was followed by several other anti-American books with the say-no theme, including *Behind the Demonization of China (Yaomohua Zhongguo de beihou)*, collaboratively written by young Chinese elite who had lived or were then living in the United States, including reporters for American newspapers, a Columbia law school graduate, and a group of foreign students at Penn State under the guidance of their professor and co-author Liu Kang.<sup>46</sup> The 1990s counter-narrative (countermyth) suggested in

books like *China Can Say No* (discussed further in chapter 7) and emerging from university campuses came in the form of a series of “neo”s, clearly indicating their strategies of resistance: neo-nationalism, neo-authoritarianism, and neo-Confucianism.<sup>47</sup> After a decade of “cultural fever” (*wenhua re*) focused purely on Western discourses, the 1990s ushered in a “classical-studies fever” (*guoxue re*): a return to the nation (*guo*), a retreat to the past.<sup>48</sup>

Emblematic of China’s reorientation toward the past is the recasting of the United States in its past role as colonizer, as well as looking back even further to link this persona to a long line of earlier invaders. The Chinese government’s resistance to alien aggression can be traced back as early as the third century BC when huge sections of wall were joined by the Qin emperor to secure a national boundary; despite the Great Wall, however, northern China was invaded repeatedly by nomads from the steppes who sometimes succeeded in taking over rule of the land, the two most prominent examples being the Mongol and Manchu empires of the Yuan and Qing dynasties. Fairbank links these historically traumatic experiences of the aggressive alien Other directly to China’s modern response to the West:

Thus the relations of the Chinese with the nomads of Central Asia have significance not only for China but for us, for in modern times the West has taken the place of the barbarian menace. The modern invasion of China by the Western world, from the point of view of the Confucian way of life, is only the most recent in a long series of invasions of alien cultures carried by alien peoples . . . the Chinese response to the West has been conditioned by Chinese experience in meeting the nomads.<sup>49</sup>

In terms of articulations of the foreign Other today (specifically, in this project, theatrical representations of the American), this inherited cultural tradition persists, and is furthermore combined with a rich array of compatible inheritances: territorial colonialism from earlier this century; virulent anti-Americanism perpetuated during the Cultural Revolution (which exploited both traditional, precolonial racism and nationalistic anti-imperialism of the colonial period); and idealism about America during the decade of opening to the West that followed the Cultural Revolution. All of these influences are further complicated by contemporary Sino-American relations, a paradox of strained political tensions and unrestrained economic trade and consumerism.

While American consumers fill their homes with products “made in China,” Chinese citizens voraciously consume images of the American Other: Chinese peasants, workers, and urban elite alike absorb endless permutations of Americans via Hollywood movies, syndicated television, popular music,

and corporate advertising. Today's America on the Chinese cultural field of representation is not simply a politically constructed and digested entity. It is a repository of impressions from those who have experienced it firsthand and returned to tell their tales, combined with highly imagined and imaginative constructions by those who have absorbed the inundation of images from these various other sources. Faye C. Fei's contrast of anti-American sentiment in the 1990s to that of the preceding decade supports my formulation of a contemporary multifaceted anti-Americanism:

While Western influences inundate China, many Chinese are pretending not to care for things Western. Ridiculing Westerners, especially Americans, is fashionable. Yet this is not a simple repetition of the old anti-Western mood but a mix of neonationalism and better-informed views of the West. For some people, the rapid expansion of China's contact with the West is a sobering process: the initial excitement, the awe, resulting from the very first exposure to the West has gradually cooled down and people have benefited from gaining more knowledge of many different aspects of Western societies. For others, it is annoying: the increasing Western presence in Chinese life and the perceived Western threat to China have given rise to neonationalism. Most people . . . are influenced by both sentiments.<sup>50</sup>

By taking into account the complex networks that comprise contemporary Chinese views of the United States held by the spectrum of Chinese participants who collectively create contemporary stage productions, my approach to this study clearly acknowledges the influential analysis of Fairbank and his contemporaries who articulated modern Chinese history as a socio-cultural "response to the West," while simultaneously aligning itself with Fairbank's critics who proposed a more "China-centered" historical view; as such, I engage with both academic perspectives but ascribe to neither exclusively. Rather, I endeavor in this project to investigate and articulate a sense of Chinese "agency" that foregrounds the efforts, opinions, and agendas of Chinese theatre artists themselves and examines Chinese plays as production in the context of material circumstances and human relationships beyond (but also including) the play as text, while at the same time acknowledging that these practices shift in contemporary China in accordance with the trajectory of China's complex political, cultural, and economic relationship with the United States (and, by extension, the West). Far from seeing China as a static entity and "passive recipient of stimulus from a dynamic West" (a characteristic of the Fairbank approach cited by James Hevia), I examine the development of Chinese spoken drama in the past fifteen years by consider-

ing the perspectives of those creating it, through the lens of their construction of images of the American Other as part of a fluid and dynamic process of continually repositioning themselves vis-à-vis this “significant Other” in response to various domestic and international artistic, political, and material stimuli. In adopting this China-centered approach, I do not escape entirely the pitfall identified by Hevia—namely, that this strategy tends to “treat the Western presence in China as a known entity . . . more or less the same West with which Fairbank and his students dealt,”<sup>51</sup> but I do highlight the continually changing complexity of this Western presence and acknowledge that it is both internally and externally determined. Without escaping or replacing a binary of East and West, I draw attention to its constantly shifting dynamic, its horizontal construction of bilateral hegemonies, and its employment as a conceptual device by both Chinese and American artistic collaborators, critics, and audiences.

This combination of both historical and contemporary—residual and evolving—images of Americans and the land they inhabit results in complex representations on the spoken-drama stage. Whereas in some instances references to representational origins are obvious, in most cases a complicated web of associations from all of the aforementioned sources (including those available via media and advertising to the Chinese consumer, as well as those experienced firsthand through international travel) are interwoven to form an American character, setting, or “essence” (aesthetic) in a given play. This multidimensionality is enhanced by the collaborative nature of theatre itself: in some of the plays examined here, artists contributing to the project (playwrights, designers, actors, directors) have traveled or lived abroad but others have not. This necessarily results in uneven—even contradictory—levels of signification of otherness but also enhances the range and possibilities of such signification. In the case of *China Dream* (*Zhongguo meng*, 1987), for example, the play’s run in Singapore following its initial staging in Shanghai offered the actors an entirely new perspective. In the case of *Student Wife* (*Peidu furen*, 1995), the designers’ lack of firsthand access to America resulted in a botched attempt at a realistic set, while the participation of an American actor led to the critical reexamination and revision of problematic textual representation of foreign characters, an issue that was addressed once more—resulting in even more radical changes to the script—in *Swing* (*Qiuqian qingren*, 2002).

Close examination of both the texts and production processes of a sample of native plays featuring American characters from the 1980s, 1990s, and the first years of the twenty-first century reveals the numerous factors contributing to their representations of the Occidental (specifically American)

Other and the variety of levels on which these embodiments and images can be interpreted. Each subsequent chapter of this text considers one of these plays, exploring the participation of its contributing artists as well as its manifestation on the stage. In some cases the background of a particular playwright, director, or actor becomes a crucial factor in understanding the significance of the play's representation of the American and its possible resonances, and thus considerable weight is afforded to this "key player." The productions overall were selected for their ability to adequately cover the period from the mid-1980s to the present, to reflect the range of representations of Americans that emerged onstage during this time, and because of the significance of each production in and of itself. The directors who supervised these projects—Huang Zuolin, Wang Gui, Lin Zhaohua, Yu Luo-sheng, and Lei Guohua—are among the most important and most innovative directors in contemporary Chinese theatre, each with a body of work that stands out among his or her peers for its experimentation and ambition. Indeed, one of the major points that will emerge within this analysis is the correlation between theatrical innovation and representation of America and Americans. In each case examined here, the insertion of an American into the play provided opportunity for considerable experimentation in genre, form, and substance; it is no accident that these directors chose such projects and used them as a basis to further expand their agendas for artistic innovation.

Before proceeding with close analysis of the plays and their productions, however, I articulate in chapter 2 the theoretical foundation on which such analysis is built. In choosing to identify the Occidental Other as my object of inquiry, I am immediately cast into the sea of identity politics and postcolonial theory that began to emerge in the mid-twentieth century and was energized immensely by Edward Said's pathbreaking study of the phenomenon he identified as "the discourse of Orientalism." Thus, my own study is necessarily in dialogue with Said and the many critics who have utilized, interpreted, and responded to his findings. These writers include Said himself, who has periodically reevaluated his own critical stance in works ranging from essays ("Orientalism Reconsidered" and an afterword to later editions of *Orientalism*) to entire books (*Culture and Imperialism*). This second chapter is an etymological approach to unpacking the term "Orientalism" and its many reassessments in order to position its corollary, "Occidentalism," for my particular use in this project (and, hopefully, in the future efforts of others to examine Western images in non-Western cultural contexts). "Occidentalism" is a term that has recently been introduced to cultural studies discourse but has not as yet been sufficiently defined or articulated. It is my

hope that this study can contribute to that effort: that it can assist in claiming the term for productive use while at the same time rescuing it both from the ways that it has already at this early stage been misused and from falling victim to the discursive pitfalls that often plague interpretations and applications of Orientalism. Consequently, my articulation of Occidentalism is both specific to my project and necessarily open-ended, with an altogether intentional invitation to others to respond, refashion, and reexamine its construction and possibilities.

For this reason my discussion of Occidentalism is primarily located in chapter 2, which serves as a critical entry into examination of the plays, intended to inform but not overwhelm each individual case study. Because “Occidentalism” is presently a “hot” term in contemporary Chinese cultural studies, my lengthy exploration of its discursive emergence through an overview of the existing literature attempts to compensate for the lack of such a discussion in these very sources that have employed the term, providing for the first time a systematic chronology of its history as a critical discourse. I fully recognize that to some readers (particularly those whose focus is theatre studies rather than Sinology), I may be guilty of overcompensating for this lack, and I invite those readers to commit their energy to the subsequent chapters, which focus not on the theoretical construct of Occidentalism per se but on its tangible manifestations in the seven plays chosen for discussion in the remainder of the book. Thus, my intent is for my discussion (in chapters 3 through 8) of recent stage productions in China that represent the American Other to be fully accessible to all readers and to provide analysis incorporating many different elements (such as interculturalism, exile, anti-Americanism, and self-representation) of what might collectively be categorized as Occidentalism. My purpose in this approach of separating theoretical discussion of Occidentalism from close inspection of the productions in which it is reflected is to open the plays to various points of entry and to invite the reader to reflect on these plays in light of the questions raised about Occidentalism and to form independent connections, conclusions, and queries.<sup>52</sup>

In considering the positioning of the American Other throughout these plays overall, two categories of analysis emerge in rather distinct but intersecting formations: a *politics of identity* and a *politics of location*, both of which concern the “situating” of the subject. Most of the ensuing discussion of Occidentalism in chapter 2 is an engagement with a politics of identity on a theoretical level; an additional aspect to such a politics in analysis of staging the Other would necessarily include addressing, on a practical level, the issue of embodiment itself. The central phenomenon that is com-



mon to these plays—that of the Chinese actor *becoming* American physically as well as psychologically (or being replaced by an actual foreigner, as is the case in some of the most recent examples)—is an element whose significance should not be overlooked.

Whereas in film and television representations the foreigner is figured as a “natural” physical presence that is then dubbed by a Chinese actor, it is only onstage that the Chinese *body* becomes foreign. This occurs through an unavoidable denaturalization (even in the case of plays in the realist mode) through use of costume and makeup, and sometimes vocal alteration. In theatre, physical representation is synthesized without the splitting of physical and vocal enactments (such as dubbing, or the ability to mute or adjust volume) practiced in film, and without the filtering and framing of the foreign presence via multiple takes, camera shots, and postproduction editing. Furthermore, the body is live and thus more real to the spectator, though paradoxically at the same time more unreal since it is a thoroughly mediated presence, an enacted/embodied (rather than photographed/duplicated) Other: the foreignness is grafted onto the Chinese actor through costume, makeup, movement, and vocal technique. Although both theatre and film spectators thus suspend their disbelief in digesting these denaturalized representations of the Other, it is only onstage that the Chinese actor both embodies and speaks for this Other. This is one of the ways in which inclusion of an American character in a local stage drama becomes an opportunity for theatrical innovation as well as social, political, or cultural commentary. This aesthetic is further experimented with when directors in the mid-1990s begin to replace the Chinese actor in foreign “drag” with the foreign actor who faces the challenge of acting onstage and delivering lines in Chinese (usually with limited expertise in either) without the possibility of dubbing or editing as done in film and television. An extension of this vital distinction between theatrical and other forms of representation of the Other is summarized in Leigh Dale and Helen Gilbert’s analysis of Orientalism and Occidentalism in different textual modes in Australia and Japan:

In drama, usually a polyphonic discourse, the possibilities for hearing the Other speak are amplified by the avoidance of a single narrative perspective. The represented role of the Other can also be inflected by the particular actor, though this is strongly mediated by the text itself.<sup>53</sup>

Up until the period after the Cultural Revolution, the guise of the foreigner was always grafted onto the Chinese actor through costume, makeup, voice, and movement intended to approximate the appearance of the designated Other in as realistic a manner as possible. There is a long tradition of re-



alistic makeup (*xianshi huazhuang*) in the spoken-drama tradition—including body painting, rubber noses, chin extensions, and other racial simulation—which began with the very first Chinese spoken drama: a production of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, performed in Tokyo, Japan, in 1907 by Chinese foreign students in blackface. This technique is still practiced in China and even staunchly defended by some Chinese artists and intellectuals abroad.<sup>54</sup> Until very recently, the Chinese actor always became the American (or otherwise foreign) Other through these signifiers.<sup>55</sup>

Spoken dramas of the 1980s and 1990s interrogate this practice to differing degrees. Of the plays included here, the one that comes closest to the traditional *xianshi huazhuang* practice is Lin Zhaohua's 1993 production of Guo Shixing's *Bird Men* (*Niaoren*). Although Lin is known as an experimental director, it is not surprising that the Beijing People's Art Theatre, which produced *Bird Men*, would present the American in a conventional manner, since it is the premier theatre in China acclaimed for its faithful productions of Chinese classics (such as Lao She's *Teahouse* and Cao Yu's repertoire), its adaptations of foreign classics, and its conservative political orientation (being the theatre most heavily funded and closely monitored by the central government). In the mid-1980s the Beijing People's Art Theatre began to spread its experimental wings, giving directors like Lin Zhaohua sufficient creative license to explore new artistic directions with small productions staged in rehearsal rooms (such as Gao Xingjian's *Alarm Signal* [*Juedui xin-hao*] and *Bus Stop* [*Chezhan*]), and in the 1990s a public venue for such works—a separate “little theatre” (*xiao juchang*), on the idea of the familiar American “black box”—was opened adjacent to the main theatre complex, where new works and less conventional pieces could be produced regularly. Although Lin's approach to *Bird Men* was in keeping with the theatre's realistic-drama (*xianshi xiju*) aesthetic tradition, his subsequent production of another of Guo's “man” plays—*Chess Men* (*Qiren*)—was held in the little theatre and was far from traditional.

*Bird Men*'s American character, Charlie, is designated as blond, blue-eyed, and speaking horrible Chinese in a thick American accent—all markers in the conventional Chinese “realist” tradition that accentuate the character's distinct Otherness. In Lin's production, Charlie appeared brown-haired rather than blond, but the old makeup tradition was still employed: thick hair, a beard, Western eyeglasses, and loud Western clothing, as well as the requisite American accent for his unintelligible Chinese.

Also in a realist-production mode, but using a different approach than that in *Bird Men*, Yu Luosheng's 1995 production of *Student Wife* (*Peidu furen*) featured foreign actors playing foreign roles, speaking in standard

Chinese, for the first time ever on the Chinese professional stage.<sup>56</sup> The play features two couples, one Chinese and the other American. In the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center's production (directed by Yu), two company actors were cast as the Chinese husband and wife, while the American wife was played by Polish actress Basia Wajs, and her husband was portrayed by American Robert Daly. This kind of interracial casting is a new and quite revolutionary approach, obviously changing the theatrical dynamic and opening up multiple possibilities for experimentation, as will be illustrated in chapters 6, 7, and 8. In terms of the production aesthetics of costume and makeup, however, these interracially cast plays actually uphold the same principles as the traditional school of the earliest Chinese spoken dramas: for example, rather than gluing a beard on to appear Western for the production, as the actor playing Charlie in *Bird Men* did, Daly was required to grow a real one for the run of *Student Wife*. Facial hair was also required of the American lead actor in the 2002 Shanghai production of *Swing*, another play attempting realistic representation.

When a Chinese actor is costumed and made up to appear foreign, there is always the reminder that China is commenting on and interpreting the foreigner. When a foreign actor is cast, such appropriation does not occur on the physical level but still exists on a textual level; though partially concealed by the realism of the bodily representation, China still speaks for the Other. In the case of *Student Wife*, there is an intriguing illusion that the American is speaking for himself; as described in chapter 6, Robert Daly's participation in the rehearsal process served both as a painful reminder to him of this paradox and as a challenge to Chinese artists regarding their depictions of the American Other. By the time *Swing* is produced seven years later, the American actor not only insists on changes in the representation of his character but actually stakes a claim to coauthorship along with Chinese playwrights Sun Huizhu and Fei Chunfang and attempts to refocus the play's energy on his own character rather than the Chinese protagonist.

A much earlier Shanghai production, Sun and Fei's *China Dream*, directed by Huang Zuolin fifteen years earlier, did not attempt to simulate reality in representing Americans onstage but rather adopted an intentionally playful aesthetic, including its application of the foreigner guise through costume and makeup. *China Dream* requires a cast of two: an actress who plays Mingming (a Chinese emigré) and an actor who assumes all of the other five roles in the play (both Chinese and American), for which he dons different costumes, wigs, and makeup. Were these combinations to appear on five separate actors, the result would be similar to Charlie in *Bird Men*; but since it is one actor donning all five disguises, the effect is altogether different.

This playful enactment of the foreigner in various guises is an intentional component of the dialogue between East and West in which the play *China Dream* itself engages; thematically, it also helps to manifest Mingming's disorientation in America, by creating an effect similar to a hall of mirrors, in which likeness and difference are simultaneously reflected and repeated. The fact that the actor dons wigs and costumes to play *both* the foreign and the Chinese characters helps to dissolve binaries of cultural difference even as these differences are explored, which is a central objective of the play as a whole, as discussed in chapter 3.

Muting ethnic difference even further—again precisely in the midst of investigating it—was Wang Gui's 1991 production of *The Great Going Abroad* (*Da liuyang*), the story of an identical twin who travels to America. Slightly different choices were made in at least two performances of the play, one of which marked racially Other characters through costume and makeup, the other of which left designation of national identity up to the dialogue and the story itself. Occasionally, linguistic signifiers indicated cultural contrast, but on the whole the production relied on the audience's ability to imagine ethnic difference without having it physically represented onstage. As discussed in chapter 4, this strategy is very much in keeping with the director's underlying vision for the play, which is to emphasize themes of universality and *intracultural*, rather than *intercultural*, tension.

Whereas Lin's production of *Bird Men* was staged in the huge proscenium at the Capital Theatre, Wang's *Going Abroad* was an independently funded show that toured remote provinces; the vast difference in production aesthetic between the two is directly related to these contrasting conditions. Not only was Wang able to experiment extensively with fusing disparate performance modes (including modern dance, karaoke, kung-fu fighting, car chases, and shoot-outs), but the constantly transitory nature of the production itself (with actors, administrators, and locales undergoing repeated and precipitated changes) echoed the themes of dislocation and exile experienced by the main character in the play.

This latter point moves us from a *politics of identity*—as revealed both through Occidentalizing gestures that “other” thematically and through production practices in costume and makeup that “other” physically—to a *politics of location*: the trauma of cross-cultural encounters and the disorientation of exile. Una Chaudhuri encapsulates this trauma in the term “*geopathology*,” which she defines as “the characterization of place as problem.” Chaudhuri identifies protagonists of modern and contemporary drama as displaced subjects and shifts focus from standard identity politics (which privileges human

relationships, ideologies, social and cultural constructions) to “construction of identity as negotiation with the power of place.”<sup>57</sup>

In this sense, the main characters in *China Dream*, *The Great Going Abroad*, *Bird Men*, *Student Wife*, *Dignity*, and *Swing* are all “geopathic” figures: they are the contemporary exiles, immigrants, and refugees with whom Chaudhuri’s analysis is concerned. Much like the literary picaresque trope, Mingming, Gao Yuan, Paul Ding, Jiang Zhuojun, Jin Xiaoxue, and Su Xin (the plays’ respective protagonists) each leave home for a distant and unfamiliar land, where their experiences leave them transformed. As with its approach to physical representation, *Bird Men* is somewhat unique among the plays; it is the only one that is set completely in China, and the protagonist travels from America to China rather than the other way around. Although racially Chinese, Paul Ding is culturally American, making him the only main character who is a “foreigner.” The other plays focus on a Chinese citizen who travels to America and faces traumatic and transformative circumstances. (*Che Guevara*, though having scenes presumably set in China, aims for a more universal flavor in terms of setting and lacks a central protagonist who experiences traumatic encounter with an Other culture.)

Two of the plays set in the United States, however, do include China as a location, both of them in ways that exhibit the tendency of inclusion of the Occidental Other to expand theatrical innovation. In *China Dream*, scenes alternate between Mingming’s challenging experiences in the United States and her “retreat” to the China of her memories, enacting a physicalized nostalgia for the past. To accommodate all of these locations on one stage, the mise-en-scène is left bare except for a round platform that evokes various spaces and two columns of vertical elastic bands that extend from floor to ceiling and signify diverse objects and locales. Substituting for actual physical indicators of place are limited props and an array of gestures adapted from indigenous Chinese performance practices.<sup>58</sup>

In *Student Wife*, the audience is “invited” into the Chinese couple’s home, where their American friends have come to visit them. Aside from this convention of framing the play, the remainder is an enacted flashback of the Chinese wife’s traumatic experiences during her stay in America, set in the home of the *American* couple. Thus, the stage environment that begins as a swank Westernized *Chinese* apartment is soon revealed to be an *American* setting, and China as a location quickly disappears from the field of representation. This spatial conflation of China and the United States is very different from that employed in *China Dream*, but again it is the presence of the American Other that invites artistic innovation: because of the casting of

foreign actors, the audience can be pulled in closer to the characters and action, which in turn provides the opportunity for a hyperrealist aesthetic in which the actors and audience can interact and the one “realistic” box-set can signify two domestic spaces on opposite sides of the globe.

According to the discourse of geopathology, “America [is] a privileged space for the renegotiation of the problematic relationship between identity, culture, and place.”<sup>59</sup> In *China Dream*, *Going Abroad*, *Student Wife*, *Dignity*, and *Swing*, the protagonists experience what Chaudhuri calls “place as fate”: their encounters with American Others are rooted in their dislocation and “ill placement,” and the Other as concept thus emerges from context.<sup>60</sup> The America of *Going Abroad* is vast, unrecognizable, and confusing. Gao Yuan is overwhelmed by the juxtaposition of spaces; he literally loses his sense of direction, a state that is enhanced by scenes in which he is physically tossed, chased, and forcibly transported. His geopathic trauma is enhanced by a dynamic production aesthetic that features grossly exaggerated and undersized set pieces and props: the scale of place is completely distorted, reflecting Gao’s inner sense of disorientation and dislocation.

In *Student Wife*, Jiang Zhuojun experiences this sense of overwhelming disorientation when she ventures out into the dangerous and unfamiliar streets of Los Angeles. Otherwise, she is safely cocooned within the Spere’s American home, which Chaudhuri reminds us can serve simultaneously as a shelter and a prison.<sup>61</sup> Jiang indeed expresses her anxiety at this claustrophobic existence; it is her desperation from this unbearable confinement that eventually sends her running out into the L.A. streets late at night rather than face Lucia Spere’s continued abuse.

In Lucia’s attempts to force Jiang Zhuojun’s “assimilation” (in *Student Wife*); in the efforts of Mingming’s boyfriend and others to adjust her behavior to fit their expectations (in *China Dream*); in the conflation of Gao Yuan with his twin brother by everyone with whom he interacts (in *The Great Going Abroad*); in Bob’s attempt to usurp Sue’s independence (in *Swing*)—in all of these gestures, the place of America emerges as that which absorbs and assimilates its Others, diluting difference. As Una Chaudhuri points out, America presents a paradox of supporting individualism and forcing sameness; its multicultural diversity is cloaked with a heavy veneer of homogeneity.<sup>62</sup>

China as place, on the other hand, particularly as represented in *Bird Men* and *Che Guevara*, employs tactics of foreign reception that are quite opposite: China excludes and rejects its Others, emphasizing rather than erasing difference. When Paul Ding enters the Beijing park where the birdmen gather, bringing along all the trappings of his American psychoanalytic training, he is literally placed on trial for transgressing Chinese cultural practices and is

eventually ejected by force from the park. This scenario is a clear metaphor for how China as a nation has handled its long history of alien invaders.

If China's past experiences of repeated invasion and imposed absorption of foreign rule, culture, and populations can be read—as this introduction suggests—as a form of colonization, then it is quite possible that China's own initiative in sending scores of students overseas during the era of opening and reform beginning in the 1980s suggests a postcolonial counter-practice, even an aggressive expansionism. In any case, the recent reform period poses a challenge to China's self-perceived role as victim: during the past two decades, China has become the visitor as well as the visited, the “invader” as well as the invaded, and is increasingly perceived both at home and abroad as the emerging superpower of the twenty-first century.

An *Asiaweek* book review of Peter Kwong's *Forbidden Workers: Illegal Chinese Immigrants and American Labor* estimates that more than 25,000 Chinese “sneak” into the United States annually, with another million or more who are here legitimately overstaying their visas.<sup>63</sup> The American impression of an “Asian invasion” is also reflected in the increased number of students leaving China to pursue advanced degrees in the United States during the height of the “going-abroad fever” (*chuguo re*) of the 1980s and 1990s: in 1984 there were 4,000; by 1988 that figure was up to 20,000; in 1992 the number had risen to over 50,000; and one 1998 estimate is as high as 120,000.<sup>64</sup> Foreign knowledge is collected overseas and citizens are coaxed to return with their new skills, which are in turn sometimes used against the very nation that provided them. This, at least, is the perception of the American public, press, and government when scandals like the 1999 nuclear facility information “leak” attributed to Wen Ho Lee occur.<sup>65</sup> It is also the impression given by the Chinese press as it attempts to persuade intellectuals to return to their native soil; in an article extolling the virtues of past returned students in an attempt to inspire future patriotic imitators, one Chinese reporter concluded:

In modern Chinese history, returned students have been an indispensable force . . . Like Prometheus, they stole fire from the West to destroy imperialist aggression and feudal autocracy in China, lighting the way forward for Chinese society.<sup>66</sup>

Business dealings with China during the later part of the period of opening and reform also shifted, with the Chinese government welcoming foreign investment but also setting conditions for joint ventures that include handing companies over to local control after a contracted duration. In short, China has realized that it can set the parameters for its own commer-

cial “colonization” and can extend its own expansionist impulses overseas as well.

Indicative of this phenomenon has been the reappropriation of the term “Open Door,” particularly in regard to educational exchanges.<sup>67</sup> Where the phrase once signified a forced opening of China to an aggressive colonizing imperialist West, it now signifies the encouraged migration of educated Chinese toward that West—and *back*—in the interests of modernizing their homeland. That this Open Door for Chinese going abroad is open in *both* directions is entirely crucial. Fearing a brain drain because of overseas students remaining in their host countries, the State Education Commission instituted increased restrictions on overseas students and scholars in 1996. Since then, state-supported travelers abroad have been required to sign contracts, pay deposits, and repay all funding (plus a fine) if they fail to return to China.<sup>68</sup>

In contrast to this policy that postdates their production, the protagonists in the plays *China Dream*, *The Great Going Abroad*, and *Student Wife* who travel to America are under no apparent pressure to return; in fact, at the outset of their journeys, it is very likely that they will not. All three, however, experience extreme homesickness and disappointment in the American society they encounter. *China Dream*'s Mingming, possessing the most clearly defined “immigrant” status, arrives as an artist and transforms herself into an entrepreneur in order to successfully sail the capitalist high seas. *Going Abroad*'s Gao Yuan is positioned as an exile, initially traveling to America to “have a look” and visit his brother but is involuntarily restrained and unable to leave; the play ends with his declared intention to return to China. *Student Wife*'s Jiang Zhuojun accompanies her student husband to California, where she finds herself almost immediately in the throes of acute geopathic trauma.

All three protagonists exhibit the classic symptoms of what one Chinese writer calls the “marginal psychological state” of Chinese students in the United States: these include feelings of loss of status, spiritual emptiness, cultural rootlessness, restricted communication, and uncertainty regarding whether to stay or leave.<sup>69</sup> The significance of this proposed psychological condition is that it does not reflect the sufferer's perceptions of the traumatizing Other (American society and its inhabitants) so much as it articulates a construction of the Self, of what it means to be Chinese.

In this way, Occidentalism in all of the plays examined here, despite its inconsistencies with Orientalism, which are detailed in the following chapter, does operate to privilege reflection of the condition of its subject (the Self) over its object (the Other).<sup>70</sup> Whereas Orientalism has been argued to



deny agency to the objectified Other, Occidentalism often aligns the two manifestations in mutual dialogue. This is particularly apparent in *China Dream*, in which Mingming's American boyfriend, with his (somewhat Orientalist) knowledge of Chinese philosophy, represents the foreign-student persona from the reverse cultural perspective. His character confronts Mingming on her potential loss of her root culture, portraying a far more sympathetic image of Americans than had graced the Chinese boards at any earlier period in the development of spoken drama.

Paul Ding, the Chinese American psychologist who "invades" the bird park in *Bird Men*, is similarly complex, a character that exhibits the potential of Occidentalism to enact dialectical representation, self-consciously articulating a Chinese Self in contrast to an American Other, but also reflecting on what it means to be Other in and of itself. Paul's return to his "native" China to psychoanalyze the birdmen involves both scientific and entrepreneurial impulses, since he must purchase and take over the park in order to set up his clinic to examine the bird-raising "patients." In this sense, he represents American imperialism and capitalism in combination with Chinese neo-nationalism; whereas he believes his goals are fueled by love for his motherland, from which he has been separated, the local Chinese see his motivation as equivalent to the worst of Western colonialism, invoking in their criticism of him sentiments that are direct echoes from China's nineteenth–twentieth-century colonial period.

*Bird Men*, like the other plays examined here, foregrounds issues about the influence of contact with America on Chinese identity, and at the same time utilizes this thematic construction as an opportunity for aesthetic innovation. As in *China Dream*, traditional opera is invoked as a cultural contrast, but with even greater implications. Enactment of cultural cross-examination is *literally* staged, symbolically subverting hegemonic Orientalist practices of the West through Occidentalist counter-practices.

*Bird Men's* Paul Ding is an especially interesting case because in him the Self and the Other are literally combined—physically, culturally, and psychologically—approaching the possibility of some kind of synthesis that subverts the binary logic of Orientalism and similar theories of "othering." Such binaries are, of course, to some extent unavoidable, and even necessary; but in my proposed notion of Occidentalism, I suggest that this Occidentalist "othering" is only part of a fluid process of cross-cultural transnational contact that ultimately points beyond itself toward the potential for more complex models of representation and the possibility of increased understanding.



## CHAPTER 2



# Occidentalism (Re)considered



They cannot represent themselves;  
they must be represented.

—Karl Marx

The Marx quote above is one of two epigraphs that preface Edward Said's seminal text *Orientalism*,<sup>1</sup> in which he postulates the now widely accepted theory that the "Orient" exists as a region constructed culturally, politically, and intellectually by the hegemonically dominant "Occident" and as such is denied agency to represent itself. Closer examination of the plays selected for this study, particularly in regard to how both the Oriental and Occidental Other are constituted, shows that the "unrepresented" *can* represent themselves—and furthermore, that they do so through a seductive manipulation of Western Orientalism and its unexplored discursive Other, Occidentalism, which alternately exploits and circumvents the fallacious East-West binary that use of these discourses typically establishes.

Edward Said concludes his famous exposition and critique of Orientalism with the claim that, above all, he desires to convince his reader that "the answer to Orientalism is not Occidentalism."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in his introduction, he lists several "tasks left embarrassingly incomplete in this study," chief among them exploration of alternatives to Orientalism.<sup>3</sup> And yet, with all the density and complexity of the aspects of Orientalist discourse Said illuminates in his text, what he chooses to leave us with in the end is the question: "But in conclusion, what of some alternative to Orientalism?" while at the same time admitting that his "project has been to describe a particular system of ideas, not by any means to displace the system with a new one."<sup>4</sup> Thus, though urging consideration of alternatives to the discourse he has so strenuously outlined, he offers no assistance in doing so, other than to warn against subscribing to what would seem the most natural or logical response—Orientalism's inverse, Occidentalism.

It would appear from the body of work that constitutes the considerable

critical response to Said's book that many have heeded his final warning, for indeed the concept of Occidentalism arises infrequently and inconsistently. When the idea first emerges, as I will show, it is not even identified as "Occidentalism" per se. Those who attempt to trace some kind of linear development of the idea do so superficially and without any real discussion of what the term means and how it has been and/or should be used. Those endeavoring to conceptualize the term for critical uses neglect to examine earlier emergences of either the term itself or similar concepts, resulting in a kind of theoretical quicksand for the reader who wishes to gain an epistemic understanding of Occidentalism in order to apply it to studies of representations of the Other, as attempted here. Instead, the term "Occidentalism," even in its heretofore limited use, has taken on several incongruous meanings and has barely begun to be investigated in the way its famous counterpart has been. Ironically, this hiddenness and forbiddenness of Occidentalism (which, if taken to be demanded by Said himself, can be creatively interpreted as a possible attempt to conceal biased representations of the West articulated by "his" people in Middle Eastern Arab communities) reinforces the Orientalist apparatus condemned by Said: it prohibits the rest of the world from seeing gestures made by "Oriental" peoples to stereotype, speak for, objectify, and otherwise represent (perhaps even dominate) their Occidental "Others."

The concept of "Occidentalism" does, however, arise, and in recent years has been increasing in circulation; though it may still constitute merely a blip on the vast field of postcolonial scholarship prompted by Said's study, it demands much broader, deeper critical attention than it has thus far been afforded. Such attention must begin with an "etymology" of the concept (particularly as it appears in Sinology), which until now has been conspicuously absent.

### **Postmodern Emergence**

Despite Said's warning to the contrary, "'Occidentalism' has, inevitably, been discovered and identified."<sup>5</sup> Precursors to the actual term "Occidentalism" revolve around concepts of *reversal* of Orientalism, employing Said's text as their axis. The first response of this kind, contributed by an Arab scholar in the journal *Khamsin*, came shortly after *Orientalism* was published. In "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse," Sadik Jalal al-'Azm points out the central dilemma of Said's book: that his critical approach (which James Clifford insightfully identifies as an exercise of intellectual history with humanist tendencies that goes abrasively against the grain of the Foucauldian cultural

criticism it claims as its method of inquiry)<sup>6</sup> reinforces the very essentialist binary difference between East and West it purports to problematize, by attempting to trace Orientalism to antiquarian origins, therein inadvertently lending it the legitimacy it seeks. Al-'Azm argues that Orientalism, like nationalism, is a *modern* phenomenon. Whatever their origins as actual discursive practices, identification of Orientalism and Occidentalism as discourses respectively are *postmodern* gestures, implying that Occidentalism can exist and develop only in relation to its preexisting coefficient, Orientalism, regardless of the chronology of its manifestations. Perceptions of the West in China of course far pre-date Said's rendering of Orientalism as a discourse, and can even be argued to predate the images and apparatus constituting that discourse itself. Concepts of the non-Chinese barbarian, which would become an enduring standard for perceptions of Westerners, for example, are recorded in texts as early as the *Zuozhuan* and *Shanhaijing* (both fourth century BC) and the Five (Confucian) Classics such as the *Liji* (third century BC); and the Chinese had discovered Europeans specifically by the sixteenth century.<sup>7</sup> This paradox is one I shall return to momentarily.

In describing his models of Orientalism-in-reverse, al-'Azm raises an important point: that Said himself acknowledges the impossibility of "true" representation without categorization, reduction, distortion—that all representation is in fact *misrepresentation*—and that therefore what the Occident is doing (that which Said devotes his efforts to exposing and denouncing) is merely "behaving perfectly naturally."<sup>8</sup> Confirming Said's assertion that Orientalism reveals more about its subject than its object, al-'Azm adds: "But nonetheless this image has left its profound imprint on the Orient's modern and contemporary consciousness of itself."<sup>9</sup> This point raises very interesting questions regarding how to approach analysis of images of the Other in cultural representation. That representations of an objectified Other reveal as much, if not more, about the objectifying subject as the "othered" object is widely agreed upon, as is their enduring impression on constituencies who project such images. What is largely uninvestigated is the effect of such representations on the "othered" community. In exploring images of Americans presented on the Chinese spoken-drama stage, this issue might easily be glossed over due to the relatively few foreigners who attend Chinese plays; but this rationale—which I have found to be common among Chinese theatre workers—is misguided since access to Chinese spoken drama in the expatriate community is increasing, and many dramas in production never seen by foreigners are circulated overseas in translation textually. Furthermore, the entire question of whether audience reception alone determines the "imprint" of a Chinese theatrical representation on the consciousness of

its Occidental object—or whether indeed “imprints” are more indirect or circulate among more circuitous channels in society (both home and abroad)—is far from being analyzed or answered, and such a question has obvious applications to other forms of cultural representation (literary, cinematic, print- and visual-media-originated) as well.

Al-'Azm offers two examples of instances of Orientalism-in-reverse that allude to ways in which certain aspects of Orientalism can be redirected in order to reposition the Orient as privileged (rather than subjugated) object. These instances, however, fall short of being actual *reversals* because the Orient, though privileged, still remains the object of inquiry rather than truly turning the tables in order to look at the East looking at the West.

Al-'Azm's first illustration regards trying to “capture the essence of the ‘Arab mind’” through linguistic analysis, leading to “the conclusion of Orientalism in Reverse that comparative philological and linguistic studies prove the ontological superiority of the Oriental mind . . . over the Occidental one.”<sup>10</sup> This is a reversal only in the sense that the effect or result is reversed, not the process itself:

*Reiteration* occurs at both the ontological and epistemological levels, only *reversed* to favour Islam and the East in its implicit and explicit value judgments.<sup>11</sup>

His second example claims that the Arab poet Adonis “in classical Orientalist fashion (reversed, however)” reinforces the binary of East and West in defining their essential differences; the poet assigns attributes of “technologism” and lack of originality to the West, along with inherent traits derived from features like system and symmetry, while he credits the East with originality and essence that can only be captured through prophecy, vision, magic, miracle, and so on.<sup>12</sup> While Adonis' intent may be to privilege the Orient, he appears to be merely enacting the kind of self-Orientalizing described by Said, with a result of mystifying, exoticizing, even fetishizing the Orient in his very gesture to privilege it. Said gives several examples in his book of positive Orientalizing<sup>13</sup> and negative self-Orientalizing: al-'Azm's second illustration of Orientalism-in-reverse seems to be a combination of these two activities rather than an actual reversal of either of them.

Regardless of whether al-'Azm's seminal attempt to manipulate Orientalism's constructs succeeds in radically inverting it as a process, his analysis did pave the way for others to make similar efforts, and thus helped Occidentalism inch toward the academic horizon. In 1985 J. Timothy Wixted delivered to the Western branch of the American Oriental Society the presidential address, titled “Reverse Orientalism,” in which he attempted to

“turn around” certain “prisms” fashioned by Said to examine the West’s construction of Oriental societies and apply them to the way those societies view the West.

The crux of Wixted’s article is an examination of “the set of attitudes that . . . nearly all ethnically Oriental scholars seem to bring to Western scholars of and Western language scholarship on *their cultures*,”<sup>14</sup> retaining the East as the discursive object, though at the same time making it the inquiring subject. Wixted spends most of his energy criticizing Chinese and Japanese approaches to studies of their own language and literatures: their claim to authority by sheer birthright (and denial of intellectual authority to outsiders), their general distrust of Western scholarship on their societies (and in China’s case, blatant ignorance of Japanese scholarship on China), and the concomitant academic irresponsibility and inferiority of native scholarship. He claims that the Japanese have merely a purely narcissistic interest in what the West thinks of them, while the Chinese “quite simply do not give a damn.”<sup>15</sup>

Wixted, as a white American Sinologist, objects strongly to concern with cultural identity of a given speaker overshadowing evaluation of what is being said; he believes that Said contradicts himself by, on one hand, speaking both specifically for the Middle East and more generally for all of Asia and, on the other hand, implying that his subject position as a Palestinian lends him “privileged validity”; Wixted concludes, “there is an element of having-your-cake-and-eating-it-too in his own praxis.”<sup>16</sup>

Clearly Wixted’s agenda is to question the prevailing attitudes of Chinese and Japanese scholars toward Western academics who specialize in studies of their societies; in this respect, his paper offers little in the sense of a “reversal” of Orientalism, for the considerable scope of Orientalism does not include the academic West’s assessment of how the Orient studies the Occident. The initial section of his address, however, does offer some provocative food for thought regarding Said’s condemnation of the West as the overriding imperialist power of modern times:

The people in the twentieth century who most actively sought to occupy and control China, Korea, Southeast Asia, and Oceania—politically, economically, and militarily—and to teach and modernize these people, all on the basis of knowing (better than the Chinese or others themselves knew) what was good for them, were none other than the Japanese.<sup>17</sup>

Wixted also invites—unfortunately only in passing—analysis of the vast and varied Japanese literature about America, posing the Saidian question,

“to what extent does such literature tell us more about the Japanese who write it than it does about its putative subject?”<sup>18</sup>

Another five years passed before the “prisms” presented by Wixted were “turned” and assiduously applied specifically to studies of modern China and christened “Occidentalism.” Much of this effort was made by Xiaomei Chen, whose research has consistently focused on Chinese reception of Western literary and cultural forms, and who has been persistently disseminating the concept of “Occidentalism” among her colleagues. She co-organized a conference on “Orientalism and Occidentalism” at Stanford in 1991, and authored *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China* in 1995. Because her efforts are at the forefront of the circulation of the concept of Occidentalism, and due to the prominent position it plays in her book, Chen’s use of the term requires close attention. Before moving into such an analysis, however, let us examine a brief but important application of Occidentalism by one of Chen’s contemporaries, Frank Dikötter, in his study *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*. Dikötter’s book was completed about the same time as Chen’s investigations of Occidentalism but addresses an earlier period of modern Chinese history in a far more detached way than Chen’s case studies. Brief as his aside on Occidentalism is, his description raises some useful questions for conceptualizing it as a potential discourse.

In chapter 5 of *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, “Race as Species: 1915–1949,” Dikötter describes how discussions of race took on a cultural as well as a political dimension during the New Culture Movement, of which construction of national identity was a major component. As young Chinese intellectuals returned from abroad, Western thought began to play a prominent role in cultural reconstruction: “most intellectuals agreed that the West was the ultimate norm by which change should be measured . . . [W]hether as an idealized version of itself or as a polluted alien, the West became China’s alter ego.”<sup>19</sup> Reformers like Chen Duxiu focused on the essential differences between China and the West, the “yellow” and “white” races.

Identifying its three salient features as *polarization* (emphasis on the fundamental dichotomy of East and West à la Chen Duxiu), *projection* (of native ideas onto Western origins) and *fragmentation* (of Western thought itself through distortion, decontextualization, and misquotation in order to simplify assimilation), Dikötter hinges his illustrations of Occidentalism on a problematic discrepancy between modern Chinese intellectual interpretation of Western ideas and the objective existence of “real” Western thought. His concept of Occidentalism is inherently negative: as a distorted representation of Western thinking, it is an obstacle to “pure” transmission of Western ideas to Chinese minds and society. Noting that the “phenomenon of Occi-

dentalism” should not be “unduly” emphasized, Dikötter stresses that intellectuals responded to it in varying ways. Though never providing a clear definition of exactly what he means by “Occidentalism,” the section summarized above and reference to the book’s index indicate that it is synonymous with Western thought, or reception thereof.

Though her study spans many more pages, years, and materials than Dikötter’s, Xiaomei Chen’s construction of Occidentalism ultimately strikes a similar chord. For Chen, Occidentalism involves essentialization of the West and skewed adoption of Western models, is employed most effectively by the intelligentsia in order to adjust its relationship to dominant official ideology, and is slippery and difficult to define; unlike Dikötter’s version, however, Chen’s Occidentalism is (at least when employed by the educated elite) largely positive in intent and effect.

Chen isolates two discordant strains of Occidentalism (“two related yet separate discursive practices” or “two different appropriations of the same discourse for different political ends”).<sup>20</sup> The first, “official Occidentalism,” is an essentializing of the West to support state nationalism and suppress the “people”; the second, “anti-official Occidentalism,” is in opposition to the first and occurs when the intelligentsia employs the West “as a metaphor for political liberation against ideological oppression within a totalitarian society.” Later, she identifies a “third kind of Occidentalism in which the anti-official Occidentalism overlapped with the official Occidentalism of the early post-Mao regime which manipulated the former into legitimizing the latter’s political agenda.”<sup>21</sup>

Clearly, Chen’s concept of Occidentalism is almost purely political in the most concrete sense (versus the abstract sense in which *any* attempt at representation is inevitably “political”) and hinges primarily on domestic, rather than global, politics. In this sense, Chen’s concept of Occidentalism, like those previously discussed, has not sufficiently resisted the apparatus of Orientalism, particularly in its retention of the East as object of inquiry: Chen’s Occidentalism positions a Chinese subject employing Western metaphors that allow “the Orient to participate actively and with indigenous creativity in the process of self-appropriation, even after being appropriated and constructed by Western others.”<sup>22</sup> While, again, it is widely agreed that representations of the Other are acts of self-definition, they are clearly not *simply* self-definition—or at least not merely *domestic* self-definition. The hegemonic nature of the Orientalist practice outlined by Said was fueled by Europe’s self-perceived need to assert its global authority; I would contend that Occidentalism as practiced in China is also largely motivated by China’s need to assert its global legitimacy and national identity. Sinologists

widely confirm that in modern Chinese history the images of Americans often serve to assert national identity and claim legitimacy.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, theatrical representations of American characters in spoken drama reflect perceptions of the United States and assertions of what it means to be “Chinese” in a shifting political and cultural field (both global and domestic), as well as aesthetic innovation and institutional changes in spoken drama itself. If Occidentalism is truly to be considered empirically as a counterpart to Orientalism, it must, even if it does not accrue the institutional power Said highlights, contain the ontological element of rendering a field of images of its Other, and not merely acknowledging Western influence (a practice actually contrary to Orientalist logic, which does not emphasize multiple biased perceptions of the Orient having the agency to transform their European subject).<sup>24</sup>

Of Chen’s case studies of Occidentalism as a “counter-discourse,” only the chapter on the controversial television serial *River Elegy* (*Heshang*) examines actual images and perceptions of the West as constructed by China. Her chapters on Chinese modern drama, which she desires to “redeem . . . from its marginal position both in China and in the West,”<sup>25</sup> merely recount productions of Western plays (of Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Brecht) produced in China for domestic political purposes. The only native play considered in detail in Chen’s study is Gao Xingjian’s *Wild Man* (*Yeren*) and she does not address it on the level of what it might say thematically about China’s relationship to the West, though she treats superficially its use of both Chinese and Western theatrical techniques and more rigorously its “origins” or “influences” in terms of genre. Despite the fact that the very title, *Yeren*, conjures up pejorative terms used to describe the non-Chinese “barbarian” outsider,<sup>26</sup> Chen does not investigate the representations of the West and China that abound in Gao’s play—or in any other Chinese play. There is no consideration, for example, of dramas staged in China—both native and foreign—in which the West is representative of that which threatens national stability, social normalcy, Chinese culture, or humanity in such a way that the West becomes allegorical for the *problem* (the Party) rather than the *solution* (freedom, democracy, etc.). Her chapter “Occidental Theater” addresses Chinese productions of foreign plays only in terms of their thematic use for political purposes; though she fleetingly mentions the performative dimension of Chinese actors embodying foreigners, she does not pursue it (my discussion of *China Dream* in chapter 3 contains more detail on this aspect of Chen’s study), and she includes no play by a native playwright representing foreign Others. Her assessment of foreign productions considers them only insofar as they are staged to serve domestic goals of Chinese intel-



lectuals vis-à-vis the establishment, without investigating how these stagings also serve other purposes or actually represent the foreign Other itself in various ways. The chapter would be more aptly titled “Occidental Theater” rather than Occidental Theater, or perhaps simply “Western Theater in China.”

Clearly, Chen and I have different agendas: I am interested in excavating images of the foreign (specifically, American) Other that surface in Chinese plays (my analysis thus seeks to draw in consideration of phenomenology and performance elements such as costume, makeup, movement, and voice along with textual study to explore theatrical as well as literary representations), and I am exploring Occidentalism as a possible critical method through which to shape a discourse (or at least illuminate patterns and raise questions) about these images. In this light, my interpretation of the spectrum that a term such as “Occidentalism” would cover differs sharply from the territory to which Chen applies it. Her images of the West are limited to those that allegorize liberation of the intelligentsia from the CCP, without consideration of renderings of the West that support the establishment’s nationalist agenda, or of how such representations reflect perceptions of the foreign Other itself. I believe that adoption and articulation of an emergent term like “Occidentalism” demands probing more deeply into images of the Occidental Other and acknowledging that such images, while articulating national and/or cultural identity as previously mentioned, also do indeed speak for the Occidental Other in addition to the Oriental Self.

Eugene Eoyang, in his 1992 essay “Thinking Comparatively: Orienting the West and Occidenting the East,” attempts to sum up what he perceives as the confusing development of multiple counter-discourses to Orientalism. His essay is the only work in the “Occidental school” to cite other members, among them al-‘Azm, Wixted, Chen, and, of course, Said. His articulation of the entire corpus is unfortunately all too brief. Most regrettably, he does not elaborate on, but merely cites, Chen’s essay on *Heshang*, using it only to borrow her term “counter-discourse” to apply to Said’s study of Orientalism, thus making Wixted’s reverse Orientalism a “counter-counter-discourse” and so on.

Eoyang is a bit misguided here, of course. Said’s extrapolations of the paradigms of Orientalism do not constitute a discourse in and of themselves, but merely the unmasking, articulation, and critique of a discourse. Furthermore, Eoyang misappropriates Chen’s term “counter-discourse”: her meaning involves opposition to a ruling ideology in local domestic politics rather than to a global power superstructure like Orientalism (her use of the term also involves a kind of give-and-take akin to fluid models of hegemony like those

described by Lisa Lowe and others; Said's "opposition" to Orientalism, even if it *were* a discourse, would be oppositional in quite a different sense). James Clifford explains the "oppositional" nature of Said's project in his essay "On Orientalism"; he calls Said's gesture a "writing back" against a West that had traditionally "spoken for" the rest of the world and indicates that Said's intent is to perform discourse analysis.<sup>27</sup> Said's "opposing" does not in itself, then, constitute a discourse (as Eoyang would have it) but rather an identifying, isolating, articulating of an existent, but heretofore hidden, discourse.

Eoyang introduces Chinese "four-cornered" logic as an alternative to Western binary logic, suggesting helpful new models of subjectivity and "oppositional" discourse. In Eoyang's formulation:

Western thought tends to be dominated by binary logic, which is monolithic. Something cannot be both A and non-A. Chinese logic is "four-cornered": it entertains the following possibilities, that something is (1) A; that it is (2) non-A; that it is (3) both A and non-A; that it is (4) neither A nor non-A.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, he ironically upholds the binary we are all trying to dissolve by asserting that "phenomenological paradigms are lost when fundamental differences between Western and Chinese ways of thinking are glossed over."<sup>29</sup>

In visiting the locations of emergence of concepts of Occidentalism, our journey touches down on the "other" side of the binary—in China, with an article published in *Dushu*, a reputable scholarly journal. Its author, Zhang Kuan, laments the fact that Said mentions "Occidentalism" (*xifang zhuyi*) only in passing in *Orientalism*; Zhang furnishes his own definition of Occidentalism as the likely homologue to Orientalism, a concept under whose umbrella everything can be inspected, ranging from impetuous treatment to wishful distortion of Western culture, to sentimental rejection of the West, to the intelligentsia's sense of loss of superiority of Chinese civilization, to ancient models of Chinese theories on the West, to the apogee of missionary activity. In this sense, Zhang captures the paradoxical aspect of Occidentalism that the aforementioned scholars in the United States seem to have neglected.

Zhang goes on to mention that during his studies in the United States, he encountered a professor who was passionately interested in Chinese images of the West. At the end of the article, he details one incident of note regarding an evening when the professor presented slides, one of which showed a bloody, gutted pig hanging on a cross. Explaining the artistic and linguistic symbolism,<sup>30</sup> the professor interpreted the image as a priest being killed un-

der a Boxer's butcher knife, conveying that the Chinese do not have the capacity to welcome the gospel but rather blaspheme God and kill his emissaries. Zhang objected, offering his knowledge of the ills the church had committed in order to win converts in the Chinese countryside, upon which the professor, displeased, reminded him to reflect on his "educational background." Zhang concludes from his readings of Said and other (mostly literary) texts as well as his own experience that Orientalism and Occidentalism each has its own logic, and that he is probably still personally steeped in his own Occidentalist subjectivity. He hopes that "true dialogue" (*zhenzheng de duihua*) and "impartial narrative" (*gongzheng de xushu*) are possible but says if they are not, "then just let each say its own thing." As a reminder to his colleagues to be mindful of their own cultural circumstances, he concludes: "scholars of China, be sure not to join the chorus of Orientalism like a hive of bees."<sup>31</sup>

Along with comparative literature scholar Xiaomei Chen, anthropologist James Carrier has been a prominent proponent of the term "Occidentalism." After initial exploration of the term in a 1992 essay, he edited a volume bearing that title, which was published the same year as Chen's book of the same name, prompting David Arkush to begin his joint review of the two books with the following comment:

The simultaneous appearance of two books entitled *Occidentalism* immediately suggests the question of exactly what is meant by the word. Clearly some sort of converse to Edward Said's "orientalism," but what could the converse be . . . ? The evidence from these two rather dissimilar books is that "occidentalism" is used for several different things and probably adds little to Said's influential theory of orientalism.<sup>32</sup>

In my critique of both Chen and Carrier, I am in agreement with Arkush that the term "Occidentalism" requires careful and consistent definition in order to be a productive participant in post-Orientalist discourse. Furthermore, I propose a definition that differs significantly from those of Chen and Carrier, whose uses of the term have been the most recognized among the emerging body of scholars employing the concept.

Fellow anthropologist Louisa Schein credits Carrier with pointing out that the totalizing division of the world into a dominant West and "othered" East forecloses the possibility of the West as a "potential object of essentialist representation," rendering the East "incapable of othering."<sup>33</sup> Refuting this notion is one of the central points of my study and aligns my concerns with those of Schein and others who indicate Orientalism's tendency to "obfus-

cate and neutralize the histories and legacies of non-Western imperialisms and associated 'othering' practices."<sup>34</sup>

Both in his earlier article and subsequent book, Carrier invokes the term "Occidentalism" to describe the bias of anthropologists in their studies of non-Western cultures. Occidentalism in this sense is a *Western* construction of the West that becomes the "silent partner" influencing their examinations of indigenous communities, the image of a dominant West they carry into the field and through which they process their observations, despite their attempts to be objective and shift focus away from the West.<sup>35</sup> Carrier emphasizes that Occidentalism "begins to call into question some of the ways that Westerners represent the West to themselves,"<sup>36</sup> reducing the East to a mere backdrop for such xenophobic exercises. When he does consider non-Western production of images, it is not of Others, but of Selves: "ways that people outside the West imagine themselves," though he allows that "their self-image often develops in contrast to their stylized image of the West."<sup>37</sup> This discursive practice—different from Said's self-Orientalizing and somewhat related to Chen's evaluation of China's uses of the West in strategies that she sees as responses to Western Orientalist constructions of itself—is not the practice I wish to highlight in my own study.

My object of inquiry, rather, is the latter component of Carrier's articulation of this secondary Occidentalism (his primary concept apparently being the effects of the West's stylized images of itself), namely "*their stylized image of the West*." It is true, as Carrier says, that self-perception in the plays examined here develops in contrast to a construction of the West; assertion of Chinese self-identity emerges as a primary by-product of representations of Americans in the plays chosen for this study. My focus, however, is equally on these representations of the Western Other themselves, a phenomenon that in Carrier's introduction seems to be a mere afterthought:

Sadly, however, I must point to an important gap in the collection.

That gap is the way that scholars in non-Western societies, less likely to share common Western academic occidentalisms, can reveal the ways that those occidentalisms have shaped Western interpretations of non-Western societies . . . *And, of course, those non-Western scholars themselves are likely to have their own occidentalisms that would be interesting to analyse.*<sup>38</sup>

It is precisely such analysis that I hope to initiate. In Carrier's parlance, Occidentalism is "the essentialistic rendering of the West by Westerners,"<sup>39</sup> while the "othering" of the West by non-Westerners—what I consider to constitute the practice of Occidentalism—he labels "ethno-Occidentalism." His

logic in misnaming Occidentalism “ethno-Occidentalism” is that it consists of “the Aliens’ conception of the impinging Western society.”<sup>40</sup> The problem here, of course, is that Carrier presumes a dominant Western subjectivity in deployment of (indeed, even naming of) these discourses. If Orientalism is the construction of the “Orient” by its oppositional Other, how, then, can Occidentalism *not* be fundamentally its reverse: the construction of the “Occident” by *its* oppositional Other?

Here I wish to clarify that my intention is not to reduce Occidentalism to an oversimplified inverse of Orientalism; likewise I do not suggest an adherence to rigid oppositional binaries. Occidentalism, like Orientalism, is a complex system of associations, assumptions, and their applications; furthermore, my own concept of Occidentalism is *not* merely a reversal of Orientalism precisely because it does not assume a conventional binaristic hierarchy of hegemony. This chapter articulates these complexities and attempts to position Occidentalism as an intricate, fluid, uneven process quite different from Orientalism. What I *do* wish to emphasize here, however, is its correlation to Orientalism in terms of its “speaking subject” and “othered object”: I take issue with Carrier’s notion that the West must be privileged as the “possessor” of any given colonial or postcolonial discourse by virtue of its assumed pervasive political and cultural power, thereby reducing non-Western subjects to “Alien” and qualifying their discourses with the prefix “ethno.”

Carrier’s own rhetoric in attempting to dismantle Western Occidentalism is unfortunately and ironically (and certainly unconsciously) Orientalist. He locates societies studied by anthropologists as “outside” and “beyond” the West (“the Alien”),<sup>41</sup> centering the West and placing other societies at its periphery, a gesture that reinforces positioning the West as subject and the non-West as object lacking its own agency. Even what he confesses to be an “important gap” in his study upholds this construct: he laments the absence of analysis of the way that “Western academic occidentalisms . . . have shaped Western interpretations of non-Western societies,” with non-Western depictions of the West considered only as an “interesting” aside. Like the post-Saidian scholars discussed earlier, Carrier maintains the West as his subject and the East as object, acknowledging the East as subject only in terms of articulation of itself as object, and then only in response to its construction by the West.

The only essay in Carrier’s edited volume that reflects the paradigm I envision as having the potential to formulate an effective concept of Occidentalism (the same paradigm I employ in this present study) is Millie Creighton’s chapter, “Imaging the Other in Japanese Advertising Campaigns,” in which she outlines the uses of white Western (primarily American) Others as symbolic

images that both contest and reinforce Japanese social mores and traditional conceptions of outsiders. Creighton's essay is considered the strongest chapter in the collection by most reviewers, with one explaining that "Creighton's contribution is so good partly because it sharply focuses on the single topic of non-Westerners' occidentalism."<sup>42</sup> She traces the evolution of a complex image of the white Western Other, beginning in the Meiji era (1868–1912), when the role of Japan's primary outsider shifted from China to the West (leaving China in a liminal marginality neither inside nor outside as a result). This period, which corresponds to China's own significant confrontation with and opening to the West (as outlined in the preceding chapter of this study) brought forth a paradoxical image of the Western Other as both signifier of innovation and palpable threat:

The imaging of white foreigners in Japanese advertisements reflects the dichotomized role of *gaijin* in Japan. They tend to be either objects of glorified attention or conversely a standard of negative traits. In either case they are often stripped of individual identity and their own personalities, encountered and experienced as representative *gaijin* rather than real individuals.<sup>43</sup>

Creighton's articulation of the duality of such representation is uncannily similar to the images of Americans that emerge on the Chinese stage during the 1980s and 1990s; it also captures the uniquely dialectical nature of Occidentalism as a discourse that distinguishes it from its Saidian predecessor.

### **Discursive Strategies**

In moving from concepts of reversals of Orientalism (like al-'Azm's and Wixted's) to Occidentalism proper in the sense that I wish to employ it, something is gained and something is lost. Gained is an orientation toward the West as discursive *object*;<sup>44</sup> lost is the assurance of an inescapable direct link to Orientalism: whereas the term "Occidentalism" certainly implies a connection to Said's theory, phrases like "reverse Orientalism" guarantee it. The advantage of keeping in mind—and in frame of reference—Said's discourse is that one cannot slip into a false perception that Occidentalism is somehow independent of it: as Chen and others have pointed out, constructions of the West implicitly contain Orientalist precursors by virtue of the fact that Occidentalism is being revealed, theoretically shaped, and ultimately transformed in the present postcolonial, postmodern moment. This is true even if certain Occidentalist images "came first" chronologically. The game of "who perceived whom first?" is one to be avoided, although, as indi-

cated earlier, it is worth keeping in mind that non-Western peoples have been representing and stereotyping Others for at least as long as the reverse has been true, and for presumably similar reasons. Unduly concentrated attention on this aspect of cross-cultural perception runs the risk of reinscribing Said's overly totalizing genealogical tactics, though acknowledgement of a dialectic or tension between the actual moment of a given image's emergence vis-à-vis the moment of its discursive theorization situates Occidentalism squarely in postmodernism and illuminates its temporality—or that of any discourse for that matter—in the manner that Foucault suggests when he says, “A discursive formation, then, does not play the role of a figure that arrests time and freezes it for decades or centuries; it determines a regularity proper to temporal processes . . . it is not an atemporal form.”<sup>45</sup> The very activity of rescuing Occidental discourse from its Orientalized obscurity occurs amidst the crowded and uneven terrain of postcolonial theories (of color, of gender, of nationhood) that Said's text helped to inspire. In this sense, the business of articulating Occidentalism is anything but innocent. In evaluating its potential efficacy, consideration of personal subjectivity and interrogation of the concept of discourse are mandatory.

If we are to embrace Occidentalism as a discursive practice, we can only do so in a sense truer to Foucault's propositions than Said's discourse of Orientalism. Attempts at a tightly woven, all-encompassing, controlled formulation will lead to both the unwieldiness and the ultimate limitations of Said's admirable, yet flawed, effort. Standing in the post-Saidian moment, we have the gift of hindsight—and foresight—that allows us to avoid the discursive pitfalls of Orientalism. I propose that an operative discursive concept of Occidentalism that can be fruitfully applied to readings of cultural representations can only be determined if it is considered to be (1) paradoxical (or contradictory/dialectical) in character and function; (2) existing in both paradoxical relation to and continuous dialogue with Orientalism (and other discourses); and (3) open-ended, changing, active, and self-consciously temporal. These discursive traits—particularly an embracing of paradox—open up Occidentalism wide enough to encompass the conflicting representations, contradictory approaches, and “four-cornered” subjectivities<sup>46</sup> that are otherwise impossible to “unify” in theorizing Oriental perceptions of the Occident (here, China's view of the United States).

Our concept of paradox must be spacious enough to contain both binarist and nonbinarist elements; our sense of contradiction must be vast enough to allow for the entirely possible range of positive and negative representations of the Occidental Other; and our idea of the “Occident” must expand to the point where it transcends the category of mere “West.” These

are all difficult assignments, for difference is *not* hierarchical in the traditional binarist sense, but *layered* in the sense of an intricate—and sometimes hopelessly entangled—web of instances: that which Foucault refers to as a “discursive constellation.”

Another reminder from Foucault will further clarify this point:

Let there be no misunderstanding: it is not the objects that remain constant, nor the domain that they form; it is not even their point of emergence or their mode of characterization; but the relation between the surfaces on which they appear, on which they can be delimited, on which they can be analyzed and specified.<sup>47</sup>

In examining, and attempting to discursively interpret, representations in theatrical performance, this elucidation is particularly user-friendly; the stage and the dramatic text are inevitably shifting surfaces in the sense that a play can never be fixed, is always open to interpretation and transformation by the mere fact that the dramatic text awaits and suggests performance and no performance can ever duplicate another—thus, no dramatic representation is ever static. Michael Hays contrasts the novel to the play in terms of the bound and unbound:

It would seem that what secures the physical as well as the discursive form of the novel here is that it is bound. The play, on the other hand, as performance, is unbound, open to the dangers of revision and role playing, alternative orders and practices.<sup>48</sup>

In the chapters that follow, my attention to particularities of production contexts, changes of participants and venues, and multiple interventions at various stages of production acknowledge these shifting surfaces that lead to diverse discursive formations open to multiple interpretations.

Mahmoud Sadri, in his review of Carrier’s book, supports such a vision when he points out that, in contrast to Orientalism’s clear-cut politics, “the complexities of the motives and interests of various ethnic groups, classes, and nations in a globalized, postmodern, and postcolonial world preclude such simple associations for Occidentalism.”<sup>49</sup> Creighton, in her assessment of shifting trends in Japanese advertising, notices the same rapid internationalization in Japan that is also prevalent in contemporary China, including increased overseas travel of ordinary citizens, more frequent interracial marriages, and easier access to a rising number of local foreign residents. These interactions are the beginning of a very real process of internationalization in which the host country (be it Japan or China) walks a careful tightrope between embracing the benefits of such globalization and inter-



mittenly reasserting native traditions and expectations so as not to relinquish self-identity. Such interplay of simultaneous disintegration and reinforcement of East/West and other binaries (insider/outsider, Self/Other) is precisely the paradoxical tension the discourse of Occidentalism must include. Feminist cultural critic Angharad Valdivia, in her discussion of multiculturalism, suggests an alternative to binary logic, which she envisions as “spectrums” or “continuums,” that can more effectively contain contradictions.<sup>50</sup> Such models might be employed to complement the image of difference as “layers” suggested above.

In the articles and books cited that “answer” Orientalism, as well as in numerous works on racial and cultural perceptions and political relations between China and the United States, theoretical positions regarding the traditional East/West binary vary. While many, most prominently Lisa Lowe and Xiaomei Chen, consider deconstruction of essentialist binaries a crucial discursive priority, most (including Lowe and, especially, Chen) at times inevitably reinscribe them even as they seek to erase or at least displace them. This constant tension (classic in Said’s *Orientalism*) of explicating a construct in a precarious attempt to deconstruct it, as well as the dilemma of discarding an “us/them” way of looking at the world when there is as yet no steadfast alternative, can be the undoing of an idea like Occidentalism unless the discourse radically decides to implement it, strategically, to its advantage. In this way, Occidentalism should look very different from a mere mirror image of Orientalism as it develops, though precisely how is difficult to determine. It is, primarily, as we apply what we determine to be the useful components of Occidentalism to cultural texts and consider these gestures in relation to other discursive surfaces and adjacent practices that Occidentalism will begin to take shape. And each time it is applied, it will be transformed—this is in keeping with the third group of properties (mutability, activity, temporality, open-endedness) Occidentalism must maintain in order to be an effective frame of reference. Foucault describes this process in his conclusion to *Archaeology of Knowledge* as: “an attempt to reveal discursive practices in their complexity and density; to show that to speak is to do something; . . . to show that to add a statement to a pre-existing series of statements is to perform a complicated and costly gesture, which involves conditions, and rules; to show that a change in the order of discourse presupposes transformations in a practice, perhaps also in neighboring practices, and in their common articulation.”<sup>51</sup>

For some, the East/West binary is not only inevitable but also beneficial in assisting mutual ontological understanding of alien cultures. Eoyang subscribes to this principle (“I have chosen the broad concepts of the ‘Orient’

and the ‘Occident’ not only because they are inescapable, but because the mindset to which they allude, and the attitudes which they represent, are generally familiar”),<sup>52</sup> as do several scholars who have devoted their careers to the comparative study of Chinese and American systems of politics and philosophy. David Shambaugh’s detailed study of China’s professional “America Watchers” supports the findings of earlier scholars that there are “fundamental differences” between Chinese and American worldviews, especially regarding the concept of the individual.<sup>53</sup> Wei-ming Tu, the leading American scholar of Confucianism, stresses points of contrast and difference between the United States and China throughout his essay “Chinese Perceptions of America,” in which dichotomies of yin and yang are invoked, along with divisions along lines of the individual and collective, private and public spheres, political stability versus rupture: “even a superficial comparison . . . reveals irreconcilable and contradictory conceptual as well as experiential differences between the two.”<sup>54</sup>

The binary logic that reinforces such essentialist cultural dichotomies can be easily recognized in cross-cultural perceptions between the two peoples, which tends to be marked by a regenerative “love-hate” contrast that periodically folds into ambivalence.<sup>55</sup> This fluctuation between—and often simultaneous coexistence of—both positive and negative images is another paradox (besides the competing reinforcement and dissolution of essentializing binaries) that must be accommodated by an Occidentalist discourse. Such a discourse is inherently paradoxical, not only in relation to Orientalism and its practices, but also in relation to the object of its inquiry. Due to the both contradictory and ambivalent character of images of Americans produced by Chinese (which thus both compete with and compliment one another), Occidentalism itself becomes a “four cornered” discourse, which is neither purely negative in its embodiment of the United States nor purely positive, and yet both negative and positive.

Contemporary Chinese plays like *China Dream* (*Zhongguo meng*, 1987), *The Great Going Abroad* (*Da liuyang*, 1991), *Bird Men* (*Niaoren*, 1993), *Student Wife* (*Peidu furen*, 1995), *Dignity* (*Zunyan*, 1997), *Che Guevara* (*Qie Guewala*, 2000), and *Swing* (*Qiuqian qingren*, 2002) are clear examples of this multifaceted Occidentalism. And yet, it would be overly simplistic—and erroneous—to say that Occidentalism is thus a *neutral* discourse, for these representations of Americans through the characters presented onstage are inherently political, infused with layers of blatant stereotype and supposed objective knowledge, and are functioning with agency both within the discursive system of the play/performance and within the wider circuit of audience reception (where Occidentalism necessarily splinters exponen-

tially due to the inability to scientifically determine the phenomenological, psychological, and other types of codes it enacts on individual viewers depending on their own cultural circumstances and personal subjectivities).

To complicate things even further, Eoyang raises an intriguing issue that brings together the dialectic of East/West binary logic in Sino-American relations and the issue of contradiction within discursive practice, namely, the very concept of contradiction itself. According to Eoyang, the notion of contradiction is fundamentally different in English, where it indicates diametrically opposed entities, than in Chinese, where contradiction (*maodun*) implies paradoxical contrast and the “potential coexistence of opposites.”<sup>56</sup> To further illustrate that such dialectical thinking is linguistically rooted and inherently Chinese, Eoyang reminds us that abstractions in Chinese language are often formed from concrete compounds, such as “size” (*daxiao*) combining the words for “big” and “small.” Whether or not this syncretic approach to contradiction can be proven to be present in “Chinese” thinking or absent from Western (“English”) thought, it is a useful paradigm in the construction and application of an Occidental discourse.

Equally important is investigating and reshaping our concept of the Occident itself, acknowledging that the binaristic dichotomy between East and West that persists in much of our cross-cultural thinking is a seductive illusion despite its apparent legitimacy and practical utilitarian value in politics, academics, and other forms of intercultural contact. As Lisa Lowe points out, the very logic of an essential and autonomous Orient and Occident is Orientalist and implicitly reinforces hegemonic structures of domination and subordination. Lowe, in her reading of Foucault and others, proposes a model of discourse that is “diverse, uneven, complicated . . . multivalent, overlapping, dynamic”;<sup>57</sup> she is committed to refiguring Orientalist discourse through this radically altered lens. In attempting to conceptualize Occidentalism in the ways I have indicated here, I find Lowe’s ideas particularly promising.

Like Lowe, Wixted questions wholesale East/West distinctions, based on their hybrid homogeneity as individual entities:

The whole issue of West/non-West, East/West, and Western world/East Asia dichotomies almost invariably skirts the following important questions: What groups synchronically make up the West, now and in the past? How homogeneous is such an entity, compared with the cultural groups it is being set against? And, how has the West changed diachronically over time?<sup>58</sup>

Wixted maintains that in order to draw ultimate distinctions between the West and non-West, “one would have to be both anthropologist and cultural

historian for the entire world” and that, to his knowledge, no scholar even comes close to having such a background. Said himself, in his ruminations since *Orientalism* (1979), has continued to address the dialectic of this East/West binary, which simultaneously requires and resists disassembly. In “Orientalism Reconsidered” (1986), Said contends that East and West as essential categories exist as “facts produced by human beings” and thus belong as constructed to the realm of the social world in which their essentialism is reinforced by our subject/object approach to empirical inquiry.<sup>59</sup> By the time Said writes *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), such categories have become “gigantic caricatural essentializations” and the notion of what constitutes a “Western” nation or culture is at the center of his interrogation.<sup>60</sup>

Wixted points out the difficulties of articulating a coherent concept of “Asia” or even “East Asia” because of the marked, but often overlooked, contrasts between the cultures traditionally assigned to that geographic region. He includes an insightful discussion of Japan’s self-perception of its identity as distinct from and superior to its Asian neighbors. I would add that any binaristic approach to East and West in the contemporary world runs head-on into the dilemma of modern Japan (is it Eastern or Western?)<sup>61</sup> and a growing number of other countries as well (including Australia, which “has an economic investment in defining itself as Asian,” according to Leigh Dale and Helen Gilbert).<sup>62</sup> James Clifford, in “On Orientalism,” explores the shifting notion of the West:

When we speak today of the West, we are usually referring to a force—technological, economic, political—no longer radiating in any simple way from a discrete geographical or cultural center. This force, if it may be spoken of in the singular, is disseminated in a diversity of forms from multiple centers—now including Japan, Australia, the Soviet Union, and China—and is articulated in a variety of “microsociological” contexts . . . It is too early to say whether these processes of change will result in global cultural homogenization or in a new order or diversity. The new may always look monolithic to the old. For the moment, in any event, all dichotomizing concepts should probably be held in suspicion.<sup>63</sup>

Since placing regions and peoples on either side of the binary has become such a problematic mission, displacement of the binary seems unavoidable—and yet, as Clifford points out, the notion of “West,” at least, is still in wide circulation with potent results. It seems, then, that if we desire to salvage a discourse of Occidentalism as a counterpart to Orientalism, divorcing the concept of the “Occident” from the “West” might be a useful strategy.

Granted, associations inscribed in our notion of the Occident require revision in such an effort (as does the dismantling of existing articulations of Occidentalism such as I recommend here), but it seems to me there is a degree to which “Occident” is not as yet purely synonymous to “West,” both because it does not receive the casual usage of the latter term to which Clifford alludes, and because it connotes a constructedness in much the same way that the “Orient” has never been synonymous with “Asia.” Thus, before dismissing the possibility of constructing a discourse called “Occidentalism” because it necessarily implies either a binaristic vision of the West or an attempt to mirror the structures, claims, praxis, and pitfalls of Orientalism, let us consider the possibility that the “Occident” may be a discursive terrain that is still open to excavation and articulation, and also acknowledge that any formulation and use of an idea of Occidentalism inevitably and actively transforms Orientalism—itself a temporal, unfixed discourse—in the process, in a Foucauldian act of “dispersion.”

Even with these good intentions in mind, however, the questions of who Occidentalism claims as its subject and whom it identifies as its object remain unanswered. Xiaomei Chen’s Occidentalism, as already noted, does not focus on its Occidental Other as object of representation but merely makes use of the West and things Western in objectifying political circumstances as a response to the ruling totalitarian establishment; an important success of Chen’s use of the term, however, lies in her constitution of Occidentalism’s speaking subject. Said’s Orientalism specified the Middle East (more generally East Asia and the Indian subcontinent) as its object and Europe—and later, America—as its speaking subject, but was ultimately articulated in such a way that he came to imply that the entire Western world invariably engages in the Orientalizing of the entire Eastern world, neglecting to point out that there might be exceptions. One of the dangers of a discourse of Occidentalism is that it could reinscribe such connotations and fail to specify its agents and its acted-upon (both of whom are far too complex to be reduced to “oppressors” and “victims”). Aware of this danger, Chen consistently refers to her discourse as “Chinese Occidentalism” and attempts to locate two or three varying strains within it. Thus, Chen’s claims are open to criticism only in a Chinese context and do not pretend to be (or risk misinterpretation as being) applicable to other global (even “Oriental”) contexts. If a discourse of Occidentalism is to be employed in examining representations of Americans in Chinese spoken drama, as suggested here, adoption of Chen’s localized specification “Chinese Occidentalism” may be appropriate. Other writers employing the term “Occidentalism” also precede it with an adjective that reveals its discursive *subject*: Creighton consistently uses the term “Japa-

nese occidentalism” and Carrier “Western occidentalism” to describe the discursive strategies they respectively examine.

Likewise, identification of Occidentalism’s object would seem to be called for in such a study. Obviously, specification of the American as discursive object is logical—but how is this to be articulated? Disposing of the term “Occidentalism” in favor of something like “Americanism” would preclude widespread application of the discourse (to images of other foreigners in Chinese theatre and other cultural forms) and would imply that such representations spring solely from contact with and ideas about Americans, neglecting the origins of images of Americans that derive from other sources, experiences, histories. Dubbing our concept “Chinese-American Occidentalism” would seem an ideal gesture were it not for the fact that it is sure to be misinterpreted as an examination of attitudes either by or about Chinese Americans. Thus, in the absence of a satisfying alternative, my use of the term “Occidentalism” for the purposes of this present study should be understood as referring specifically to a practice through which China represents the American “Other.”

In examining the representation of “Others” in Chinese theatre (and possibly literature, media, film, etc., as well), it must be acknowledged that, after the American (who is by far the most prominent Other figured on the Chinese stage), the most significant “othered” personage is the Japanese. If we aim to apply strategies of Occidentalism to such images, are we to consider Japan part of the “Occident” or part of the “Orient”? Chinese scholar Wang Ning indicates the ambiguity of Japan’s position along the Orient/Occident axis when he suggests the dual nature of Japan’s own practice of Occidentalism:

[In] Japan, which apparently belongs among the developed group in its economic sense, Occidentalism has its own unique manifestation: on the one hand, Japan always views Europe and America as its economic rivals; therefore the West actually refers to the geographically Western countries. On the other hand, Japan has gradually realized its double cultural coloniality, namely, it was influenced by China before the nineteenth century and penetrated and influenced by the West after the latter part of the nineteenth century.<sup>64</sup>

Clearly, examples like Japan indicate the inadequacy of terms such as “Orient” and “Occident,” but the call to move beyond them is somewhat premature, since Occidentalism itself has clearly emerged as a recent discursive formation with a long history. That we are only now conducting deep investigations of its cultural formations does not mean they have not been previously present (the Orientalism Said identified had been rampant, yet

unidentified, for centuries). As Wang Ning reflects, “Occidentalism, like a ghost, has already been haunting such Oriental countries as the Arab countries, India, and China, which all have long cultural traditions, spreading its seeds.”<sup>65</sup>

In his essay “To Screw Foreigners is Patriotic,” Australian scholar Geremie Barmé discusses the proliferation of the concept of Orientalism in Chinese intellectual circles beginning in 1993, linking it to a wider agenda of reformulating national identity and advocating patriotism amid a climate of increased anti-Westernism and redress of cultural self-loathing through consumerism and expression of national pride in popular culture.<sup>66</sup> In other words, though Barmé does not call it Occidentalism, he identifies a discourse whose proliferation opens an intellectual space for recognition of its precursor: the fact that (a practice we would describe as) Occidentalism is identifiable by the mid-1990s as a clear strain of Chinese neo-nationalism opens a space for discussion of its discursive corollary, Orientalism. Theatrically speaking, Occidentalism is evident in the contemporary reappearance of the American Other on the Chinese stage in 1987, even though it is very different from the hostile anti-American form it took in the mid to late-1990s (which is in turn reminiscent of the negative portrayal of American characters in Chinese plays of earlier anti-American periods, such as the Korean War). Furthermore, though most scholars begin their discussions of Occidentalism as a recent discursive response to Orientalist discourse and/or as a cultural response to subjection to national shame at the hands of Western imperial powers during the Qing dynasty, clearly China’s discursive and cultural identification of a Western Other precedes these points of departure, as indicated in chapter 1.

As the latest significant contributor to the “etymology” of Occidentalism constructed in this chapter, Peter Hays Gries has recently published several compelling articles describing “China’s new Occidentalism” as a characteristic of contemporary Chinese cultural nationalism and anti-Americanism. Citing local Chinese texts (such as the *Say No* book series discussed here in chapter 7), Web-site discussions, and other sources, Gries offers a convincing portrait of Sino-American mutual misunderstanding, sensationalism, and disdain in the wake of events such as the 1999 Belgrade embassy bombing and the 2001 Hainan Island spy plane incident.<sup>67</sup> Echoing the thrust of my present study, Gries maintains that “just as the ‘West’ uses an Oriental Other to define itself, the ‘East’ deploys an Occidental Other to the same ends.”<sup>68</sup> In his assessment, China often does this by asserting (in a rather essentialist fashion) its own historical and cultural longevity and superiority, very much in the vein of our discussion in chapter 1. For Gries, the core of contem-



porary Occidentalism is the pitting of perceived “Chinese” values against “American” or “Western” values:

Chinese Occidentalism inverts Orientalism by privileging Mainland Chinese forms of knowledge as “experiential” or “intuitive.” Such Occidentalism thus simply replaces Eurocentrism with Sinocentrism. The hierarchy of power implicit within Chinese cultural nationalists’ “Cultural China” framework thus mutes the voices of “Whites” (*laowai*) and even émigré Chinese scholars . . . A widespread Chinese Occidental practice juxtaposes Western “self-interest” against Chinese “benevolence” and “kindheartedness” . . . Occidental visions of the West depict a world of cut-throat competition between selfish individuals . . . reflect[ing] the dominant normative values of the ingroup: the West prizing individual reason and the Chinese cherishing a social sensibility.<sup>69</sup>

Distilling Occidental gestures as “replication and inversion” of Orientalism (whereas I would argue that Occidentalism is far more complex than simply a “response” to Orientalism), Gries contends that the recent discursive currency of Occidentalism in Eastern nations illustrates that Said’s warning at the end of his book has “fallen on deaf ears.”<sup>70</sup>

In the end, if that warning—that “the answer to Orientalism is not Occidentalism”—is correct, I do not believe it is for the reason Said states, namely that “no former ‘Oriental’ will be comforted by the thought that having been an Oriental himself he is likely . . . to study new ‘Orientals’—or ‘Occidentals’—of his own making.”<sup>71</sup> Said is misguided on two points here: first, his statement implies that “Orientals” haven’t *already* been “Occidentalizing” others for quite some time, and second, that it is not a useful strategy for responding to Orientalism. Ironically, Said unwittingly enacts his own criticism in *Culture and Imperialism*:

To ignore or otherwise discount the overlapping experience of Westerners and Orientals, the interdependence of cultural terrains in which colonizer and colonized co-existed and battled each other through projections as well as rival geographies, narratives, and histories, is to miss what is essential about the world in the past century.<sup>72</sup>

As Homi Bhabha points out, Said, in *Orientalism*, suggests “that colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the coloniser, which is a historical and theoretical simplification.”<sup>73</sup> Lowe indicates (and the citation above shows) that Said has modified his rhetoric to increasingly account for resistance by the colonized. Clifford reminds us that the binaristic “we-they” di-



chotomy condemned by Said is useful in strategies of resistance to imperialism and political oppression,<sup>74</sup> and scholars like Chen exemplify this in their articulations of Occidentalism. Furthermore, the most recent scholarship coming from both the United States and China (such as that of Peter Gries and Wang Ning) acknowledges that Chinese Occidentalism is indeed alive and well, while the “War on Terror” since the al-Qaeda attacks on the United States of September 11, 2001, has produced a body of scholarship on Islamic Occidentalism (with definitions of it ranging from “the widespread hatred of the West”<sup>75</sup> to “lust for . . . , counterfeit affinity with, and superficial knowledge of the West”<sup>76</sup>).

Wang Ning gives the following forecast on Occidentalism in China, confirming its existence but also fearing its consequences:

Occidentalism has indeed been in the minds of many people although it has not yet become a theoretical topic. It every now and then manipulates our research on East-West cultural relations, sometimes playing a role of intensifying the East-West opposition rather than establishing communication and dialogue. Undoubtedly, in some sense it lends support to our struggle against Western cultural hegemony. It could sometimes even help to give full play to a certain national spirit and national pride to more or less contain Western hegemony. But meanwhile, we must confront the fact that . . . no one culture can replace another even if it were extremely powerful . . . any overemphasis on the superiority of a national or regional culture might well lead to new cultural oppositions or clashes. Thus, in my view, advocating Occidentalism and looking upon it as a counterpart to Orientalism is undesirable at present.<sup>77</sup>

Here, Wang is clearly responding to the uses of Occidentalism in Chinese nationalism described by Gries, including diatribes such as the *Say No* book series. In chapter 7 I examine two plays recently staged in China that echo this same hostility and cultural xenophobia, but even such Occidentalism onstage is complex and in motion, conversant with theatrical representations that preceded it and literally setting the stage for those to follow. Adapted to an art form that has been dominated by Western tradition and that risks losing its audiences to competing forms of entertainment, Occidentalism in Chinese spoken drama has been utilized in complex and extraordinary ways for social, artistic, and commercial purposes, lending texture to analysis of Occidentalism as a discourse that is not addressed by scholars like Wang and Gries.

Thus, when Clifford, echoing Said, asks, “How is an oppositional critique of Orientalism to avoid falling into ‘Occidentalism?’”<sup>78</sup> I am tempted to inquire rhetorically, “Why should it?” While acknowledging that the categorizing, stereotyping, and otherwise misrepresenting of foreigners in Chinese dramas deeply offends me at times, I am also invited to be intrigued by them, to look behind and within them to discover their oppositional strategies, empirical and cultural bases, and to look beyond them and wonder at their societal and artistic impact. Occidentalism *is* employed as an oppositional strategy to “answer” Orientalism in contemporary Chinese theatre productions (it is also employed on other levels for other reasons), as it has been throughout this century. It may adopt many of the deplorable tactics exposed by Said in his critique of Orientalism, but it also, like its counterpart, can tell us a great deal about the *subject* that employs it. And though I, as its object of representation, cannot help but resist the distorted essentialization and objectification it inevitably visits upon me, I also must acknowledge its self-defining and oppositional power as a cultural discourse in China that is as yet unmatched by possible alternative strategies. In short, as an Occidentalized Other, I can resist Occidentalism, but I cannot condemn or dismiss it.

Eoyang, borrowing from Dava Krishna, urges the importance of looking at issues “from both sides, to see how each looks when seen from the point of view of the other” and thus proposes a unique project of “orienting the West” and “occidenting the East.”<sup>79</sup> For Said to place a detour sign before Occidentalism’s construction site is to seal off competing images of the Occident fashioned by the “Orient” and prevent us from looking at things from both sides. It is to privilege Western representations and modes of discourse, flawed or unflawed, and erase and silence counter-representations and discourses. It is to perpetuate the agenda that African American scholar bell hooks reveals when she notes that postcolonial critics say a great deal about how blacks are perceived by white minds, but very little about the representation of whiteness in the black imagination. Hooks exposes racism in her students who are naïvely amazed to hear that blacks watch whites “with a critical ‘ethnographic’ gaze.”<sup>80</sup> This same kind of prejudice marks those who are surprised to hear that foreigners are represented on the Chinese stage, or who think that expatriates in China are perceived by natives only as they wish to be perceived. Looking at things from “both sides”—unearthing the discourse of Occidentalism and letting it stand alongside Orientalism in all its similarity and crucial difference—is a potentially useful way of addressing the imbalance articulated by hooks. She proposes a radical act of “reposit-

tioning” that has the power to deconstruct racist practice, and describes it using Gayatri Spivak’s words:

What we are asking for is that the hegemonic discourses, the holders of the hegemonic discourse should de-hegemonize their position and themselves learn how to occupy the subject-position of the “other.”<sup>81</sup>

Western scholarly inquiry into the components and operations of Occidental discourse is one method of beginning to perform the practice Spivak proposes. Examination of the way *we* are represented by *them*, contrary to the dangers Said anticipates, can do much to balance the scales. Such an examination applied to a representative selection of Chinese plays can offer valuable insight about how the American is perceptually figured (and what this might indicate about Chinese self-identity), and how we might construct Occidentalism as a discursive practice.

A thorough reading of these plays through the “prism” of Occidentalism—embracing the paradoxical interplay of images of China and America, interpreting the statements that point to construction of national identity vis-à-vis the West in the years preceding and directly following Deng Xiaoping’s acceleration of capitalist reform, and critically representing hegemonic Orientalist practices in order to respond with Occidental counter-practices—has the potential to offer illuminating insight and raise provocative questions.

The conversation between Orientalism and Occidentalism that Said has warned us against is potently present in these plays, and we miss much if we close our ears to it. While, admittedly, Occidentalism is not a viable “alternative” to Orientalism in the sense that Said hopes to unearth—it cannot claim immunity from reinscribing practices we now so readily recognize in Orientalism, and it does not promise to rescue us from Orientalist approaches to cross-cultural investigations and representations—it is an “answer” in the sense that it *exists* as a discourse (albeit as yet unarticulated) that stands as both interlocutor and competitor to Orientalism in all its forms. That we have failed to explore it, shed light on its operative strategies, and recognize its manifestations does not mean it has not been there all along, engaged in both armed struggle and quiet conversation with Orientalism—from some angles seeming its mirror image, from others an utterly different animal, but waiting patiently for us to discover it, consider it, and by our very consideration endlessly transform it. Occidentalism must be brought into the light, considered, and understood before alternatives to Orientalism can be suggested, because such alternatives—options that depart from the negative attributes and tendencies of Orientalism—are not truly alternative

unless they offer an alternative to Occidentalism as well. Bypassing Occidentalism entirely in search of these adumbrative alternatives to Orientalism amounts to skipping a crucial step in the discursive process, and unwittingly further advances the Orientalist agenda by silencing Other voices that have much to say—to Said, and to all of us.

## CHAPTER 3



# Immigrant Interculturalism: *China Dream*

Being an immigrant, unlike being an exile, is an evolutionary alienation, occurring over years, sometimes over a lifetime. It is a process that inevitably raises the specter of return, of the need to recover somehow the true meaning of that very real—increasingly real—place one left behind.

—Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place*

Among Said's claims in *Orientalism* is not only that native Oriental scholarship is generally ignored by Western academics but that Oriental scholars themselves “want to come and sit at the feet of American Orientalists, and later to repeat to their local audiences the clichés characteriz[ed] as Orientalist dogmas.” He concludes that “such a system of reproduction makes it inevitable that the Oriental scholar will use his American training to feel superior to his own people.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, any attempt at self-representation on the part of non-Western intellectuals is unavoidably “contaminated” by the very Western education that is employed as a tool to carve out the space that makes representation possible. This paradox is pointed out self-referentially by Xiaomei Chen in her study of Occidentalism<sup>2</sup> and is lamented as well by exiled Chinese intellectual Liu Zaifu in his discussion of the foreign “gods” that have dominated modern Chinese literary theory.<sup>3</sup>

For contemporary Chinese intellectuals such as Liu—or Sun Huizhu and Fei Chunfang, the playwrights considered in this chapter—this concern is of particular immediacy because of the privileging of Western thought (promoted by young Chinese intellectuals upon returning from studies abroad) that surged during the May Fourth Movement and was revived after the Cultural Revolution when access to the West was once again restored.<sup>4</sup> One of

the by-products of the May Fourth “Enlightenment”—as well as one of its catalysts—was Western-style drama (dubbed *huaju* or “spoken drama” by pioneer dramatists), which developed from stagings of foreign plays, such as those of Ibsen and O’Neill during the 1920s and 1930s, to more experimental native works in the 1980s and 1990s. The issue of Western “contamination” is thus virtually inherent in any attempt at self-representation through the use of spoken drama by Chinese artists; and yet modern drama, despite its relatively narrow audience (in terms of the percentage of the population-at-large that actually attends plays, the number of theatergoers in comparison to TV- and film-viewers, and the almost exclusively urban concentration of theatre patrons) has proven to be one of the most potent forms of Chinese self-expression in this century. Xiaomei Chen devotes most of her book to case studies of theatrical productions precisely because such discourse has been most efficacious in the theatre.<sup>5</sup>

If one were to make a case for use of spoken drama in China that transcends Western Orientalist domination, one would unquestionably examine the dramaturgy of Huang Zuolin (1906–1994). Huang served as executive director of the 1987 Shanghai production of *China Dream* (*Zhongguo meng*), which he codirected with Hu Xuehua and Chen Tijiang.<sup>6</sup> The Oxford-educated Huang and his wife, Dan Ni, were the first to introduce Stanislavski’s “Method” to China, upon their return from England. Huang was also responsible for importing Brecht’s dramatic theories and plays to China, through a famed six-hour lecture in 1959 at the Shanghai People’s Art Theatre and subsequent productions of both *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1959) and *Galileo* (1978). His intercultural system of theatre blends the acting style of “Uncle Stan” (as Stanislavski is often dubbed in China) with the techniques of both Bertolt Brecht and Mei Lanfang (the foremost Beijing opera actor of China, celebrated for his fresh approaches to and modernization of the classical theatre form, as well as his unsurpassed skill).

It is important to keep in mind here the debt that Brecht himself owed to Asian performance traditions, particularly Beijing opera, which he saw exhibited in Mei’s 1935 appearance on the Moscow stage, inspiring his articulation of the famous *Verfremdungseffekt*. It was Brecht’s essay “Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting” that first drew Huang’s attention to both the German playwright and, curiously, to his own native theatre traditions. Brecht’s theory of epic theatre, though misconstruing in several aspects the Beijing opera that served as an element of its construction, nevertheless was significantly influenced by Asian theatre and thus cannot be considered purely “Western” or “Occidental” in the first place. Huang’s use of Brecht’s dramaturgy, then, cannot be seen as merely self-Orientalizing in the Saidian sense.<sup>7</sup>

In the mid-1980s, Huang finally labeled his dramatic theory “*xieyi*,” a term that Chen translates as “suggestive theatre” but which is better left in its original Chinese since Huang himself adopted and rejected three different English translations and was convinced the idea has no Western linguistic equivalent.<sup>8</sup> As manifested in production, *xieyi* involves the fusion of traditional Chinese performance techniques (such as those of classical opera) with imported modern Western methods.

At age 82, Huang came closest to achieving his ideal of intercultural theatre in his direction of *China Dream* at the Shanghai People’s Art Theatre; in fact, almost all reviews and critiques of the play in the Chinese press refer to it as “an eight-scene *xieyi* play.” Sun Huizhu and Fei Chunfang, “disciples” of Huang, wrote the play with Huang’s theory of *xieyi* very much in mind; thus, incorporation of Stanislavskian realism in inner character development, Brechtian alinear structure and use of *Verfremdungseffekt*, and the stylized movement and minimalist stage aesthetic of Beijing opera were all built into the script by the playwrights and enhanced through Huang’s direction. Huang reflects in his essay “*China Dream: A Fruition of Global Interculturalism*”:

What I have been seeking is a cohesion of the Stanislavski, Brecht, and Mei Lanfang philosophies of theatrical art. *China Dream* is a concrete example of this search. It is my wish to combine Stanislavski’s introspective empathy, Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt* and Mei Lanfang’s conventionalism into one. I do not mean to say that my ideal has been fully realized in *China Dream*, but it shows the kind of theatre I have been striving towards. It is my strong conviction that the future of Chinese spoken drama should develop along this line.<sup>9</sup>

Sun and Fei, like Huang, subscribe to the idea that the best course for Chinese spoken drama is not to follow the “lead” of the Occidental theatre from which the form is borrowed, nor to endeavor to meet the West’s prescribed standards of quality or seek its approval, but rather to search for exciting and provocative intra- and intercultural approaches both thematically and performatively. While Huang’s emphasis in his productions has been on global and domestic *stylistic* borrowing, Sun and Fei also privilege *thematic* juxtaposition of cultures within their plays, even as they experiment performatively.

Their play *China Dream* consists of eight “episodal” scenes, which occur in various locations and are temporally alinear in structure. The two main characters are Mingming, a recently immigrated Chinese actress who opens a restaurant, and her American boyfriend John Hodges, a lawyer holding a PhD in Chinese philosophy. The first and eighth scenes feature them to-

gether in a U.S. canoeing club, while the second and seventh scenes take Mingming back to her past in rural China and her lost love; the four scenes in between are set in various American locales: her grandfather's home, a movie theatre, her restaurant, and a bar. The play features only two actors, one playing Mingming and the other playing all male roles, both Chinese and Caucasian (though in the English-language production, the male roles were divided between two actors).

The play is intended for a bare stage with no scenery, and only costume changes and acting technique to indicate differences in character and setting. It is in this respect that the play is most intriguing: it not only served as an experiment to subvert "realism" and manifest the theatrical vision of esteemed director and theorist Huang Zuolin, but, as I will show, it also subverts binaries of East and West by constructing unique interplay and manipulation of Orientalism and Occidentalism in telling the story of Mingming's experience (see pl. 1).

First drafted in English for a 1986 University of Wisconsin playwriting contest, the play was translated and adapted into Chinese the following year by its authors Sun Huizhu and Fei Chunfang (who use the names William H. Sun and Faye C. Fei for their scholarship and creative work in English), then recent immigrants to U.S. doctoral programs in theatre. Following a staged reading, it premiered in the United States at the Henry Street Theatre (New York), in October 1987. It was staged in China at the Shanghai People's Art Theatre in July 1987, continuing through 1989, and then toured to Beijing, several other Chinese cities, and Singapore. Upon completion of their degrees, Sun and Fei embarked on university teaching careers in the United States and continued to collaborate as playwrights (recent projects include a television miniseries based on their play *A Fight in the Dark*, and the 2002 production of their play *Swing*, the subject of chapter 8). After sharing a faculty position in the drama department at Macalester College, they repatriated to China in 1999: Fei is now a professor at East China Normal University, and Sun is a professor in the dramatic literature department of the Shanghai Theatre Academy.

Thus, *China Dream's* themes of immigration, exile, displacement, nostalgia, memory, tourism, nationalism, transnationalism, and cross-cultural misunderstandings are directly related to the playwrights' own lives. While admitting the play was prompted by their experiences and those of friends who had recently emigrated,<sup>10</sup> Sun and Fei intended that it *not* be "another play about immigrant assimilation, . . . but rather a play of global perspectives."<sup>11</sup> Regardless of their intentions, however, the play *does* address precisely these issues (of identity, assimilation, nostalgia, displacement, exile,



etc.), although it also goes far beyond them—especially in its intercultural aesthetic agenda. Patrice Pavis’s reflection is an insightful summary of Sun and Fei’s own claim:

A play like *China Dream* is not about the problems and dilemmas of minority groups living in North America, caught between the demand for integration and the maintaining of their own identity. In reality its primary themes are those of cultural misunderstandings and the enrichment of cultures through hybridization.<sup>12</sup>

Here I would add “complication” or “contestation” to Pavis’ idea of “enrichment,” because the play, far from merely celebrating or glorifying the merits of hybridization, investigates the complex cultural negotiations at stake in such endeavors.

Sun and Fei’s intercultural agenda was as much aesthetic as it was thematic:

We believed that, with the inspiration of Chinese theatrical tradition, we could offer a different type of episodic drama that flows more easily and elegantly around the stage/world . . . these ideas developed along with our search for a dramatic theme reflecting our experience and musings about the Chinese and American cultures, a new thematic interest on which we began focusing after we crossed the Pacific in 1984 and 1985.<sup>13</sup>

Among the “ideas” Sun and Fei intended to privilege (aside from cross-cultural perception rather than merely the immigration/assimilation dilemma) was the true integration of spoken drama (*huaju*) and “sung drama” (*xiqu*, more commonly referred to as classical Chinese opera) rather than mere borrowing between the forms, which is the usual case in such intra/intercultural experimentation. In their words: “we wanted to make the two types of theatre work together, rather than back to back.”<sup>14</sup>

Their ideal vision of integration imagined for *China Dream* was never fully achieved in production; in terms of staging and interpretation, Sun and Fei have expressed some degree of disappointment in all versions they witnessed or heard about. In New York the directors could not “rid themselves of their inherited ‘realist’ tendencies,” adding cubes and walk-on actors to the *mise-en-scène*; this, and the lead actress’s interpretation of her character, “made the play look like another immigrant story in the mixed style of exoticism and selective realism.” In the Tokyo production (of which they learned only after the fact) each character was portrayed by a different actor. They prefer the Shanghai directors’ approach (it was this Shanghai version that

toured to Singapore, Beijing, and other cities), although they regret the choice of a large proscenium theatre and the addition of elaborate technology such as colored lights and lasers. They conclude that “no ideal model of (the) seamless integration we conceived was ever attained.”<sup>15</sup>

Significantly, the criteria the playwrights use to evaluate the extent of aesthetic synthesis achieved (and the degree to which the intercultural textual framework is thereby enhanced or undermined) pertain to elements such as set, movement, and casting choices—all *visual* codes. It is precisely the non-textual elements of Sun and Fei’s play—those that continue to draw us to the visual and the performative—that coaxed Huang toward it as the ultimate incarnation of his *xieyi* vision of theatre. It is through the stripping away of all conventional naturalistic spatial and temporal cues (from plot structure to set design) that Sun and Fei open up the complex fluidity that allows us to move with ease from past to future, reality to imagination, land to water, and East to West. It is in emptying the *mise-en-scène* of all the trappings of Western “realism” they witnessed in American theatre after they emigrated that the playwrights fill the play with potential. Their ideal of a truly bare stage (though never fully realized in production) is a literal erasure of East and West, and becomes a “blank” canvas on which they subsequently impose a richly textured array of binary-blasting cultural signifiers.

In creating a dramatic world that is intercultural in every aspect—theatrically, thematically, psychologically, linguistically—Sun and Fei exhibit for the reader/spectator the impossibility of an overly simplistic Orient-Occident opposition because of the simultaneous and often indistinguishable layering of Eastern and Western influences that constitutes a given Self positioned in the contemporary relationship between China and the United States, while at the same time acknowledging that, as human beings situated in the context of this relationship (and I would add here that any reader/spectator who encounters this text thus enters into the rubric of U.S.-China relations on a personal level), we cannot fully escape the constructions of Orient and Occident (East and West, China and America) that history (be it Asia- or Eurocentric) has constructed for us. We cannot ultimately define the specific cultural “otherness” of the characters in *China Dream* any more than we can distinguish the ratio of European and Asian influences in Brecht’s dramaturgy; and yet neither can we claim to have erased the binary of Orient and Occident any more than Huang—in his attempt to fuse disparate aesthetics of theatre—has reconciled Stanislavski’s interior “Method” to Brecht’s condemnation of it.

In taking this position, I am working at once with and against strategies adopted by Xiaomei Chen and Lisa Lowe, both of whom demand an alter-

native to Said's insistence on an East-West opposition. I find Lowe's essentializing conclusion somewhat problematic:

Binary constructions of difference—whether Occident and Orient, male and female, or a static concept of dominant and emergent—embody a logic that gives priority to the first term of the dyad while subordinating the second.<sup>16</sup>

After all, one is just as likely to say “Orient and Occident” without any intention of reversing the implied hierarchy. I do, however, support her claim that “logics of domination and subordination are embedded within binary conceptions of difference.” Unlike Lowe (and Chen), however, I see a glaring absence in comparative scholarship of analysis of ways in which “logic of domination” fed by “binary conceptions of difference” has been turned *against* the Occident *by* the Orient, either in response to imperialistic domination or in the context of some other (alternative, perhaps even previous) historico-politico-cultural circumstance. Rather than discard this binary altogether for fear of becoming limited to it, we need to fully explore its duality even as we attempt to transcend it. Thus, we must take the risks Lowe considers unduly dangerous, particularly in order to evaluate the friction of Orientalism and Occidentalism present in a play like *China Dream*.

As indicated in the preceding chapter, it is precisely these dangers Chen should have explored at some point in her study of Occidentalism. Although she admittedly wishes to concentrate on its deployment as both an official and anti-official discourse rather than its ideological constitution, thus “reject[ing] binarist and universalist arguments grounded in an Orient constructed either by the East or the West,” she also claims to be presenting a “study of a Chinese *Occidentalism* which focuses on the role of the intellectuals in producing a counter-discourse *about an imagined and imaginary West*”<sup>17</sup> without offering cogent evidence of what form that imagined West actually takes. Her description of “Occidental Theater” addresses how plays by Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Brecht were staged in China and succeeded by virtue of their universal appeal (a basis on which they remain popular in any country) and their potential as political allegories; her definition of “Occidentalism” is thus reduced to a nearly neutral adjective “foreign” or “Western,” pertaining strictly to *influence* rather than being inclusive of examination of the actual manner in which the West is represented through these theatrical productions (or their very selection for stagings) or consideration of a more complex allegorical possibility than that of the West representing anti-official sentiment.

In concluding her chapter on Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Brecht, Chen points out rather dramatically, “The Chinese actors and actresses assume Occidental voices, wearing Occidental costumes, while speaking, all the time, for the political interests of the Oriental Self.”<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, she explores this no further than to assert that such a gesture is not merely an instance of culturally imperialistic self-colonizing but rather an “intricate event” that brings together East and West while privileging neither.

*China Dream* is engaged in just this sort of equalizing “intricacy,” but Sun and Fei, unlike Chen, confront the thematic interplay between Orientalism and Occidentalism head-on. Even so, they uphold Lisa Lowe’s contention (with which I heartily agree) that notions like the Occident and Orient are not fixed, but that they acquire different meanings over time and through context (which is “plural, unfixd, unrepresentable”) and in so doing present an Orientalism (as well as Occidentalism) that, in Lowe’s words, “may well be an apparatus through which a variety of concerns with difference is figured.”<sup>19</sup>

What emerges through the play *China Dream* is a field of shifting tensions: degrees of Orientalism and Occidentalism that are played out differently in accordance with varying identities, contexts, historical incidences, and desires that ultimately reveal “othering” of a kind that acknowledges the existence (and juxtaposition, interconnectedness) of East and West, but privileges neither East nor West by privileging *both*. In this sense, the play creates and explores a space for subjectivity much like Homi Bhabha’s “interstice”: “This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.”<sup>20</sup>

In further investigating concepts of the “beyond” contingent to this interstitial site of subjectivity, Bhabha fashions a sense of displacement focused on the recognition of what he calls “the unhomely moment.” Una Chaudhuri’s construction of geopathology is nearly synonymous to Bhabha’s articulation of “unhomeliness,” which he defines as “the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world . . . that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations.”<sup>21</sup>

In *China Dream’s* Mingming, we see a combination of the immigrant and the exile—a conflation, perhaps, of the fictional émigré protagonist herself with the playwrights (who would eventually resettle in their homeland, in 1999, converting their immigration to exile). Mingming displays the geopathic symptoms of *both* immigration—described by Una Chaudhuri in the epigraph to this chapter as an evolutionary process of alienation marked by

nostalgia for one's origins—and exile, which, according to Jean Sgard, is an actual negotiation of dual realities and subjectivities rather than their gradual, eventual, and inevitable separation:

The experience of exile is dynamic and contradictory: it entertains a coming and going between here and elsewhere, the past and the future, nostalgia and hope, exclusion and inclusion, self and others.<sup>22</sup>

In this sense Mingming succeeds in simultaneously inhabiting two cultural contexts, a possibility Chaudhuri emphasizes is invited by plays that employ bilingualism in their explorations of immigration. According to Chaudhuri's articulation of geopathology, "the conjunction of language and place . . . is a major thematic of the anxiety of immigration."<sup>23</sup> This returns us to one of the key intercultural elements of *China Dream*: its consistent use of linguistic hybridization in both versions of the script. The interplay of English and Chinese deployed by the two main characters serves to articulate this linkage of location to language while also linguistically manifesting the play's central theme: the sheer impossibility of fixing identity, particularly in binaristic terms of East and West. This theme reflects a certain irony, of course, when one considers Sun and Fei's initial intention in creating the piece—to explore "the significance of East-meets-West . . . how some Americans/Westerners see Chinese/Eastern culture, and how some Chinese see the West"<sup>24</sup>—a goal that becomes ultimately unattainable as the play successfully exposes the artificiality of constructed perceptions of East and West. Significantly, language plays a central role in dissolving such binaries.<sup>25</sup>

As we know, the play tells the story of Mingming, who, sometime after the Cultural Revolution (when she was assigned to rafting on a river and met a native of the area named Zhiqiang) emigrates to America from China, opens a restaurant, and meets John Hodges. This is as much as can be said if one wishes to remain limited to a "factual" plot summary. As will soon become apparent, any attempt to attach descriptive terms to characters and cultural phenomena in the play—such as defining Mingming or her restaurant as "Chinese" or John as "Western" or even "American"—becomes extremely problematic. When the character John introduces himself at the beginning of the prologue, he says, "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to our play. I'm John Hodges. My Chinese name is Hao Zhiqiang, not a bad name, huh?" (This is my translation of the first few lines of the Chinese version of the play. The underlining of words, phrases, or lines in my translations indicate that they appear in English in the original script.) In these few words, he immediately sets up the type of paradox that persists throughout the play:

not only is he, the *actor*, both John Hodges and Zhiqiang (in the English version simply Qiang), but he, *John*, actually embodies both men (notice that it is not the *actor* who introduces himself and says, “I *play* both John Hodges and Hao Zhiqiang,” but rather the *character* John who speaks and claims the dual identity). The rather implausible truth of his statement is borne out in the play as John is gradually revealed to be more “Chinese” than Mingming and in the final scene prophetically offers information that only Zhiqiang could possibly know.

The play’s English and Chinese scripts differ significantly. The Chinese production featured only two actors, Xi Meijuan and Zhou Yemang; Xi played Mingming and Zhou played all other roles (these included Mingming’s grandfather, the raftsmen Zhiqiang, and the Caucasian roles of John, another potential suitor, and a reporter). For the New York production, an Asian actor was added to play Zhiqiang, the grandfather, and two new characters, a chef and a bartender; according to Sun and Fei, this was because “most Americans were not ready to accept John, a Caucasian, playing all five of the male supporting characters, including two Chinese ones.”<sup>26</sup> The playwrights did not, however, doubt Chinese audiences’ willingness to accept representation of Caucasian foreigners embodied by a Chinese actor. Because of these casting differences in the two versions of the play, conflation of John and Zhiqiang was absent for the New York audience, resulting in reinforcement of a racial binary that was skillfully subverted in the China and Singapore productions. This fundamental alteration in production value and performance technique undoubtedly affected the audience’s reception of the play. My analysis in this chapter draws on both the Chinese and English translations and productions, keeping in mind that, despite their differences, most of the issues of identity and “othering” remain equally present and potent in both versions of the play.

As we have seen, the actor playing John addresses the audience directly in the prologue; he proceeds to solicit applause for Mingming and informs the spectators that he will request a final assessment of her acting ability at the play’s end, at once complicating and enhancing a central conflict in the play—Mingming’s forsaking her acting career to open a restaurant.

As John initially addresses the audience, Mingming cries out from offstage, “John, what are you talking about out there? [I’m not ready yet],” but her first utterance *onstage* is “Hi, good evening. In fact, I have a quarter American blood. My grandmother was American,” to which John responds, “That’s right. But she looks Chinese, and she’s spent most of her life in China.”<sup>27</sup> Immediately a verbal and visual incongruity has been established that will echo in scenes to come: Mingming *looks* Chinese (the actress play-

ing her *is* Chinese) but at various points in the play and to various other characters she becomes “American” based on both ethnicity and life experience, and to Mingming herself she is *both* Chinese and American and *neither* Chinese nor American, depending on how she is being received by those with whom she is interacting.

In this identity crisis Mingming experiences throughout the play, we see the unique “Asian American” position of the displaced-foreigner-in-America/returned-immigrant-to-China that is less explored in studies of Asian Americans than permanent immigrants/refugees or second- and third-generation offspring. Also reflected, even if unintentionally, is Sun and Fei’s own attempt to position themselves as relocated Chinese citizens: like Mingming, they articulate themselves bilingually both within and between the English and Chinese texts and exhibit, particularly through the two “River Rafting” scenes, a nostalgia for their homeland that is at odds with their desire for China’s modernization and economic prosperity.

In this regard, both Mingming and Sun/Fei fulfill the six criteria of diasporic individuals belonging to “expatriate minority communities” defined by William Safran. Along with being (or descending from) one who has dispersed from a “center” to a “peripheral” region, these criteria are:

- retention of collective memory, vision, or myth of one’s original homeland;
- feelings of alienation or lack of total acceptance in the host country;
- idealization of one’s ancestral home and desire to return if conditions are appropriate;
- a feeling of obligation toward maintenance and/or restoration of one’s homeland;
- a consciousness defined by a continued relationship to one’s homeland.<sup>28</sup>

In the first “River Rafting” scene (the second scene of the play, set during the Cultural Revolution, when millions of Chinese urban youth were “sent down” to the countryside to do hard labor and learn from the peasants), Mingming reveals to the rafter Zhiqiang (Qiang) the fact that she is an “American devil” (*meiguo guizi*). As in the prologue, this revelation is purely linguistic (she *tells* him she is from America, upon which he attempts to flee), but this time it effects a *visual* result:

*(He stares her up and down.)*

MINGMING: Do I look American now?

QIANG: I’ve no idea. You *are* different from the girls in our mountains. But

I've never seen any real Americans. How different are they from us Chinese? Have you seen your grandmother? Was she also . . . so beautiful?  
(16/8)<sup>29</sup>

This physical change occurs in Zhiqiang's eyes, but we must extend our inquiry beyond the textual level to theatrical performance in order to explore the effect these words could have visually: might the actress accompany her question with a physical change that prompts Qiang's response and a similar reaction in the audience?

Zhiqiang questions Mingming further, asking, "Is it because you're this 'American devil,' they forced you to raft here?" but Mingming defers the question, saying, "Never mind . . . I was a volunteer" (in Chinese, "No, I volunteered"). Later, she exclaims, "An 'American devil,' it serves me right to do the hardest labor; it serves me right to atone for my parents' and grandparents' crimes for being Americans!" (17/9: in the Chinese version, this is preceded by, "Could they let an 'American devil' sing revolutionary model opera?"). Her statement is dubious in light of the other information she has provided between his asking the question and her providing an answer for it: we have learned that both of her parents were top scientists and that she herself was enrolled in an opera school, either of which could have as easily been criteria for her being "sent down" to do hard labor.

In her first acting audition just after arriving in the United States, Mingming both visually (by donning a Western dress, according to stage directions) and verbally reveals her "quarter-American blood" in order to assimilate and earn the role, only to be told by Mark (who is from Hong Kong) that she shouldn't have told: "You're far from being an American, aren't you? Who would want a quarter 'American actress'? Just say you're Chinese! Once you reveal your quarter-American blood, you're no longer an authentic Chinese, either!" (26/14). He continues by telling her that her acting is "too Americanized" and that she needs to "behave more Chinese!" When she adopts a stylized Beijing opera stride he applauds her "Chineseness" (27/14). This scene reaches a powerful climax (as does her identity crisis) when Mark proceeds to take her to a movie, her first American date. Unfortunately, his choice of films leaves much to be desired: leading her into the theatre halfway through a showing of *Greystoke*, he explains, "Tarzan is found and brought back from the jungle to his grandfather . . ." inadvertently offering to Mingming a glaring metaphor for her own situation. She, like Tarzan, has been "rescued" from China and brought to her exiled grandfather, feels awkward in his mansion and before his guests, and is embarrassed by her inadequate English. Most significantly, just as Tarzan jumps onto the table, mim-



icking animal sounds and movements, Mingming imitates exotic gestures and movements of Beijing opera to the delight of her hosts and embarrassment of herself.

In this scene, the playwrights are exposing Orientalist fetishizing of Chinese culture on the part of the West and the self-Orientalizing tendency of China, while at the same time presenting the erroneous American perception of China as a “jungle” from which unfortunate citizens need to be “rescued” and a critique of the Chinese as being complicit in this misperception because of their ignorance. Mingming’s awakening is so traumatic that she thereafter relinquishes any desire to continue her career as an actress for fear of seeming like a gorilla coming out of the jungle. Furthermore, Sun and Fei’s choice of metaphor extends to American society’s view and treatment of immigrants in general—particularly recent refugees who are neither familiar with social customs nor competent in English—and the assumption that such people are “blind” and “deaf” to the prejudice all around them.

When the enraged Mingming walks out on Mark at the end of the scene, he naïvely asks her, “Do you know where your home is?” to which she responds (oversensitively, according to the stage directions) by merely repeating the question. When he asks if she knows how far it is, she replies, “I don’t care. I’ve lived in the jungle, too. I can walk, no matter how far,” indicating possibly that she’ll walk all the way to China if she has to. Then she utters repeatedly, “I don’t know where my home is. I don’t know where I’m going.”

As a result of Mingming’s feelings of alienation and longing for a home, she makes a dream journey back to the China of her memory and must come to terms with the tension between her nostalgic vision of the China she left behind and the reality of a modernizing, rapidly changing post-Mao society. Zhiqiang, who drowned on the river, before her eyes, one day long ago, has been resurrected in her dream, and it is he who articulates the speech acts of China’s national consciousness as Sun and Fei perceive it. “The river that has claimed me and hundreds of others is going to be sent to heaven today,” Zhiqiang informs the returned Mingming, indicating that it is time to heal the wounds of the Cultural Revolution, or in Mingming’s case, let go of her warped romantic longing for those days. When she expresses her desire to preserve the environment of her memory, he retorts, “Preserve the unpredictable rivers which [*sic*] have devoured our lives for centuries, which [*sic*] would keep us backward forever? Oh, you are a foreigner now. You came for exotic sightseeing? But sights cannot feed our stomachs, can they?” (61/31).<sup>30</sup>

In this scene, the playwrights present something far more complex than mere Orientalizing the Other or even self-Orientalizing. They are also Occi-

dentalizing, even self-Occidentalizing (since Mingming is thrust fully into the role of “foreigner” as economic investor and potential controller of Westernization, as exhibited by her efforts to strip Zhiqiang of his Western jacket in order to make him appear more “native” to foreign tourists). Ultimately—and more importantly—they are tangling the Orientalist and Occidentalist tendencies almost beyond distinction. Could Mingming’s efforts to persuade Zhiqiang to doff his Western jacket also be seen as her attempt to convince him not to sell out to a superficial modernization but rather to be his true self and modernize from within?

Similarly, what are Sun and Fei saying about tourism? Is it a despicable industry that caters to and reinforces the fetishes and romantic myths of foreign dominators, or is it a practical solution to a pressing problem—the need for foreign currency? Zhiqiang orders Mingming to leave, shouting, “Send us dollars, no lectures. We’ll pay you back, with interest” (65/34). This statement (which in performance was hurled at Mingming with the coldness of a pimp addressing his prostitute) offends her, and potentially offends a non-Chinese audience—or does it shame that same audience into recognizing its own practice of throwing U.S. dollars at any problem as a salve for a guilty conscience? Further analysis of this scene uncovers many more instances of such dialectical messages crisscrossing both surface and deeper allegorical meanings of the text.

The play is breaking *through*, not breaking *down*, binaries of difference in order to explore the friction between them. Said’s warning bears repeating here:

The answer to Orientalism is not Occidentalism. No former “Oriental” will be comforted by the thought that having been an Oriental himself he is likely—too likely—to study new “Orientals”—or “Occidentals”—of his own making.<sup>31</sup>

I am not convinced this is either true or reassuring to Orientalized individuals and communities seeking space for self-expression, though it is certainly reassuring to Orientalists who are beginning to fear having their own discourse of power turned against them.

Rather than avoiding Occidentalism as a counter-discourse to Orientalism as Said advocates (and Chen inadvertently executes in her study), Sun and Fei confront it with intensity, invoking it as a weapon against persistent Orientalist constructions of China and the Chinese, while at the same time contesting it as a gesture of retaliation by exposing the essentializing Orientalist logic behind it. Oftentimes, this is handled through humor in the play, with incorporation of interlingual slippages and puns that cause the compet-

itive Orientalist-Occidental exchange to break down, only to be regenerated in the next verbal or visual beat. The following dialogue between John and Mingming in the first scene is one of many examples in the play:

JOHN: Mingming, you're very competitive for a Chinese girl.

MINGMING: Why do you say that?

JOHN: Well, Chinese women are supposed to be very gentle, humble, and obedient, at least not so fond of competition.

MINGMING: Is this why you invited a Chinese woman here to spend the weekend with you?

JOHN: As if I hadn't known how atypical you are as a Chinese woman!

Maybe that's just what attracted me—an atypical . . .

MINGMING: "Typical" or "atypical," as if you were a China expert. I wonder how much you really know about China. Have you been there?

JOHN: Not really. But I have been interested in sinology ever since college.

MINGMING: "Si . . . college?" Why should psychology people go to China? Is the Chinese mind more complicated?

JOHN: Maybe it is. But what I said was not "psychology." It's sinology . . .

(5)<sup>32</sup>

Directly following this exchange, John and Mingming make a pact not to say "China." This is an interesting phenomenon: the deliberate (and competitive) deferral of a single utterance loaded with signifying meaning. John's uttering the word "China" would reveal that he sees Mingming for her outer Chinese otherness rather than her inner self; Mingming's uttering the same word would signify that she is not really "American." It is she who nearly falters twice (and immediately asks herself, "Why do I keep going back to that?" followed by a long silence), but it is John who finally says "Chinese" in identifying Zhuang Zi as his "favorite Chinese sage," shocked that Mingming has never heard of him.

It is in this ironic twist, which is sketched *verbally* at the beginning of the play and receives its full embodiment *visually* at the end—when John dons Daoist garb and claims he is an emissary sent by Dao—that the play becomes most bizarre (and perhaps least credible), but also most intriguing. The idea of a Sinicized Westerner or a Westernized Chinese is not a new one: but how seriously are we supposed to take this exchange of identity as it occurs in *China Dream*? Is the presence of an American John Hodges in Daoist robes spouting philistine Daoist prophecy entirely comical? Or does Mingming's inability to counter it with a "genuine" representation (or at the very least to recognize its inaccuracy) make it less funny—while the seriousness and commitment of John's intent makes it more cogent?

And what of Mingming's sudden declaration of love for John? Do we believe it? Does John believe it? Does Mingming even mean it? How does it compare with the nonverbal, utterly performative expression of love between Mingming and Zhiqiang in scene 2? Huang Zuolin describes how the actors in that earlier scene embodied the unspoken declaration:

After a storm, the couple has drifted to a deserted river bank. When the boy wakes and finds the girl asleep by his side, soaking wet, he takes off his white belt to cover her, and finds some branches to make a fire to keep her warm. Step by step we see the two falling in love. But how to express the passion of a mountain boy? . . . first, the boy runs his index finger from Mingming's nose to her heart and then Mingming does likewise to Zhiqiang, so that they are intimately intertwined . . . The index finger runs from the nose to the heart. When a Westerner shows a sign of affection, he usually puts his hand on his heart, saying, "I thank you from the bottom of my heart." But why, in this case, does the actor point to the nose? . . . when a Chinese person speaks of himself he usually points to his own nose. Each time he refers to himself he does so.<sup>33</sup>

This is an ideal theatrical instance of a conventional act performed in a nonverbal way. What makes it so interesting for us is that it is performed in an entirely nonconventional way in terms of an Occidental aesthetic, but an entirely conventional way in a Chinese context (see pl. 2).

In terms of audience reception to the play, cultural context was the basis for significant contrasts. Both coplaywright Sun Huizhu and codirector Hu Xuehua pointed out vast differences in the way the play was both conceived by directors and received by audiences. Hu traveled to New York City (from Buffalo, New York, where he was then doing graduate work) and later reflected on his experience in the Chinese press. He found the most significant difference to be the American emphasis on text versus the Chinese focus on physical movement and expression (in his Shanghai rehearsals with the actors, Hu had employed the Austrian stylized movement technique of "eukinetics," which Huang had studied at Oxford in the 1930s but had never before utilized in his directing). As a result, according to Hu, the U.S. production privileged the fate of the characters over their psychology and emotions, an emphasis on content over form.<sup>34</sup>

Sun contended that the disparity in audience reception was more a reaction to content: that Americans understood and accepted the contradictions in John's character and focused on the themes of universality in the play (that all individuals are caught between money and art, reality and idealism, etc.), whereas Chinese audiences regarded John's conflict as trivial and were far

more interested in Mingming's hardships.<sup>35</sup> This is a logical bifurcation of subjectivity and identification that would occur in the kind of "realism" Sun was specifically avoiding, and if the characters were clearly unicultural, which they are not. The Brechtian distancing that the play triggers—whether from stripping away conventional signifiers such as scenery and one-to-one actor/character representation or from appropriation of Chinese opera and/or eukinetics stylization in movement—should prevent the kind of Aristotelian identification hinted at here, as should the complex layering of cultural influences that marks both Mingming and John. Apparently, despite the intentions of both the playwrights and the directors, some audience members persisted in equating ethnicity with national origin and felt an impulse to identify with the characters representing their own geopolitical orientation.

This kind of us-and-them duality marked many of the speeches given at the official symposium (*zuotan hui*) organized in conjunction with the production in Shanghai, for which a variety of local theatre critics, scholars, practitioners, and educators gathered. Many who spoke indicated discomfort with the handling of culture clash in the play. Some stressed that they had never been to America and could only imagine it from books and lectures, and thus the playwrights should have given more vivid representations of the United States and its culture to "deepen" the play. One renowned director offered that this was probably because the playwrights themselves seemed a bit "hazy" about this aspect of the play, and he questioned why Mingming did not return to China when she became so unhappy. This latter question is one that director Huang had anticipated and had attempted to defer by including in his program notes an invitation to the spectators to think about and answer this question for themselves. Huang saw beyond the surface issues in a way that many audience members could not, despite the style of the play.<sup>36</sup> None of the critics seemed to realize an important premise of the play: that both the United States of Mingming's experience and the China of her memory are constructions fueled by imagination and nostalgia, rather than concrete referents to be interpreted realistically.

The only scholar at the symposium who grasped this depth was Chen Gongming, then president of the Shanghai Theatre Academy, who also raised the issue of representation of culture clash, asking a very different question: why do Mingming and John necessarily stand in for each of their entire cultures, rather than representing two young people influenced by their *specific* respective environments? He also asserted that the play could be a comedy, that its content was vast enough to leave plenty of room for various audience responses.<sup>37</sup> Huang pointed out that, according to Sun, the play *was* a comedy in the United States—that the audience at the staged reading had

laughed at virtually every line—whereas in China no one laughed throughout the entire first scene.

Curiously, it was Singapore audiences that responded most strongly to the play. Ironically, their options of identifying with either John or Mingming, or any other character, were undoubtedly informed by their exclusion from claiming either Chinese or American identity. Still, the reactions of the Singapore audience were so strong that Xi Meijuan and Zhou Yemang (the two actors) wrote about it for a popular Shanghai cultural newspaper, emphasizing that Singapore spectators had related to the play in ways that local audiences had failed to, particularly in the opening sequence between John and Mingming: the Singapore performance of the Chinese version was the first one in which the humor in that scene was successful. Xi and Zhou felt immense energy channeled to them from the audience and heard amazing testimonies afterwards from patrons who had cried, personally related, or even attended every performance and waited for them after each show. Many were stunned that mainland theatre had reached such a level of excellence, and the impression this left on Xi and Zhou was that “Chinese spoken drama could penetrate the world, that real art has no national boundaries.”<sup>38</sup>

Not all Singaporeans who attended the play at the Victoria Theatre in August 1988 shared the same opinion. Reviewer Goh Beng Choo opines that it was audience members who could not understand Mandarin that had the best experience because, though the play was stunning visually, the content was subpar. His criticisms include that the seriousness of the play “really spoils the fun” and that it tries to cover too many issues, becoming tedious in the final arguments between Mingming and John, and ultimately offering characters that are “superficial” and experiences that are implausible. He refers to Mingming as borderline schizophrenic in her alternating praise and rejection of American culture, and concludes that “the ending is ludicrous.”<sup>39</sup>

Once again, whether we accept the ending of *China Dream*—or even “like” the play as a “story” (which we could easily resist considering its deliberately nonnarrative structure)—it is praiseworthy for its ambition on so many fronts. Ultimately, Sun and Fei have made a truly intercultural effort on numerous levels, an effort attempted by few dramatists before or since. Scripted in two languages, each of which employs the other, the text itself is linguistically intercultural; performed using several Eastern and Western theatrical techniques (and written to promote such fusion), the play is aesthetically intercultural; additional intercultural production elements included costumes, makeup, and music.

Most impressive of all is the multivalence of thematic interculturalism in the piece. Beginning with Mingming’s mixed blood (echoing through her

“Chinese” restaurant that serves “French Fries” alongside “Spicy General’s Chicken”)—and culminating in her decision as a Chinese woman (though her identity is never that fixed) to remain the Western trope of a profitable entrepreneur in the capitalist marketplace in order to support an American man with a Daoist “Butterfly Dream”—the abundance of the play’s possible meanings leap out from both speech and staging and collide in the consciousness of the spectator, falling into a configuration, an ultimate assessment, that is different for each individual based not only on whether (s)he be Oriental or Occidental, but on his or her personal human experience. Binaries of difference are alternately manipulated, exposed, and deconstructed—perhaps even reconstructed along axes that previously did not exist as such.

In creating such a piece of theatrical dramatic literature—unconventional, vulnerable to various criticism, but open to endless possibilities—Sun and Fei have initiated a dialogue between the Chinese and the American stages, and their respective peoples as well. They have done this physically and artistically (by having their play produced in both Shanghai and her sister city New York), and also intellectually and philosophically, raising questions that will take many years, many books, many theatre productions on both sides of the globe to answer. In their own words:

[A]n intercultural play in both style and subject-matter, intended to speak to peoples of different cultures, may hardly speak the same thing to all of them . . . [W]e envision [such plays] as an artistic genre not only to reflect but to promote intercultural dialogue . . . [The] different productions of *China Dream* themselves make up a very interesting intercultural dialogue which was our precise goal in the first place.<sup>40</sup>

Paul Kroll, in his satirical address to the American Oriental Society in 1992 on the topic of “Self and Other”—a concept for which he reserves considerable disdain—invokes John Hodges’ favorite sage, Zhuang Zi, to support his contention that “virtually anything can somehow be interpreted as a study of Self and Other”:

There is no thing that is not “other”; there is no thing that is not “this.” Regard yourself as “other,” and you don’t see it; know of yourself, and you’re aware of it. Hence “other” and “this” are born in parallel . . . Where neither “other” nor “this” finds its opposite partner—*that* we refer to as “the axis of the Tao.” When this axis finds itself centered in a ring, it thereby responds without limits. What is “so,” in its wholeness, is inexhaustible, as likewise what is “not so,” in its wholeness, is without limits.

According to Kroll, “‘Self and Other’ seems nothing more than a calling of familiar things by a new label.”<sup>41</sup> He misses the very point that not all “things” were previously—or even are now—all that familiar, and that many of them were certainly not being “called” anything in the past. When he says that Zhuang Zi has the first and last word on Self and Other, I believe he is correct, but I think he needs to carefully reexamine the Zhuang Zi passage cited in his own address—and recognize that the sage’s paradox by no means waters down the concept of Self and Other, but rather urges us to realize in it both the inevitable binary and the richer cyclical, perhaps infinite, possibilities it offers.

Sun and Fei, through their characters of Mingming, Zhiqiang, and John Hodges, present to the spectator a web of Self and Other that comes ironically close to “the axis of the Tao” cited by Kroll, “where neither ‘other’ nor ‘this’ finds its opposite partner” by exploring both the direct tension, repeated layering, and ultimate blurring of the Orient and Occident that mark both contemporary Chinese and Chinese American experience. Following in the footsteps of the sage whose philosophy they employ as the central metaphor in *China Dream*, the playwrights challenge us to find new ways of measuring Orientalism, representation, and spoken drama itself.

In her discussion of the play in a recent article exploring reflections of foreign relations with the West in Chinese drama (primarily from 1949–1976), playwright Fei summarized *China Dream*’s articulation of the American Other with these words:

In this play there is no American devil but an entirely strange culture where the Chinese can find people friendly and endearing as well as bizarre and suspicious. From devil to stranger is a great progression because it indicates that the Chinese and Westerners can deal with each other peacefully and try to understand each other’s culture. But the cultural Other embraces a wide spectrum of images and meanings from congenial to distrustful. *China Dream* may be a bit too optimistic in its outlook on Sino-Western relations. By comparison, [later] Chinese plays concerning Westerners have shown more of the distrustful side.<sup>42</sup>

As articulated in her comments, *China Dream* reflects the optimism of the mid to late-1980s, when relations with the United States were economically and politically strong and overseas travel had been renewed with full force. Sun and Fei’s education, employment, and extended residence in America during these years are emblematic of the opportunities for (and immigration tendencies of) Chinese citizens in the United States throughout this period.

In 1998, after fifteen years in the United States during which he earned a



doctorate and became a university professor, Sun returned to China as a visiting scholar; the following year, he and his wife relocated their family permanently to Shanghai. Their decision was based on artistic and academic choices, but was also largely influenced by the increasing anti-China bias of American politics, media, and popular culture. By moving back to China, their two sons, American by birth, could be shielded from this prejudice and also benefit from both American and Chinese education systems and bond with their relatives.

Such repatriation is complex and potentially problematic: since the Sino-American political climate remains hostile, shelter from one side of the bias results in increased exposure to the other. Sun and Fei's decision can be read as part of the current wave of Chinese neo-nationalism, and their young children are as much at risk of exposure to distorted negative depictions of *their* "homeland" (the United States) as they previously were to the homeland of their parents (and their own new "home") when they lived in America.

Upon his return to Shanghai, Sun authored a book comprised of his critical reflections as a Chinese living in America. The first chapter, "Crazy Horse Who Says No," squarely situates his writing (though not necessarily his polemic) in the neo-nationalist "Say No" wave of 1996–1998, and subsequent chapters introduce the reader to areas of American life such as academics (university education, anti-intellectualism, ideology) and popular culture (malls, theme parks, fast-food buffets, Disney, yard sales, gossip, and red-light districts). Appropriately, Sun titled his book *Realizing the American Dream* (*Ganwu Meiguomeng*), again invoking the illusive character of the "American dream" that was central to his 1987 hit play.<sup>43</sup>

*The Great Going Abroad* (*Da liuyang*), which was written the year after productions of *China Dream* closed (three years after it was penned), indicates the dramatic shift in Sino-American relations after June Fourth (*Liu Si*, the Chinese reference that encompasses both the spring 1989 democracy movement and the Tiananmen Square massacre of that date). As will be revealed in chapter 4, the writers and director of *Going Abroad* cleverly seized upon the downward spiral of U.S.–China relations as a foil for their critique of China's "cannibalistic" tendencies spawned by its Cultural Revolution of 1966–1976 and reiterated in the 1989 massacre.

Falling in the immediate post-June Fourth period, *Going Abroad* embodies a unique combination of critique of Self and Other; such ambiguity gave way in the mid-1990s to more overt and heartfelt negativity toward the United States, as formerly divergent sectors of Chinese society (the leadership, the intellectuals, and the masses) became increasingly unified in their hostility toward the Clinton administration and America in general. Thus,

while the following chapter on *Going Abroad* explores the complexity of representations of the United States during a fascinating transition period, *Bird Men* (Niaoren, 1993) embeds similar political metaphors while also foregrounding multiple negative images of the American in keeping with official discourse, while *Student Wife* (Peidu furen, 1995), *Dignity* (Zunyan, 1997), and *Che Guevara* (Qie Gewala, 2000) display far more conventionally orthodox criticism of the United States during a period of strained political relations. Adhering to the government status quo, articulated by artists and intellectuals, and enthusiastically received by general audiences, these later plays reflect an increasingly unified negative view of America among the three sectors of society.

At the same time, their Occidentalist representations are still complex: *Bird Men* demonstrates the cultural ambiguity of the Chinese American figure and the theatrical potential of *intracultural* performance to enhance cross-cultural themes, while the innovative casting and production processes of *Student Wife*, *Dignity*, and *Swing* (Qiuqian qingren, 2002) complicate the otherwise oversimplified testimony of an exiled Chinese citizen in the United States. In sum, analyses of the plays to follow reveal that while themes of cross-cultural misunderstanding, intercultural contact, and the geopathic trauma of displacement continue to be foregrounded, binaries of difference between Self/Other and East/West are reinforced rather than dissolved, manipulated rather than subverted.

In turning now from *China Dream* to *Going Abroad*, we shift from the longing triggered by the permanence of immigration to the awakening induced by the instability of exile.



## Exilic Absurdism: *The Great Going Abroad*

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home . . . The exile's new world, logically enough, is unnatural and its unreality resembles fiction.

—Edward Said, “Reflections on Exile”

The complicated and unsettling cultural dynamics emerging from cases like that of *China Dream* playwrights Sun Huizhu and Fei Chunfang are crucial to discourses of immigration and exile, and central in distinguishing the two. The discourse of immigration is one of evolution, permanence, assimilation, and unidirectional migration, though accompanied by persistent longing for one's place of origin. Exile, by contrast, is immediate, alienating, and carries the hope of being temporary. Sun and Fei's plans for their lives in America shifted radically between these two perspectives: they began with a prolonged period of study with the possibility of return, and then opted to pursue academic and artistic careers in the United States. This marked a change in status from “exile” (overseas student) to “immigrant”; Sun did not visit China for nine years, developed a promising teaching and publishing career within the academy, and the couple purchased a home and began to raise a family in Massachusetts and Minnesota. Their decision to relocate to China shifts their subjectivity back to that of exile, inviting revision (a literal re-vision-ing) of their entire overseas experience, as reflected in Sun's subsequent book, *Realizing the American Dream*.

The central character Sun and Fei created in *China Dream*, Mingming, is very much an immigrant, coming to the United States to pursue an acting career but eventually setting up a restaurant business instead. By contrast,

the main character in Wang Peigong and Wang Gui's *The Great Going Abroad* (*Da liuyang*) is a temporary visitor to America who must come to terms with the perils of exile after his arrival. Said's description of the world of the exile as "unreality [that] resembles fiction" becomes literal in *Going Abroad*, but the absurdly fictional world represented on stage contains very real concerns.<sup>1</sup>

While *Going Abroad* extends motifs of geopathology suggested in our analysis of *China Dream*, it also offers a metaphor for the *internal* exile of Chinese intellectuals who attempt to speak out from within the confinement of their own national borders. The protagonist's experience of exile overseas echoes the domestic ideological exile of his creators, and the pattern of experience of both externally and internally exiled Chinese writers corresponds precisely to the trajectory of geopathology as explicated by Una Chaudhuri. The play also introduces deployment of Occidentalism for simultaneously orthodox and unorthodox purposes: as both endorsement of official neo-nationalist rhetoric of anti-Americanism, and critique of the domestic political and cultural dynamics orchestrated by the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>2</sup>

*Going Abroad* is the story of Gao Yuan, a young Chinese entrepreneur who "strikes it rich" and ventures overseas to the United States, following in the footsteps of his identical twin, Gao Shan, a research assistant to a university anthropology professor. After sharing his excitement with the audience in song and animated conversation, Gao Yuan soon "lands" in a land full of linguistic confusion, physical danger, and mistaken identity. He is immediately accosted by lewd women and thieves, and later is intended as the next victim of the butchers who have already viciously murdered his brother. In the process of trying to make sense of the alien environment into which he has been thrust, he is embroiled in a love triangle involving his late twin brother (for whom he is mistaken), the professor's daughter (Susan), and an unwitting villain (Wen Jun), who vies for the affection of both the professor and his daughter and is used as a pawn by the professor's housekeeper (Sisi) to accomplish her evil ends.

Like Mingming in *China Dream*, Gao discovers that America is not the paradise he imagined; but whereas Mingming's series of jarring encounters confront her on the *psychic* level of bicultural identity formation, Gao Yuan is faced with *physical* danger and the tangible horror of the murder of his twin brother—his other self. Reminiscent of Huang Zuolin and Sun/Fei's approach to *China Dream*, director Wang Gui and the writers of *Going Abroad* use humor and innovative staging techniques to bring to life the contrasts and tensions of Sino-American cross-cultural experience and personal self-discovery. The geopathic figure of Gao Yuan inhabits a physical stage space

representing America that is fluid, undefined, and ever-changing: in this case, America is even veiled behind the ambiguous pseudonym of “*waigu*” (foreign country), although it is referenced specifically by cultural markers such as English-language use, local colloquialisms, and contemporary American pop songs.

The dark, bizarre fantasy world of *Going Abroad* is characterized by constant motion: bodies, props—even set pieces—are always moving. The exiled subject is continually dislocated, disoriented—even disembodied and dismembered. Time is sometimes displaced along with subject: past and present intersect, overlap, then separate, mirroring the doubling and splitting of the twin protagonists; time is distilled and dizzy, passing rapidly through the series of events (which also are mirrored, in contrasting slow-motion dance sequences that frame the action of the play). One critic compares the performance to “a winged horse galloping freely on stage,”<sup>3</sup> while another opines: “The whole play gives one the impression of having someone at your beck and call. Things happen too easily, are resolved too easily, seem random.”<sup>4</sup> The play’s treatment of the crisis of Self in a frivolous framework—and its mingling of horror and humor—form an uneasy contrast that apparently threatens to render the narrative ridiculous.

Reception of the play in terms of assessment of quality was open to variation depending on whether its playful “corniness” was intentional or whether it hoped to be taken seriously. If the writer/director consciously adopted such an uncanny and unconventional style, then the play was brilliant: it was so “bad” it was good. On the other hand, if the production was intended as an honest attempt at a morality play dressed up for the 1990s with the added glamour of a star cast, it was indeed ridiculous. This dialectic was later hinted at in one critic’s commentary:

Some artistic works seem very coarse on the surface, but actually that surface roughness goes through a process of careful composition, craftfully woven into something entirely different than crude and sloppy.<sup>5</sup>

Seen in this light, the project was a triumph of Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, with its variety of distancing stage elements and its invitation to the spectator to reflect on a multiplicity of available meanings in a dialectically critical mode while at the same time being thoroughly entertained.

Colleagues who attended the two November 1991 Shanghai performances, as well as artists who participated in them, were puzzled that a foreign scholar had taken such an interest in this frivolous “plaything,” and could not quite grasp the aesthetic paradox described above, though one of the actors did recognize an underlying message of the play that made it thematically contro-

versial. It would not be until five years later, when I interviewed him, that director/playwright Wang Gui would specifically address the unique and easily misunderstood style of the piece, and also reflect upon the deeper resonances of the play's subversive message. Not only was experimentation in the production evidenced by its innovative stage aesthetic and risky subtext, but the play crossed untested boundaries in other ways as well, from the moment of its inception.

Significantly, *Going Abroad* was *not* produced by a premier professional theatre in a major city for a local audience; on the contrary, it was conceived and sponsored by an independent business entrepreneur from Hebei and was performed on tour in remote provinces from June 1991 into 1992. When the production eventually reached Shanghai, it did so as an unpublicized pair of performances in the relatively private setting of the Shanghai Theatre Academy, primarily because its star—popular screen actor Zhang Qiuge—is a 1984 graduate of the academy. The only published Chinese reviews (cited above) appeared two months later in *Shanghai Drama* magazine, a local subscription periodical. These articles describe the play as “fashionable [and] stylish,”<sup>6</sup> and “a super-amusing variety play”;<sup>7</sup> audiences likewise reacted to the play as playful entertainment, enjoying the pertinent theme, diverse performance modes, and Zhang's comic portrayal of the protagonist(s).

From the preceding description, one might infer that the play was unimportant: it did not reach large urban audiences, did not attract the attention of the press and theatre critics, and was not a focus of public discussion. One would be grossly mistaken, however, because *The Great Going Abroad* was a small miracle pulled off by one of China's most famous and controversial directors, a dissident playwright, and a crooked and naïve businessman.

The play was a unique interpretation of the (by then) popular and well-worn theme of going abroad: on the surface, it was a parody of the motif—and the experience—but underneath the glossy, hilarious surface lay a searing criticism of the Chinese ethos and national character. *Going Abroad* was also the most ambitious experiment in *form* to date; its elements of dialogue, song, dance, and “action sequences” combined realism and absurdism, comedy and tragedy, parody and farce, the beautiful and the grotesque—frustrating those who attempted to classify it. Furthermore, it is one of the richest plays of this period in terms of our study of Occidentalism: its portrayal of America and Americans is multifaceted, paradoxical, and open to incongruous readings. Ultimately, the play's setting in America and its absurdist presentation mask its utterly serious assessment of China's current predicament. It is a risk Wang Gui had taken before, but 1991 was a particularly precarious time to test such waters again.

The period between *Liu Si* (June 4, 1989) and Deng Xiaoping's tour of southern China in early 1992 was an especially tense time for Chinese intellectuals and cultural workers: not since the Cultural Revolution had there been such fear of imprisonment and other repercussions for suggesting opinions counter to the communist/socialist establishment.<sup>8</sup> Wang's play is situated squarely in this context. Its final performances came just before the reform and opening launched by Deng's economic campaign, which loosened the tight ideological grip of the government as it promoted free-market capitalism. Later that year, the politburo propaganda chief Li Ruihuan announced a relaxation of political control for the first time since June Fourth, deemphasizing the use of art for "political education," in an official speech that invited increased production of "politically harmless, artistically superior, crowd-pleasing works."<sup>9</sup> Wang's project came too early to enjoy the protection of such a policy.

Although it emerged after the 1989 crackdown, *Going Abroad* aspired to the principles of the cultural discourse of the late 1980s that June Fourth had interrupted—the discourse that gave wings to such productions as *China Dream*. In the words of Zhang Longxi, the 1980s was "a period of cultural critique and the attempt at liberation of the mind . . . in which Chinese intellectuals played an important role, after decades of self-enclosure and isolation, in opening up windows toward the outside world and introducing new ideas and values into the cultural arena of post-Mao China."<sup>10</sup> Despite intermittent periods of repression signaled by campaigns against "spiritual pollution" and "bourgeois liberalization" throughout the 1980s, literature and art that contested the status quo (Party corruption, official versions of the Cultural Revolution, the government's approach to modernization) were publicly produced and debated during the decade preceding June Fourth.

In fact, it was during this time that Wang Gui became the controversial figure he remains today. He was center stage as a director, playwright, and critic during the mid-1980s when a string of "controversial" plays was publicly produced in theatres, then printed and discussed in published journals. Among these plays were the early works of Gao Xingjian (China's most recognized "absurdist" playwright) and a play called *W.M.* (anglicized initials for the Chinese word *women*, meaning "us" or "we"—*men* being the plural suffix for *wo*, which means "I"). *W.M.* was penned by Wang Peigong and later revised for performance by Wang Gui, who directed its premiere in Beijing in 1985.<sup>11</sup>

The seven characters in *W.M.* are young people of various personal backgrounds whose childhoods were accompanied by the backdrop of the anti-rightist campaigns of the 1950s and whose adolescence and young adulthood

were spent as “sent down” youth in the rural reeducation campaigns of the Cultural Revolution; they later meet for an urban reunion in an upscale restaurant in the mid-1980s (when the play was written). *W.M.* boldly addresses the emotional turmoil and ideological disillusionment triggered by the political upheavals its characters have endured, including the reform period that was then underway.

Wang Gui, head of the Air Force Drama Troupe at the time, did not bend in the face of severe criticism from authorities, but rather rejected their response and opened dress rehearsal to an influential public, which included artists and the press. The production was subsequently dismantled and internally “sealed off,” and both Wangs were dismissed from their posts in the Air Force. The highest ranking officials in the Party’s Central Committee, Propaganda Department, and other branches also went after the many cultural workers who had supported the play and petitioned the government’s response. Though stigmatized by the establishment, Wang Gui ironically felt more freedom after his dismissal and was able to pursue projects independently all over the country.<sup>12</sup> After *W.M.* was banned by the Air Force, he was invited to Shanghai to oversee a production of the play.<sup>13</sup> At great personal risk, he also restaged it “unofficially” in Beijing when theatre colleagues helped him gather artists from various troupes to form the cast, a model he would adopt again for producing *Going Abroad*.

Considering the fate of the two Wangs in the mid-1980s, it is not surprising that Wang Gui forbid their next collaboration (the play under consideration here) from being staged in the capital:

They [the cast and crew of *The Great Going Abroad*] intended to go to Beijing, but I didn’t let them. One reason was because there would be problems—there are lots of people looking for problems. The other was because the Beijing theatre community would see the play as garbage, as something base; and also because in Beijing there are too many people trying to find fault, in terms of thinking and politics—there are so many “experts.” Shanghai was their own idea, they wanted to go. I told them to go to cities in central China to perform. I told them not to go to Beijing and Shanghai.<sup>14</sup>

By playing remote locales like Xingtai, Shijiazhuang, and Handan (the producer’s hometown), Shandong, Xiancheng, and Nanjing (a major city where innovative projects can visit without drawing political attention, as was the case with the 1989 Little Theatre Festival), the play was able to reach large, enthusiastic audiences without reaching hard-nosed Party officials and cultural bureaucrats.



The hybridity of *Going Abroad* is one of its salient features—not only in terms of its amalgamation of aesthetic elements, its cross-cultural content, and its expansive touring itinerary, but also in its collaborative realization by a diverse group of participants ranging from the remote entrepreneur producer to actors from various provinces and several artists from Beijing. Although the play itself was not staged in the capital, many of its key contributors dwell there. The Beijing collaborators included its designers, several lead actors, and its primary writer, Wang Peigong, so it can still be classified somewhat as a “*jingpai*” (Beijing-style) play.<sup>15</sup>

Had I not spoken with production participants in 1991 and 1996, I would never have known that Wang Peigong actually wrote the play, since his name does not appear on the manuscript, in the few published reviews, or even in the unpublished list of main contributors to the production. With six other collaborators listed in such sources—including three playwrights given credit for various drafts, Wang Gui for production revision, and two lyricists for the original pop songs in the play—Wang Peigong’s omission is undoubtedly intentional, and with good reason. Not only was *Going Abroad* produced in the general immediate aftermath of June Fourth, but acknowledgement of Wang Peigong’s participation would have linked the play directly to the 1989 democracy movement’s most extreme subversive element—Wu’er Kaixi.<sup>16</sup> After the massacre of June 4, playwright Wang was accused of helping Wu’er flee the country because the latter had visited his home on June 2 and borrowed 3,000 yuan from his wife.<sup>17</sup> Wang was not even home at the time, but was arrested anyway—and imprisoned for fourteen months. Shortly after his release, Wang Gui met with him in their compound (though dismissed from the Air Force, the two had remained in the housing provided by their former work unit) and told him about Hebei entrepreneur Ni Xiancai’s invitation to create a new play, upon which he immediately agreed to write the script. According to Wang Gui:

We talked about it for several days, and then he [Wang Peigong] wrote the draft in a week. Why? Because we had been collaborators for a long time. And when he came out of prison, he had no money and no creative activity: Qingyi [the China National Youth Theatre, his work unit since leaving the Air Force] would not take him back, so he had no job. In a week, he could get 5,000–6,000 yuan from this script: he has a wife and child, so that way he could get by. As soon as I mentioned it, he was thrilled. “How should I write it? How should I write it?” [he said].<sup>18</sup>

At that point, all that existed was a rough story line, apparently conceived by Ni. In writing the script, the names of the main characters were retained, but

Wang Peigong was depended on to shape those characters and create the plot.

Like *W.M.* before it, *Going Abroad* became a collaboration between the two Wangs, with the participation of several other writers as well. Wang Gui originally told me there was no extant script, since the play was written and changed—then revised by him periodically—throughout the rehearsals; but later, after our discussion of inconsistencies between productions he had seen (one of which he provided on videotape) and the one I had witnessed in Shanghai (which he did not attend), he sent me a manuscript he had stored on his computer.<sup>19</sup> The original draft had been written by Wang Peigong in Beijing and rehearsed in Xingtai (a city in Hebei province). Wang Gui had assembled the actors: first Zhang Qiuge (whose work unit was playwright Wang's former employer, the China National Youth Theatre), and then Sha Jingchang of the China National Experimental Theatre, and Wang Deshun, an expert mime actor. The female villain was originally played by an actress from Tianjin, later replaced by Mao Lixin of Hebei.<sup>20</sup>

For those actors "borrowed" from official work units like Beijing's China National Youth Theatre and China National Experimental Theatre, special contracts were drafted and handsome sums paid to the theatres that loaned them out. Usually such contracts allocate a percentage of the actor's salary to his work unit, which in this case was a substantial payoff for the theatres since Ni Xiancai was paying his actors 2,000 yuan per month, about ten times the monthly base salary at a state-owned theatre at the time.

Ni's total investment in the project was considerable, several hundred thousand yuan in Wang Gui's estimation. In addition to paying the actors' hefty salaries and commissioning Wang Peigong to write the original script, Ni incurred the expense of a hotel room in Beijing during the time that Wang Gui was revising the script and soliciting actors and designers. He also paid 60,000 yuan, for materials and labor, to Xu Xiang, the production's set designer (of Beijing's Central Academy of Drama), and absorbed the cost of the ad hoc troupe's travel and lodging expenses throughout China. When the show docked in Shanghai for its visit to the Theatre Academy, Ni jumped ship; it was at this point that actor Chen Ziqiu stepped in as temporary manager of the ensemble.

According to Wang Gui, Ni had borrowed up to half a million yuan from the Hebei cultural bureau and other sources (obtaining small amounts of 10,000–20,000 yuan from each lender), thinking that he would make a profit on the production and be able to repay his debts. His business dealings in the past had included opening a factory and a bar, but the thirty-something businessman was unprepared for an artistic gamble. His assump-

tion that recruitment of star actors and popular singers, along with a new theatre approach that combined them with modern dance and trendy costumes, would draw large affluent audiences in remote locations was hugely misinformed. Had he known more about the current circumstances of theatre in China, he would have risked his fortune elsewhere: theatre in China had been concerned over loss of audiences since the mid-1980s, and its most successful efforts had come in the form of highly publicized, long-running plays in Shanghai and Beijing—the very two cities in which Ni’s project would likely never be seen.

Whether the project sprung from an idealistic yearning for artistic involvement and public recognition on the part of Ni Xiancai or was intended as a vehicle for one of the dancers in the troupe (who, according to Wang Gui, was Ni’s “little friend, his lover”) is uncertain, but the results of his efforts are clear: for Ni, a financial fiasco that ended in his arrest; for Wang, a creative success that culminated in a pathbreaking production; for us, a prime example of Occidentalism in contemporary performance—one that sheds light on the shifting position of the newly exiled Chinese individual in a sea of confusing identifications.

In terms of exilic experience, *Going Abroad*’s protagonist Gao Yuan can be compared to his creators Ni Xiancai and Wang Gui. Like them, Gao embarks on a risky venture. With the naïveté and laissez-faire optimism of Ni, Gao finds himself trapped in alien circumstances for which he is utterly unprepared; but with Wang’s cunning and wit, Gao devises an ingenious scheme to overcome his adversity and establish his superiority. Unlike Ni, Gao adapts to his circumstances and prevails, but not completely unscathed: like Wang, his experiences bring him from the brink of his own ruin to confidence in his survival, but with a somber education in the darkest capabilities of humanity along the way.

Wang Gui and Gao Yuan are both survivors. A Party member, soldier, and government cultural worker since age 13, Wang endured several humiliating campaigns in his adult life, including three years of hard labor in frigid Heilongjiang with his wife and children, a year of rice-planting during reeducation in Hubei, and his aforementioned dismissal from the Air Force after staging *W.M.* In this light, critic Lin Xi’s classification of Gao Yuan as a “*yang chadui*”<sup>21</sup> has ironic resonance (“*chadui*” is the term for urban school graduates who were “sent down” to rural areas for reeducation during the Cultural Revolution; the prefix “*yang*” makes Gao Yuan an “overseas *chadui*” and carries a humorous political tone).

Although Gao Yuan’s traumatic encounters overseas in *Going Abroad* at

first glance seem incomparable to the internal domestic suffering reflected in Wang's own life experiences, they are actually invoked as a direct metaphor for similar trials endured by Chinese intelligentsia. Gao's alienation in the dark and confusing environment on an-Other shore is a reflection of the Chinese intellectual exiled in his own homeland. The barbaric foreign Other that murders Gao's brother and then threatens to rip out Gao's heart for personal profit is actually the cannibalistic Chinese Self that Wang Gui recognizes in his fellow countrymen.

The play is controversial because, although it defames America (the ambiguous "*waiguo*") on the surface, at its heart it criticizes Chinese ignorance of that outside world. It employs ironic exaggerations of distorted views of America (both excessively positive and excessively negative) to unmask this Chinese lack of sophistication.<sup>22</sup> Wang Gui himself encapsulated its even deeper subversion when he described the play's message this way:

The central point the play expresses is Chinese people are shooting themselves. The surgeon Wen Jun and Gao Shan are both Chinese; but [Wen] kills Gao Shan and sells his heart to someone else: this is Chinese beating themselves, fighting themselves, and it is very intentional . . . this is a characteristic of our culture [*minzu de liegenxing*], especially during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>23</sup>

Placing all of the action of the play in an overseas country automatically provides leeway for depictions of unsavory characters and unsettling events; it takes some pressure off of the artists in terms of possible repercussions for investigating darker complexities in Chinese society. This strategy can be seen as a clever riff of the Brechtian gesture of invoking estrangement by setting action in distant distorted lands. In this case, and as we will see again in *Student Wife* and *Dignity*, situating the play in a foreign country can actually encourage negative portrayals of humanity and society, since the gloomier *waiguo* appears, the brighter China seems in comparison. In *Going Abroad*, the character Wen Jun (the Chinese student who enacts the evil monstrosities in the play) can be regarded as a victim rather than the perpetrator Wang Gui conceives him to be—by virtue of the fact that, first, he is a foreign citizen of Chinese origin (*huayi*) who has been subject to the negative effects of American society throughout his upbringing and, second, that it is the American characters in the play who are the catalysts for events that occur. It is the American anthropology professor who employs the rival Chinese students Wen Jun and Gao Shan; it is his daughter, Susan, who heightens their competition as the object of both of their desire; and it is his housekeeper

Sisi who is the mastermind behind the atrocities committed by Wen, who is revealed in the end to be her pawn rather than a criminal acting of his own agency.

Taking Wang Gui's cue, the play is open to interpretation as symbolizing the self-destructive cultural ethos forced onto well-meaning Chinese citizens by the Maoist hysteria of the Cultural Revolution (an allegory that would cast Sisi in the image of Mao manipulating the Chinese masses, represented by Wen, in their mutual debilitation). Alternatively—and at far less risk to the playwrights—the play can also be explained as a depiction of the corruptive influence of mindless adherence to foreign conventions. If pressed to defend themselves, the two Wangs have set up a tidy shelter for their true intentions: as candidly as Wang Gui summarized the meaning of the play as exposing the murderous tendencies of his own people, he could just as easily say that the play condemns idolatry of the overseas Other and the eager embrace of all things Western without consideration of the potentially hazardous consequences. At least one critic interpreted the play's content on this more superficial level:

The first thing I felt when seeing *The Great Going Abroad* is that the play did not describe overseas as golden, didn't make it seem like everything over there is wonderful and that everything here is horrible. On the contrary, over there it's dripping with blood, cannibalistic.<sup>24</sup>

The action of the play consistently works on both levels: it materializes the contrasting essentialized images Chinese hold of America as both paradise and hell. As mentioned above, Americans in the play can be interpreted as catalysts for the destructive sequence of events—but they can also be seen as caught up in the vortex of China's own self-mutilation. Capitalism is imagined as both liberating and deceptive. It is Gao Yuan's financial luck as a *getihu* (entrepreneur)<sup>25</sup> in China that affords him the resources to leave its confines and venture overseas; the play opens with a lengthy interpretive dance sequence, after which Gao rushes onto the stage and shouts: "Hey! Pals! What can I say? In this world today, if you have money, you can perform all miracles! Look: passport, plane tickets, visa, genuine goods at a fair price, everything one would expect. Ah, it's just like a fucking dream!"<sup>26</sup> When he arrives in America and feels suddenly alienated because he can't find his brother, he comforts himself, saying, "What am I afraid of? I have money!"<sup>27</sup> Soon after, he is stripped of his fortune by street thugs, triggering his geopathic trauma. Toward the end of the play, Gao is held at gunpoint by Wen Jun, who insists that police and the law should investigate his brother's

death; Gao tricks him into handing over the gun and vows to seek his own revenge, exclaiming: “Everyone knows capitalist laws are hypocritical! Police are just an instrument of capitalism! I may as well believe in a sheet of scrap paper as believe in that!”<sup>28</sup> Once again, this condemnation can be read on two levels: as an honest assessment of the ills of capitalism—as the establishment would have it—or as a critique of the essentializing gaze with which that establishment and its people often look upon the West.

Double signifiers continually surface: Gao Yuan is impressed with the professor’s fast fancy car, but later in the play, these same “toys” become the instruments of a deadly car chase. While American songs by artists like Michael Jackson and the Talking Heads are incorporated for lighthearted sequences,<sup>29</sup> they also set moods of fear and catastrophe, and they are counterbalanced by original Chinese pop compositions, including the patriotic theme song from the 1990 Asian Games held in Beijing.<sup>30</sup>

America is a place for birthday parties and dancing, the land where Gao Shan and Susan once frolicked on the beach in their young love; but it is also the location of the clinic in which innocent people are led like lambs to the slaughter by evil butchers who sell their organs for profit. In a Hamletesque scene (see pl. 3), Gao Yuan is approached by the ghost of his beheaded twin brother and warned:

I’m suffering, little brother. They took my heart out and sold it . . .  
my life was destroyed by them. They will hurt you, too. This place is  
a cruel world. It’s not the place we lived. Get away from here fast—  
the farther the better.<sup>31</sup>

Although the first Americans encountered by Gao Yuan upon his arrival are unintelligible passersby who confuse him, enticing women who maul him, and violent thugs who rob him, subsequent local citizens attempt to befriend him, and positive images of Americans are also embodied by the kind professor and his innocent daughter.

The most elusive figure is Sisi, who is specified neither as American nor as Chinese. Her name, though unusual for a Chinese woman, is not inconceivable; and, though it can be transliterated into a nickname like “Sissy,” it does not overtly indicate translation of a common English name as does “Susan.” A direct translation of the dramatis personae from the script would appear in English as the following:

GAO YUAN—Chinese entrepreneur (*getihu*)

GAO SHAN—Chinese foreign student

The two are twin brothers, played by one actor.

PROFESSOR—over sixty years old

SUSAN (*Su-shan*)—Professor's daughter, Gao Shan's beloved, over twenty years old

WEN JUN—Professor's assistant and student, foreign citizen of Chinese origin, thirty years old

SISI—female housekeeper, over thirty years old

ENSEMBLE of ten male and female actors who pose, dance, fight, perform stunts, and change sets<sup>32</sup>

Since only the twin brothers and Wen Jun are specifically defined as ethnically Chinese, it is implied that all other characters are native to “*waiguo*”; Gao Yuan and Gao Shan are both visitors from China (Gao Shan is an overseas Chinese student and potential émigré), and Wen Jun is specified as a “foreign citizen of Chinese origin,” implying a long-term residency (perhaps upbringing) outside of China. Most likely, Wen has acquired U.S. citizenship after holding a green card, but he was definitely born in China. Although non-Chinese characters in the play are not designated in the script as being specifically American, signifiers of and borrowings from American culture are scattered throughout the play; furthermore, in our discussions, Wang Gui repeatedly referred to the professor and Susan as “American.” Wang acknowledged the ambiguity of Sisi's character but tended to think of her as Chinese, whereas some of the dialogue in the play seems to confirm that she is American. For example, after offering Gao Yuan a ride in his car, the professor proceeds to bring him to Susan's birthday party to surprise her, believing he is Gao Shan. Sisi and Wen Jun are shocked to see Gao, whom they had murdered. Uncertain whether the man before them is a ghost or an imposter, they decide to test him; while ballroom dancing with Gao Yuan at the party, Sisi engages him in the following exchange:

SISI: Welcome back, sir. The young miss [Susan] was extremely worried about you.

GAO YUAN: Forgive me—you are . . . ?

SISI: Oh, Mr. Gao, you've forgotten all about me, Sisi? You don't remember that Italian pizza I cooked for you?

GAO YUAN: I remember, of course I remember. Delicious!

SISI: Was it sweet or salty?

GAO YUAN: It was *round* . . . <sup>33</sup>

SISI: Oh! (*Changes partners*)

(SISI and WEN JUN are dancing.)

SISI: He is a fake. He didn't even recognize me!

WEN JUN: I noticed you were speaking very intimately.

SISI: He is handsome, he is strong, he has more flavor than the real one.

WEN JUN: You are interested again?

SISI: Of course . . . (*Changes partners*)<sup>34</sup>

The fact that she cooked pizza for him in her role as the professor's housekeeper is another indication that she may not be ethnically Chinese.<sup>35</sup> If indeed Sisi is interpreted as being Chinese, she is clearly an utterly assimilated Chinese and, as such, displays all the negative attributes of the undesirable American; both she and Wen Jun have been corrupted by living in the United States for too long. Sisi's permanent installment in the American professor's home and assimilation to American ways make her a villainous character standing in stark contrast to the protagonists of *Student Wife* and *Dignity*, who are imbued with positive Chinese traits that make them unable to adjust to the immoral domestic sphere of the American home.

If Sisi is not considered Chinese, her fetish for Chinese men lends the story a cross-cultural dimension that inverts conventional Orientalist racial and gender roles. Initially, she seduces Wen Jun and uses her sexual power over him throughout the play to make him carry out her bloody executions; but after she meets Gao Yuan, her desire for the sexual Other is transferred to him, as exhibited when she and Wen are about to kill him:

SISI (*now dressed all in black, approaches the operating table. To WEN JUN*):

Don't let him die right away. His heart is very strong, it can sell for a good price.

WEN JUN: Then we'll give him separate anesthetics, and let his brain part die. This type of simple brain has no value at all.

SISI: I want his body. What a great macho man!

WEN JUN: I want my woman [Susan]!

SISI: It's a deal! The whole world is yours. (*Gestures at WEN JUN to go*)

(*WEN JUN waves a command to strong men and goes out the door, loitering outside the room. Inside the room, to jazzy Western nightclub music, SISI uses her feminine charms to surround GAO YUAN in a seductive dance. She caresses his strong muscles, burning with lust . . .*)<sup>36</sup>

Sisi's sexual desire for Gao Yuan, as well as her desire to possess him as an object, mirror Wen Jun's desire to steal Susan from Gao Shan (as reflected in his exclaiming, "I want my woman!" and in other scenes throughout the play). The coexistence of the typical trope of Chinese male desire for the white female and American female lust for Chinese men is an interesting twist on cultural gender politics, and is a trend that continued in subsequent cultural products of the 1990s, including the huge hit television serial *Foreign Babes*



in *Beijing* (*Yangniu zai Beijing*), which featured American and other foreign female characters who pursue Chinese men. Like Sisi, one of the American women in the series is a powerful seductress who can persuade the object of her desire to bend to her will—though not to murder innocent people, as is the case with Sisi’s sexual and cultural manipulation of Wen Jun. (See chapter 1 for further discussion of *Foreign Babes*.)

Susan is likewise depicted as having a preference for Chinese men. The following exchange occurs during a memory sequence when she recalls Gao Shan promising to put an engagement ring on her finger at her upcoming birthday party; the scene takes place at the beach (the actor playing Gao Yuan doubles in the flashback as Gao Shan, who at this point in the play is mysteriously missing):

SUSAN: Gao, will you stay?

GAO SHAN: I don’t know.

SUSAN: Mr. “I-don’t-know,” then, what do you know, you pitiful Chinese child?

GAO: I know that I love you.

SUSAN: Gao, I need you! Wherever you go I will follow, whether it’s to China or West Africa, or even to the moon! . . .

(*The dreamland disappears. WEN JUN still stands in front of her, clenching her hand.*)

WEN JUN (*in English*): I love you. (*In Chinese*): I love you. Sue! I am also a Chinese man! Why have you never noticed me?

SUSAN: I can’t be without him!

WEN JUN: He has already disappeared. I am better than Gao Shan in every way . . . <sup>37</sup>

Later, when her father brings Gao Yuan to the party and she believes it is Gao Shan returned after his long absence, Susan concedes to Wen Jun, “If Gao Shan had not come back, maybe I really could have loved you.” The presence of the several other men at her birthday party—American men (played by the ensemble of actors)—is barely acknowledged by Susan, whose romantic attractions are limited to the Chinese male characters in the play. Furthermore, despite her intimate relationship with Gao Shan, she never realizes in any of her scenes with Gao Yuan that he is not her lover, even when he does not know her name, knows nothing about the promised engagement ring, recoils when she tries to kiss him, and cannot play the cello at her request. Characters less involved with Gao Shan notice that Gao Yuan differs from him in physique, intellect, and personality. This leads one to

speculate whether Susan is deeply connected to this man she wants to marry or is attracted to him as an exotic Other of her imagination.

Susan's glaring Occidental otherness contrasts sharply with Sisi's ambiguous ethnicity. This subtle blurring of Sisi's cultural background serves to foreground the complicity of Wen Jun in destroying his fellow countryman, accentuating the Chinese self-critique that Wang Gui identifies in the play's underlying meaning. Sisi's function, in contrast to that of Susan and the professor, is to push forward the action of the play rather than to serve as a contrast to Gao's Chineseness and enhance the element of culture clash and self-awakening that is so central to the story. It is her evil scheming that is emphasized, while her race and ethnicity are deliberately diluted.

In terms of costume and makeup, Sisi remains unmarked by signifiers connoting foreignness even when the other principal American characters are physically defined as being racially Other to the Gao twins and Wen Jun. In the Shanghai production, the actress playing Susan had dyed hair (resulting in a reddish blonde color), clearly designating her as Caucasian. Even more strongly marked was her father, whose pale Western suit, cane, and white wig and beard made him a dead ringer for the colonel from Kentucky Fried Chicken, by then a common figure in urban Chinese advertising (though the likeness was officially unintentional). In contrast, Sisi had no special makeup or costume to signify her foreignness; she did wear a bright purple dress and a matching turban, but such a costume in this case does not necessarily indicate non-Chineseness, since Gao Yuan wears bright clothing in Western styles.

In other productions of *Going Abroad* (those in which Susan and the professor were played by other actors), the American father and daughter had no special costume or makeup to indicate they were not Chinese; this is true of the Hebei performance that was videotaped. In this respect, *Going Abroad* is unique among the plays in this study as the only play in which the physical codes of the American Other (skin tone, hair color, facial hair, and differences in speech, mannerisms, and style of dress) were discarded in favor of signifiers within the text and plot (*Che Guevara* adopted yet another approach).

Significantly, the ethnicities of the characters encountered by Gao Yuan are determined primarily by his reactions to them. It is in terms of Gao's cultural crisis of self-identity that their otherness, ethnically and otherwise, takes on meaning. Gao's identity crisis, in turn, is bound to his geopathic trauma as a voluntary exile in a strange land—a land that he expects to welcome him, but that instead confuses, alters, and threatens him. With Gao Yuan as the thematic and physical reference point (the entire play literally re-

volves around him, both in terms of plot development and actual spatial physicality), other characters take on degrees of otherness as determined by Gao's interactions with and reactions to them. We know that the first woman he speaks to after "landing" overseas is American, for instance, because she cannot answer his Chinese question ("*Zhe shi waiguo ma?*" ["Is this foreign country?"]) and instead replies in English, shaking her head, "I'm sorry. I don't know." As previously indicated, Gao is subsequently accosted, triggering terror and confusion, after which he is immediately befriended by a group of young men. Mistaking them for a dangerous street gang, he responds by defending himself with Chinese martial arts and *qigong*.<sup>38</sup> This incident signifies a moment of revelatory self-knowledge combined with profound geopathic self-doubt:

GAO YUAN: Hey! When did our stock become such great *qigong* masters!  
(*Laughs for a long time with pride, then suddenly becomes like a child again and cries out in agony*) Mama! I want to come home!  
(*Slide projection: dead fish and birds floating in a marine oil spill*)<sup>39</sup>

At this point, Gao Yuan is sprawled on the ground; the professor, making his first entrance, thinks he is a beggar and tosses a bill to him, before recognizing him (mistakenly) as Gao Shan. It is Gao Yuan's reaction to the professor that registers the latter's ethnicity for the audience: Gao's confusion at the encounter reveals to the audience that the professor is a "foreigner" (from Gao's perspective—a native from the perspective of the actual locale, which is America):

PROFESSOR (*wild with joy*): Gao!  
GAO YUAN (*first panicked, then warmly shaking hands*): Ah, long time no see!  
. . . I don't know you.  
PROFESSOR: Gao, Where did you go? Back to China?  
GAO YUAN: I just arrived—why would I go back?  
PROFESSOR (*pulling him*): Come on, come home with me!  
GAO YUAN (*anxiously*): I'm sorry, *laowai* [old outsider],<sup>40</sup> you have mistaken me. (*Assumes stance to use qigong again*)

After a brief exchange, Gao decides to go along with the professor to his daughter's birthday party and play out the charade, deducing that he can leave if the ruse turns out to be no fun: "just like the Red Army tactic—'fight if winning, retreat if losing.'"<sup>41</sup> As previously mentioned, this is followed by his loud singing of the opening lines to the Asian Games theme song as he is "driven" offstage in the professor's fancy car (a plastic toy car the professor holds in front of him as he rushes around the stage accompanied

by sound effects of squealing tires; Gao becomes a passenger by miming stepping into the vehicle and holding on to a crossbar at chest level on which the toy car is perched).

Gao's instinct to use traditional Chinese *qigong* in reaction to unfamiliar foreigners, along with his citing the Red Army (which fought against the imperialist-supported White armies) and proudly singing a patriotic theme song, are all indicators of an internalized nationalism that surfaces in the face of geopathic trauma. The sequence just described offers a clear example of this pattern, which recurs later in the play (another instance is Gao's use of a stance and quotation from a Revolutionary Beijing opera at the moment, detailed earlier, when he disarms Wen Jun in preparation to seek revenge).

When Gao Yuan arrives with the professor at Susan's birthday party, he again verbally establishes the Occidental otherness of those with whom he is coming into contact. Although the stage is filled with dancing *Chinese* bodies (the ensemble of ten Chinese actors play the American party guests), Gao immediately identifies them as *Western* for the audience by entering the party and greeting the crowd: "*Ha-lou!* [humorous imitation of English "hello"] *Qin'ai de laowaimen!* [dear old outsiders!]"<sup>42</sup>

In this and other scenes throughout the play, the audience must independently register nonvisual cues provided by Gao Yuan in order to continually reconstruct the combinations of ethnicity onstage at any given moment. Because all of the characters, both Chinese and American, wear contemporary Western clothing styles and speak standard Chinese (the language of the play in real time and space, though not in the imaginary world of the play), there are no conventional theatrical semiotics to establish their ethnicities.<sup>43</sup> Awareness that the professor, his daughter, the various groups played by the ensemble, and (possibly) Sisi are all American is maintained purely through the cognitive skills of each audience member in association with the linguistic and plot-based indicators that initially establish each character's identity. This challenge to the audience's imagination engages the spectator in a very different way than the other plays under consideration here.

One of the effects of this type of representation is that it downplays foreign otherness and privileges a kind of universality by erasing conventional markers of difference. This approach is in keeping with another of director Wang Gui's objectives:

In doing this play, in deciding on the subject . . . my viewpoint is different from other people: my perspective in writing this play was that all humankind are friends, everyone on earth is equal—I think I have this perspective. We were not thinking, "down with Americans" (*dadao*

*laoMei*) or about Americans putting us down. Everyone at that time [late 1980s–early 1990s] was beset with crises: local wars persisted, famine, AIDS, natural disasters, environmental pollution . . . no one felt like examining these issues . . . everyone should work to comfort the world, comfort the existence of mankind . . . everyone must help carry the load; people must live in community, not keep warring and killing each other . . . Right?<sup>44</sup>

Wang's reflections situate the creation and staging of the play (from 1989–1991) in the moment preceding the convergence of the government, intelligentsia, and public in the fervent expression of anti-Americanism that was prevalent by the time we discussed the production in the mid-1990s. The more equalized physical representation also foregrounds Wang's intention that the play be considered on a domestic as well as intercultural level: even if the audience is cognizant of the fact that the characters engaged in street brawls, car chases, holding each other at gunpoint, and butchering one another for organs are of differing ethnicities, they remain *embodied* by Chinese actors with no striking physical dissimilarities to distinguish their mutual otherness or distract from their apparent "selfness." The mind may conceive that a street thug is American and Gao Yuan is Chinese, but the eye sees two Chinese men beating one another—wearing the same clothing and speaking the same language. Thus, the dual level discussed earlier (of the play seeming to espouse the inherent dangers of naïve intercultural contact while simultaneously identifying a ruthless intracultural violence) continues to gain strength as the plot thickens and the play reaches its climactic—and surprising—conclusion.

With its characteristic juxtaposition of comic absurdism and grotesque horror, *Going Abroad* culminates in multiple scenes of violence, which, though tempered by humor, are nonetheless ultimately disturbing. The stylistic combinations are ingenious, and the resulting message is likewise multilayered. The most shocking and sobering moments come when Gao Yuan unintentionally kills the professor, intentionally murders Wen Jun, and takes a dying Susan into his arms.

Gao's showdowns with the professor and Wen Jun are initially approached with great comic effect. After Gao Yuan is tricked into believing it is the professor who murdered his brother, Gao Shan, he holds the professor at gunpoint. When his gun fails to fire, the professor helps him repair it and then turns the gun on him but soon puts it down, laughing, and offers him coffee. During this exchange, Gao Yuan's patriotic holler, "Go ahead and kill me, but the Chinese people cannot be exterminated!" elicited applause from the

audience. When the professor realizes that Wen Jun has murdered his beloved student Gao Shan, he vows to kill Wen and then allow Gao Yuan to kill *him*. Gao refuses, reaching for the gun and saying: “One who murders must pay with his life just as a debtor pays his debt . . . Now who is the real ‘class enemy’ after all? Give me the gun!”<sup>45</sup> At this point, the humor is abruptly mixed with melodrama: the professor is accidentally shot in the struggle for the gun and bleeds profusely into a bucket Gao Yuan provides. Gao turns to the audience and quips, “All that blood is damn capitalist blood!” and offers to donate his own blood, which is *genhong miaozihuang* (red-rooted and strong-seeded) O-type blood, to save the professor. The professor responds by saying that whichever Gao he is (Gao Shan or Gao Yuan), he is a wonderful person and must promise to love his daughter and have a wonderful child. His dying words are “Expose Wen Jun; save Susan!” Gao Yuan is overcome with guilt at the professor’s death:

GAO YUAN: I am so deeply grieved. In this foreign country that was his native place, I grieve this old man whose name I did not know. Forgive me! I was willing to think you were a class enemy, an “old stinking ninth.”<sup>46</sup> It never occurred to me that *laowai* [old outsiders] also included good people!<sup>47</sup>

This entire exchange between the professor and Gao Yuan first counterposes, then integrates, Chinese nationalism and intercultural understanding, beginning with an initial conflict in which Gao is blinded by his anti-Americanism, but through which he tragically comes to a resolution of his irrational xenophobia.

Gao’s confrontation with Wen Jun is markedly different in that the object of his hatred shifts from the foreign Other to the enemy at home—a fellow Chinese. This final duel is the most dramatic, the most gut wrenching, but also the most comic. It begins with Gao Yuan disguising himself as a priest to officiate at Wen Jun and Susan’s wedding ceremony. In the Hebei version of the play, this is the only time that a more typical “foreigner” costume is donned: Gao wears a huge blond beard that covers most of his face. To begin the nuptials, he asks God’s curse on the wicked and his blessing on the good, followed by both “Amen” and “*Amitofo*” (a chant to Buddha in Chinese, transliterated from the sanskrit “*Amitabha*”). Wen Jun enters playing the bridal march on his trumpet, and the “priest” proceeds with the wedding vows.<sup>48</sup> Asking Wen Jun to place his hand on the Bible and repeat his vow three times, the “priest” reveals a tape recorder and plays for all to hear a previous recording of Wen Jun’s reluctant agreement with Sisi to murder Susan on her wedding day:

WEN JUN's voice: You wanted me to earn the trust of the professor and secretly collude in the selling of human organs, and I did. You wanted me to get rid of Gao Shan, and I did. You made me blame the professor's death on Gao Yuan, propose marriage to Susan, and get the inheritance rights to the clinic, and I did. What else do you want from me?

SISI's voice: I want you to have Susan meet the Lord on her wedding night—that is the only way to guarantee the clinic stays in our hands from the start!<sup>49</sup>

Violence among all the major characters erupts, featuring combat choreography borrowed from kung-fu films, a shoot-out during which the participants hide behind movable set pieces, and a car chase (using toy cars) that culminates in a crash. (The American television series *Hunter* was in syndication on CCTV [China Central Television] at the time and was extremely popular, and the car chase and shoot-out scenes seemed to have been lifted directly from that program.) In the final confrontation between Gao Yuan and Wen Jun, the latter plays the trumpet for all of his lines of dialogue, up until Gao shoots him and he drops to the floor, speaking his only words: “Brother—thank you” (see pl. 4).

The jarring hybridity of comic performative elements with the suffering and death of the play's main characters (Wen Jun and, eventually, Susan) forms an unexpected, but highly effective, contrast. Use of the trumpet throughout his dying moments would seem to risk making Wen Jun's death (and Gao's murder of him) laughable; yet the sharp contrast between this comic mode (as he drags himself across the floor playing notes from the instrument, including the American 1970s hit song “Feelings”) and his altogether serious utterance that follows serves to imbue his parting words with the kind of weight that Wang Gui anticipated when he identified his interpretation of the play (“Chinese people are shooting themselves”). The fact that Gao Yuan and Wen Jun remind each other (and other characters) repeatedly throughout the play that they are “brothers” and compatriots makes the hero's murder of Wen, though justified, difficult to absorb.

Nor is there any relief to follow. Wen Jun's death is the final plot element before the powerful closing dance sequence that frames the entire play. Just as the ensemble of actors opened the performance with interpretive modern dance reflecting the trauma of life from birth to death, they complete the cycle by slowly filling the apron of the stage with their writhing bodies, symbolically echoing the suffering just enacted in the play. During this movement sequence set to eerie music, Susan crawls toward Gao Yuan, who is center stage, calling out his family name (“Gao,” signifying her conflation

of the twin brothers into a single desired Other). Having been shot by Sisi during the final chaos at the wedding, Susan finally dies in Gao's arms. He raises her above his head in a crucifixion pose and carries her slowly downstage center, as a huge banner with flags from every country is rolled like a wave over the heads of the dancers. At this time, the play's theme song "Ocean Tale" ("Haisu") begins, and the dancers continue to interpret its lyrics with their movements as they pass the banner over them. Eventually, they all end up intertwined, signifying the international universalism alluded to by Wang; they then break free, and each time the theme song's recurring words "great ocean" (*dabai*) are repeated, the dancers strike a new dramatic pose. The music and dance—and performance—end when Gao Yuan places Susan down on the stage and kneels beside her.

This entire closing sequence ends the performance on an extremely dramatic and serious, if also somewhat hopeful, note. Since Susan is not an active participant in—but merely a victim of—the conflicts in the story, her death is unexpected and deeply tragic, as is Gao Yuan's emotional reaction. The added symbolism of some kind of international unity and understanding conveys the hope that such tragic consequences of cross-cultural contact can be avoided in the future.

The contrast between Gao Yuan's initial euphoria in anticipation of his adventure overseas at the play's beginning and the nearly complete destruction of everything his twin brother had established in America (amidst the ruins of which he now kneels) by its end invites further analysis of the overall trauma of the typical Chinese *chuguo* experience.<sup>50</sup> The fact that many works of literature, drama, and film during the 1990s reflected similar crises of identity in conjunction with foreign travel indicates that Gao Yuan's experience is symptomatic of a collective cross-cultural phenomenon.

Examinations of motifs of exile in literature have traditionally focused on Western and Eastern European writers, and on novels rather than dramatic literature. As American society increasingly explores its own multiculturalism, however, works of Asian, Islamic, and other minority peoples in the United States are gaining more attention.<sup>51</sup> Along with studies of second- and third-generation Asian American writings, there is also a distinct genre of "overseas Chinese literature," which consists of writers originally from mainland China who continue to write in the Chinese language for a Chinese readership, while living abroad: some of these writers reside in Taiwan or Hong Kong, and some live in Europe, America, or elsewhere.<sup>52</sup> Overseas Chinese literature is considered a development primarily of the past three decades, and a thorough analysis of one Chinese writer whose career has spanned this entire period reflects a pattern in exiled Chinese writing that



neatly echoes the trajectory of Gao Yuan's experience in *The Great Going Abroad*. It also intersects with Una Chaudhuri's theorization of dramatized geopathology, which is centrally concerned with issues of displacement and the identity crisis that results from the disorientations of immigration, refugeehood, and exile.

Yu Lihua, president of the International Chinese Women Writers Overseas Organization and a prominent spokesperson for Chinese intellectuals in America, has produced an abundance of published works since the late 1950s. In summarizing the themes of her literary outpouring, critic Hsinsheng C. Kao has identified three primary stages of development, which coincide with the three stages Gao Yuan experiences during his journey in America. The first of these is "rootlessness" or "drifting" that prompts feelings of "cultural vulnerability."<sup>53</sup> These terms aptly describe Gao Yuan's disorientation when he first lands on American soil: the absence of his twin brother immediately instills feelings of panic and unbelonging, heightened by his inability to communicate linguistically and his corporeal vulnerability in the face of physical danger. He is quite literally, to borrow one of Chaudhuri's definitions of the geopathic figure, "out of place."<sup>54</sup>

His displacement is materialized physically onstage through the genius of the set-design concept: as Gao Yuan rises from the stage floor, set pieces begin to move onto the stage "independently," completely disorienting him. He wanders around the stage trying to avoid being overrun by the gigantic white pieces revolving on casters that resemble children's Fisher-Price toy buildings. At points throughout the play, these pieces move again into various formations or disappear altogether to allow open space for seaside and other locales. During the chaotic car chase, shoot-out, and fight sequences at the climax of the play, the set pieces move about swiftly and erratically, at once concealing and exposing—and endangering—the participants. This simple stage concept of an onslaught of similar and yet unfamiliar buildings taking on agency of their own—thereby completely overwhelming and alienating the uninitiated visitor—greatly enhances the intensity of Gao Yuan's geopathology.

Gao's sense of being adrift is accentuated by the fact that this new land makes him painfully aware of his otherness while simultaneously seeking to subsume him in a culture of homogeneity, something Chaudhuri identifies as a hallmark of American multiculturalism. According to Chaudhuri, America's claim to privilege tolerance and diversity becomes paradoxical in relation to its resistance to heterogeneity: "American . . . myths of infinite openness, of endless progress, of unlimited opportunity—are bought at the price of a crushing, numbing homogeneity."<sup>55</sup> America connotes dispersal,

dissolution, progress, and conformity—an articulation of otherness which is captured “within a web of sameness disguised as difference.”<sup>56</sup> This view of American society is supported by Gao’s inability to differentiate between good citizens (such as the young men who attempt to help him and the professor) and bad (the gang that mugs him and Wen Jun), and even helps to explain the professor’s and Susan’s inability to distinguish Gao Shan from Gao Yuan. As the ensemble becomes group after group of minor characters with little in the way of costume change, we begin to imagine the sea of sameness on which Gao Yuan is afloat and made keenly aware of his own difference, in spite of the fact that he learns quickly from the alien culture how to disguise it. The dialectic of his ability to adapt to—but his inability to accept—this strange brand of American interculturalism releases his internalized nationalism as a logical response, a survival tactic that becomes necessary because in the process of negotiating the mores of this new place, Gao’s very identity comes into crisis. The glossing over of difference in the American version of diversity (enhanced by the aforementioned refusal to mark cultural difference through costume and makeup) threatens to eradicate Gao’s sense of self altogether.

Indeed, this phase of “cultural confrontation” which culminates in “identity confusion” is that identified by Kao as the second stage of development in Yu Lihua’s writings.<sup>57</sup> It is also identified by Chaudhuri as a contemporary reiteration of the classic interrogation of identity: “Who one is and who one can be are . . . a function of *where* one is and how one experiences that place . . . [T]he new version of ‘who am I?’ is firmly anchored in a new form of ‘where am I?’”<sup>58</sup> In *Going Abroad* the trope of the twin protagonists is utilized to enhance this identity crisis, which for Gao Yuan is most intense when he is continually cast in the role of his brother by utter strangers who seem to know him intimately; it is best expressed when he and Susan are dancing at her birthday party:

SUSAN: You’ve forgotten? You’ve forgotten everything?

GAO YUAN: Please forgive me. I’ve . . . I’ve even forgotten myself.

SUSAN: Are you joking?

GAO YUAN: It’s true. For example . . . what is my name?

SUSAN: Silly child, Gao Shan. You are my dearest Gao Shan! (*Kisses him, then releases him*)

GAO YUAN (*confused*): . . . I am Gao Shan? Then, where did I go? I am here, then where did Gao Shan go? *Aiya*, what a mess. No, I must leave! No. If I do that, the professor and young lady will be hurt. My brother is really a disappointment—he’s got it so good here, why would he want to leave? If

he's gonna leave, he should at least say hi first! It's not right. First I need to find out where my brother is! But how can I ask?: "Excuse me, where did I go?" Can I say that? *Ai!* This play is really hard to act, there's just no way . . . !<sup>59</sup>

Again, a Brechtian *Verfremdung* aesthetic is exercised and heightened, in that the actor self-reflexively indicates both his and his character's performative embodiment of the Self that is Other: Gao's image of himself as an actor in a play enacts a doubled doubling, since he actually *is* an actor in a play, thus tripling the Self contained in one body; it continues while he is at the beach with Susan later:

SUSAN: Gao! Gao! Where are you? (*Searching*)

(GAO YUAN *swims. He climbs the bank and lies on the sand.*)

GAO YUAN: They say that living is just like playing a role, but it is really hard to play another person. These past few days, even though I've had food and drink, love and pain, I still feel uncomfortable; always pretending I am my brother. If this continues, there will be two Gao Shans and Gao Yuan won't even exist anymore.<sup>60</sup>

Gao Yuan experiences both a doubling and splitting of the self, a kind of schizophrenia that ultimately threatens to erase his original identity completely. Chaudhuri isolates this schizophrenia as one of the by-products of immigrant geopathology, providing in her description an uncanny summary of Gao Yuan's entire experience:

[I]ll-placement . . . affects every part of immigrant experience, coloring everything seen and felt, producing a sort of split self, even a schizophrenia: . . . The schizophrenia of immigrant experience begins, as does exile, with a violent and painful rupture . . . After the break comes a lesson in loneliness, in the numerous forms and qualities of loneliness, and of course the slow, dawning sense of loss.<sup>61</sup>

According to Chaudhuri's vocabulary of geopathology, the phases of "rootlessness" and "identity confusion" that Kao locates in Yu Lihua's literary characters are equivalent to a "victimage of location," the principle that identifies place as the central dilemma of the protagonist. Its resolution comes through a subsequent phase that Chaudhuri calls a "heroism of departure"<sup>62</sup> (in Kao's parlance, a "homecoming" or "awakening," as the third stage in Yu's writings are defined), which emphasizes integration and inclusive-

ness.<sup>63</sup> The geopathic figure at least recognizes the need for an eventual departure or homecoming, even if it is not enacted. Thus, many protagonists of geopathic dramas resemble the picaro figure of the picaresque novel, in which the hero leaves his home, embarks on a journey, and returns with a transformed perspective, usually one that idealizes the homeland of his origin.

This is precisely the awareness Gao Yuan has arrived at by the end of *The Great Going Abroad*. As one critic summarized:

At first, he looks at the Western world through the traditional perspective and consciousness of a Chinese person; but in this capitalist society of mutual deception, he runs up against stonewalls everywhere . . . In the end, . . . at a loss under the intermingling feelings of love and hate, he steps upon the path of return to his native land.<sup>64</sup>

His brother murdered and the murderers avenged, there is nothing left for him in this strange, unwelcoming land. He has reached the depths of loneliness, has seen both the Other and the Self in a new revelatory light, and is exhausted from the effort. Dispossessed of his wealth and security, he has little choice but to gather up his huge loss and hard-won wisdom and return home. Scenes such as that between Gao Yuan and the professor—along with the performance of an idealistic universalism represented by the dance sequence and international banner that close the play—embrace the inclusiveness and integration that Kao locates as central to Yu Lihua's later works.

If integration is an antidote to exile, then it bears repeating that the very making of *Going Abroad* can be considered as Wang Gui's reenactment of Gao Yuan's traumatic journey that is in turn a reflection of the director's own experience of exile. Though never having lived outside of mainland China, Wang has led a life of "internal exile" throughout his artistic career, particularly since 1985 and the *W.M.* controversy.

Consideration of internal or metaphorical exile in relation to more traditional geographical separation from one's homeland is a recent topic of Western literary debate, and the definition of exile is expanding as appreciation of both the intellectual isolation of repressive politics and the legitimacy of nonphysical cultural ties increases. Kao, for example, includes writer Zhong Xiaoyang in a study of contemporary Chinese women writers, *Nativism Overseas*, even though she has never lived in China.<sup>65</sup> And Rosmarie T. Morewedge, in an essay on the German novel, offers a "looser definition" of exile that includes "the attitudes of writers who [feel] no longer at home in their native country either because of official disapproval or because of their own convictions."<sup>66</sup> The volume in which Morewedge's chapter appears, *Ex-*

*ile in Literature*, includes an introduction that details the evolution of the term “exile,” including the recent reconfiguration of the concept:

In the twentieth century totalitarian regimes have produced a different type of exile often called internal exile. The distinction between expatriation and internal exile has been recognized, and both have been practiced since ancient times . . . “exile can occur without one’s being driven from a home.”<sup>67</sup>

Of the many plays in which Wang Gui has collaborated as writer and/or director, *Going Abroad* is the most emblematic of exile itself, not only because it isolates the experience of one man’s traumatic venture overseas (while providing insight regarding the exilic experiences of fellow dislocated Chinese citizens), but also because of the “exiling” of the very production itself. As detailed at the beginning of this chapter, the collaborative process that produced the play is a complicated map of literal and aesthetic migrations, both on behalf of the financial investor, the key designers and other creators, the actors, and the performances themselves. Wang Gui and Wang Peigong are political outcasts who risk their freedom with each new project; as internal exiles in the intellectual community, the product of their collaboration became a literal object of exile on the artistic landscape, traveling continuously to remote provinces (and quietly to a limited and barely public engagement in a major city) in order to avoid political censorship. The resonance of the play on multiple levels, evidenced here through several aspects of the play’s plot, characterization, aesthetic and performative elements, persists in terms of the motif of exile: the exiled performances echo the exiled character of Gao Yuan, who echoes the internal exile of his creators.

The play as a whole offers a paradoxical view of exile itself and of the Occidental land and its inhabitants that contain and embody exile. Although America is a dangerous and destabilizing place, Americans for the most part are positive figures, as represented by the professor and his daughter. Sisi is the most significant exception, and yet her ethnicity is somewhat ambiguous, as she is coded neither as clearly Chinese nor as particularly American. Wen Jun as a site of cultural transgression is a hybrid space: he is racially Chinese, and as a foreign transplant is susceptible to absorption of negative aspects of American society due to his prolonged stay (perhaps upbringing) in the United States. A similar character, Chinese American Paul Ding, will be examined in the next chapter, on *Bird Men*.

This availability of contrasting readings in interpreting the action and meaning of the play allows *Going Abroad* to fulfill cross purposes: to adhere, on one hand, to the superficial message regarding the potential social ills of

excessive foreign influence while at the same time addressing Wang Peigong and Wang Gui's deeper intention of exploring the mutually self-destructive tendency of Chinese citizens that has troubled them since the Cultural Revolution. In addition to carrying these two rather serious messages, the play also cleverly parodies the Chinese *chuguo* tidal wave and overall craze for domestic appropriation of things American that prevailed at the time and has continued since.

Shanghai theatre critic Lin Xi saw behind the play's mask of anti-Americanism, choosing to emphasize the production's accomplishments in artistic innovation over its thematic content.<sup>68</sup> His analysis deserves citation at length because it raises important aspects of theatrical innovation in which *Going Abroad* made genuinely original contributions, and also offers useful detail regarding production elements that were handled in an experimental manner, as well as reflecting a shift in analysis from content to form:

Even though the story of *The Great Going Abroad* is a bit "out of fashion" in that promulgating the disadvantages of capitalist society is not a new theme, the director/playwright's point does not seem to be to elicit deep thinking, but rather the development of artistic method itself. . . . *Going Abroad's* accomplishment is obvious: it not only retains some traits of spoken drama, but also combines good use of musical opera, dance, classical indigenous opera, film and television. It has special qualities in terms of set design, sound effects, lighting, and costume creation, breaking through former models of stage play expression and giving the audience a tremendous feeling of "stretching" . . . In terms of martial arts, this play organically mixes together the somersaults of traditional opera with the skill of film and television combat, and even matches modern sound effects to the fights, making it dynamic and realistic; this makes the pace of the performance coincide with the pace of the times.<sup>69</sup>

In addition to the innovations detailed by Lin above, Wang also devised karaoke-style song sequences, with lead actors singing into microphones to prerecorded music (and also lip-synching to prerecorded vocals) of pop songs by celebrity singers written specifically for the play. He also incorporated slide projections throughout, and commissioned scenic designer Xu Xiang to create the playful, distorted set pieces described earlier. One of the most ingenious innovations was undoubtedly the absurdist approach to physical scale in the play, particularly in the form of under- and oversized props that serve to elicit both humor (as in the use of handheld toy cars with realistic sound effects for car chases) and grotesque horror (the gigantic

knives with which victims are butchered for their internal organs). The world of the play is at once playful and eerie, colorful and morose, energetically charged and weighted with doom.

These aesthetic paradoxes are very much in keeping with Wang Gui's overall artistic style and outlook. He describes his sets as "xieyi-style," borrowing Huang Zuolin's term, and categorizes his plays as "relatively coarse and unrefined [with] a folk flavor (*minjian secai*) to them, and more fun in terms of language, etc."<sup>70</sup> In an essay originally published in *Theatre News* (*Xiju bao*) in 1987 and subsequently reprinted in a 1988 collection of controversial plays and commentary from the mid-1980s, Wang surmised that the primary purpose of theatre of the future is to entertain.<sup>71</sup> Wang's plays are indeed noted for their entertainment value, and sometimes accordingly misjudged as frivolous (as I believe was the case with several colleagues at the Shanghai performances of *Going Abroad*). Lin Xi, in extolling the praises of this particular play, goes on to defend it against its detractors in this regard:

Some say that *Going Abroad* tries too hard to entertain and doesn't resemble a spoken drama, an opera, a dance piece, and they conclude that it isn't standard or normal. This kind of hypercriticism is unnecessary . . . *Going Abroad* does not adhere to one artistic style, and that is probably its strong point. From the point of view of the law of artistic development, isn't innovation the life and soul of the theatre?<sup>72</sup>

Wang Gui himself would heartily agree with Lin Xi. In fact, in his 1987 essay, Wang bravely asserted:

A theorist once said, "Innovation is breaking rules." These words have powerful logic. If we don't break through outmoded conventions, how can we set new standards?

He warned that if theatre continued to adhere blindly to the "superficial propaganda and education model," it would lose touch with the times and its contemporary audience to the point that "once theatre's function of serving real society weakens, it will become a destitute phenomenon."<sup>73</sup> These are bold words from a man who had just suffered such humiliation in the wake of *W.M.*, but, as stated before, the mid-1980s were bold times, and artists spoke out more freely than they have ever since. As Wang reflects, "before and after 1985 many directors, after just one play, were looking through new eyes."<sup>74</sup>

Wang Gui's advice to directors of the mid-1980s serves as an apt summary of his mission as an artist, and his objective in creating and staging *The Great Going Abroad* a few years later: "Directors must fully trust their own exist-

tence and, with distinct creative personalities, break through the sealed up burdens in their hearts in order to face this open world.<sup>75</sup> Wang Gui is a director who has heeded his own advice and shows no signs of changing his philosophy. During his reflections on *Going Abroad*, Wang described his next project, a stage adaptation of Wang Meng's novel *The Secret Murder of 3322* (*Ansha 3322*):

Right now I am organizing a few small entrepreneurs who went to film and theatre academies and after graduation could not make a living, so opened a restaurant. They want to act, but not in those *zhu xuanlü* (main melody) plays. So I said I'd create a script for them—but after I wrote it they were afraid. So right now they are thinking it over . . .<sup>76</sup>

And thus Wang's unique theatre of internal exile continues, inspiring like-minded and similarly exiled artists to take the risk of joining him in crossing boundaries into uncharted seas. Like Gao Yuan, Wang emerges from such projects sobered by their challenges and disappointments, but unshaken in his belief in both the collective universality of human experience and the potential of a single individual to make an enormous difference.<sup>77</sup>





## Cultural Cross-Examination: *Bird Men*

Although they undoubtedly expose the fine turns of the European “gaze,” the arguments that set up “West” and “East” in terms of spectator and exhibit inevitably dwarf the fact that “the East,” too, is a spectator who is equally caught up in the dialectic of seeing.

—Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions*

The layers of meaning in Wang Peigoing and Wang Gui’s play *The Great Going Abroad* reflect the transitional period of 1989–1991, when idealism about the United States became complicated by the aftermath of June Fourth. Simultaneously expressing antiestablishment resistance and orthodox neo-nationalism, the two Wangs engaged in a practice that was not unfamiliar to them. As established artists with national reputations and a history of risky projects with political themes, they wisely avoided public attention and major cities, thereby dodging the spotlight of government censorship.

In contrast, Guo Shixing was an amateur playwright notching his first public production with *Bird Men* (*Niaoren*) in 1993. Furthermore, his play was written specifically *for* and *about* the capital city, rather than avoiding it, and it was produced specifically for the nation’s premiere theatre company—the Beijing People’s Art Theatre—a coup for any playwright, not to mention a novice. Despite its deliberate plunge into the mainstream, however, *Bird Men*, like *Going Abroad*, is a play that was scripted in 1991, with direct references to June Fourth and its consequences. Its production in 1993, however, situates it in a significantly different context than *Going Abroad*’s staging in 1991, when artistic repression after June Fourth was still in full force (the period of extreme government surveillance as a response to the 1989 pro-democracy demonstrations did not end until Deng Xiaoping’s economic

reforms of early 1992). Opening two years after it was first penned, and two years later than *Going Abroad*, *Bird Men* reached the public during a period of simultaneous relaxation of artistic control and resurgence of national pride, both fueled (the latter rather ironically) by China's establishment of "special economic zones" embracing competitive market capitalism.

Such subtleties were not lost on Guo Shixing, who, like Wang and Wang, masked political metaphors with overt nationalism and de rigueur anti-Americanism; unlike his fellow Beijingers, however, Guo handed his script to the top administrators at the most orthodox theatre in his own backyard, allowing it to reach unprecedented numbers of urban patrons. *Bird Men* broke all box office records, running for two years to sold-out audiences, including many patrons who paid scalpers exorbitant prices to see the play.<sup>1</sup> After its successful run in the capital, the production toured, and filled houses in, other cities, including Shanghai, Hong Kong, and even Taipei, Taiwan.

While *China Dream* reflects the *chuguo* fever of the mid to late-1980s when China was sending out its best and its brightest to contribute to national modernization by pursuing Western education, and *Going Abroad* reflects the post-June Fourth brain drain (*xueliu*) by echoing the theme of citizens venturing overseas for the benefits of Westernization while also emphasizing the perils of such experiences and valorizing the impetus to return, *Bird Men* goes one step further by calling home its exiled children—even those born and raised abroad. Although it does contain a consistent political critique throughout, and strong overtones of June Fourth, Guo's play also humorously explores the complex rupture of prolonged separation from one's "homeland," emphasizing the possibility of social alienation and risk of failed acculturation upon return, thereby aligning itself with the concurrent national urgency of calling back wayward citizens, particularly from the United States. It is fitting, then, that the travel of the Occidentally Other characters in *Bird Men* is from West to East rather than vice versa, the case in most other plays exploring such cross-cultural transnational encounters. Paul Ding, the protagonist in *Bird Men* does participate in the *chuguo* experience, but in reverse: the *guo* (country) he *chus* (leaves) is the United States, and his destination is China.

Along with shifting emphasis from the experience of Chinese citizens venturing overseas to those "returning" to their "native" place, Guo Shixing's play *Bird Men* also returns China to the center, positioning it once again as *Zhongguo*, the "central kingdom," even overtly reinscribing the traditional tribute system for foreign visitor/invasers discussed earlier. Through plot, staging, character, dialogue, and aesthetic innovation in the form of grafting *jingju* (Beijing opera) onto the spoken drama in its final and climactic third

act, *Bird Men* locates Chinese culture at the center of the play, suggesting its power over Western—particularly American—influences.

Rather than a Chinese protagonist seeking to make sense of the United States, as was the case in *China Dream* and *The Great Going Abroad*, the immigrant/exile figure in *Bird Men* is Chinese by race only: he is an American of Chinese descent seeking to make sense of China, his “homeland” that he is visiting for the first time. Although some reviews and other articles in the press implied that the character Paul Ding is a Chinese citizen who lived abroad for an extended period—and the actor who played the role, Pu Cunxin, regarded him as “a mainlander, a Chinese person”—playwright Guo Shixing verified that he is not an overseas Chinese, but rather an Asian American:

He is a *Meiji de Huaren* (Chinese American). He was born in America. He doesn't understand China. He *is* a Westerner. His only connection to China is his race—his yellow race—his mother or father is from China, but he has no other connection to China. He is an American. So he has roots in China, but the way he looks at things in China is exactly the same as a Westerner. He misunderstands just as much.<sup>2</sup>

In an effort to understand his “native” people and culture from which he has been estranged his entire life, Paul Ding travels to China and examines a group of elderly retirees raising birds at a Beijing park. His imperialist approach to observing (in effect, “seeing” for the first time) his root culture—which here is represented by primitive cultural practices such as bird-raising and Beijing opera—immediately calls into question whether he is actually Chinese at all.

In her book *Primitive Passions*, Rey Chow explores images of the “primitive” in contemporary Chinese filmmaking in an effort to illuminate aspects of “being seen” (as *object*) that are ordinarily subsumed in privileging the act of “seeing” (which emphasizes the viewing *subject*) and thereby isolate instances of how visibility operates in the non-West beyond the common Orientalist reduction to “passive spectacle.”<sup>3</sup> Chow raises several significant points that can be useful in analyzing images of the American Other in *Bird Men*, including use of primitivism as a vehicle for negotiating national and cultural identity, consideration of visibility as an important aspect of cultural production, and the overlooked role of China as *producer* of images of the foreign Other (and not merely Orientalized victim)—images that reveal the paradoxical nature of China’s national self-identity.

Chow links emergence of primitive images in Chinese film to moments of cultural crisis, fantasies of lost origins, articulation of the unknowable,

and the dialectical status of China as “simultaneously victim and empire.”<sup>4</sup> All of these aspects of primitivism can be employed as points of entry into the delightfully complex dynamic of Guo’s play, in which the Western Other interacts with the Chinese Self in a cross-cultural interplay that positions the West as both objectified entity of the Chinese gaze and an actual lens through which Chinese national identity can be more sharply focused.

*Bird Men* was written as the second part of what Guo calls “the loafer trilogy” (*xianren sanbuqu*), referring to the leisurely pastimes of breeding goldfish, taming birds, and playing chess that consume the characters in the respective plays. Along with being an avid bird-lover, the amateur playwright also enjoys the common Chinese hobby of cultivating goldfish and comes from a long line of superior chess players (an ancestor of Guo’s in the Ming-Qing period was national chess champion, and his grandfather Guo Xuchu and grandfather’s brother Guo Tisheng were both modern chess champions in China).

The first part of the trilogy is *Fish Men* (*Yüren*) and the third is *Chess Men* (*Qiren*), though the second play, *Bird Men*, was the first to be publicly produced (*Chess Men* was staged by the same director in a smaller black-box-style space at the Beijing People’s Art Theatre in 1996). The theatre’s decision to feature the unconventional work of an unknown playwright on its main stage was a considerable departure from its usual practices. Guo originally became involved with the theatre as a critic for the *Beijing Evening News* (*Beijing wanbao*), in 1980, in which he had a popular column called “Chat Room” (“Liaozhai”) under the pen name Shan Haike.<sup>5</sup> When he mentioned to Lin Zhaohua (a senior administrator at the theatre as well as its most esteemed stage director) that he was thinking of trying his hand at playwriting, Lin urged him to follow this creative impulse and offered to read the results.

Guo wrote his first play, *Fish Men*, in a single week during the 1989 Tiananmen Square democracy demonstrations, and though its strong political content was heavily veiled in symbolism, it could not get past theatre censorship due to the political climate in the capital.<sup>6</sup> Despite several revised drafts, the script was continually rejected by Beijing People’s Art Theatre president Yu Shizhi, so Lin suggested Guo move on to another project. Though he had begun to work on the script for *Chess Men*, a play that would explore the community of devoted Chinese chess players in which Guo himself was raised, his recent discovery of the obsessions of bird-raising prompted him to set aside the *Chess Men* idea and first pen *Bird Men*, which he did in just four days. His keen interest in birds began in 1989 when he brought his young daughter to a park and bought her an expensive canary. According to Guo, in the next two years, he became so preoccupied with

bird-raising that he almost allowed human life to pass him by, so one summer morning in 1991 he set all his birds free and picked up a pen to write *Bird Men*.<sup>7</sup>

*Bird Men* explores “conflicts” between Chinese and Western cultures, especially in regard to the prospect of their coexistence in one site: China in general, a park in Beijing specifically, and the Westernized Chinese individual in varying degrees particularly. This cross-cultural contact occurs during an era of rapid economic and social transformation fueled largely by increased contact with the United States and other Western societies and peoples. In a March 1994 radio interview, Guo explained:

The fact is China is facing up to the introduction of a great deal of Western ideas. It’s a good thing compared to our ignorance before. However, when a different culture enters a country from outside, it may have conflicts with the local culture. It takes time for two different cultures to exist peacefully *in one place* . . . people’s wisdom in Eastern as well as Western culture also has its down side, which is sometimes very funny, and is fit to perform on stage.<sup>8</sup>

In *Bird Men* the Occident is represented through three separate characters in the play: an ornithologist with a Westernized education, a Chinese American psychoanalyst, and a Caucasian American delegate from the International Bird Preservation Organization. All of them visit the same park in Beijing to observe—for differing reasons—the men who spend their leisure time there raising and training birds. The “leader” of the birdmen is San Ye (Third Master or Master San), a retired Beijing opera actor of painted-face roles (*hualian*) who is nostalgic for his old days in the theatre troupe. In the absence of a true disciple to whom to dispense his artistic expertise, he “adopts” fellow birdman Pangzi (Fatso) as his protégé, and also enlists a wandering newcomer from Anhui—as well as training caged birds to sing in unnatural styles, which is suggested as an extension of his obsessive need to continue the opera tradition.

Throughout the play, the three men representing the West fall victim to the biting wit of Fatso, whose strong antiforeign sentiments surface repeatedly, as reflected at one point when American-born Paul Ding (the psychoanalyst) makes a critical comment about the United States and Fatso adds, “I feel so happy whenever I hear someone say America is bad and that the Chinese there all want to come back.”<sup>9</sup>

Dr. Chen, the ornithologist, embodies a negative stereotype of Westernized education: he is expert at scientifically observing the behavior of the birdmen and classifying the various bird species, but he neither grasps the

Chinese bird-appreciation culture itself nor knows how to raise birds himself. In Fatso's estimation, Chen passes judgment on an activity he hardly understands. Critical of the men in the park for their inhumane treatment of the birds, Dr. Chen is visiting precisely because of an obsessive search for the only surviving bird of a certain species that he wishes to capture in order to display in a museum.

The American representative from the International Bird Preservation Organization, named simply "Charlie," arrives with a young female interpreter (Luo Man) for his visit to the park, and several scenes later returns married to her. He awards Dr. Chen a medal for his efforts to stuff and display rare bird species, while joining him in reprimanding the birdmen for their confinement and manipulation of the birds in violation of the birds' natural rights. Here, a political allegory that recurs throughout the play begins to take shape: one level on which the play can be interpreted positions the elderly birdmen as China's aging orthodox leadership, oppressing its intellectuals and denying its citizens basic human rights in general. In this reading, Chen, Ding, and Charlie all represent Western (especially American) consciousness and criticism of such practices.

A character with virtually no agency in the play, Charlie is described in the script as a generic "golden-haired, green-eyed" (*jinfa biyan*, more colloquially translated as "blond and blue-eyed") foreigner, but in the Beijing People's Art Theatre production he was clearly identified through dialogue as American. Although not wearing the blond wig required by Guo's character description, the actor playing Charlie had a thick beard glued to his face, Western eyeglasses, and a loud plaid suit coat. When speaking in Chinese, Charlie uses elementary sentences with a thick foreign accent, prompting mimicry from Fatso. His simpleminded questions in his futile attempt to comprehend Chinese bird culture solicit responses from the birdmen that, on the surface, are just as trite but have a telling subtext in terms of the political reading the play invites (see pl. 5):

(LUO *interprets for* CHARLIE)

CHARLIE: What if the chain strangles the bird? [ . . . ] What if it falls and no one is around to help, will it die?

FATSO: In China nothing is impossible—*except* no one being around. He [Master San] will hold it up all day long.

CHARLIE: (*Amazed*) All day? He doesn't do anything else? Then, how does he get by?

FATSO: You should be asking if he didn't hold it up all day, how would he get by?<sup>10</sup>

Charlie's concern reflects the potentially grave consequences of excessive ideological censorship, while Fatso's response acknowledges the government's Foucauldian omnipotence, while at the same time making a humorous social reference to the nation's overpopulation. The exchange also alludes to the fact that, as an unemployed Beijing opera actor, Master San is suffering the effects of China's theatre "crisis." The depressed situation of theatre in China is never explicitly explained in the play, but Chinese audiences certainly were well aware of it. Lively discussions throughout the 1980s about the many aspects—economic, aesthetic, social, and political—of the "crisis" (*weiji*), which affected both traditional opera forms and spoken drama, continue today. In this light, the box-office and touring success of Guo's play becomes compellingly ironic. The success of *Bird Men* prompted seventy-three-year-old esteemed theatre artist Huang Zongjiang to reevaluate his gloomy predictions about the deepening crisis, and the production was hailed as a "timely blessing to China's declining theatre."<sup>11</sup>

During the second act of the play, Paul Ding turns the park into the Birdmen Psychological Rehabilitation Clinic and "psychoanalyzes" the birdmen (see pl. 6). The following is a typical example of Ding's "Freudian" analysis and self-positioning as enlightened salvific Freud figure:

This many people spending their lives here with birds is a reflection of the subconscious problems embedded deep within the psychology of our entire nation. If I can make a breakthrough, not only a few bird-lovers, but also an ancient glorious nation, will be saved.<sup>12</sup>

Fed up with the psychoanalyst's neo-imperialist discourse, Master San turns the tables on Paul Ding in the third act, by performing a court scene from a Beijing opera and literally putting Ding "on trial." Ding is verbally belittled and physically beaten for his diagnoses of the birdmen, including his assessment that Fatso has a homicidal Oedipal complex in which Master San is the father figure and potential victim. The published version of the play ends with Dr. Chen and Paul Ding detained in shackles, and Charlie and his new wife being forcibly driven from the park by the staff-bearing birdmen, who play supporting court roles to Master San's Judge Bao in the opera scenario.

In the unpublished ending of the play, which was used in the production (and apparently penned by director Lin Zhaohua)<sup>13</sup> the domestic political allegory becomes as potent as the anti-American allusion. After the foreigners are driven from the park, Ding ominously strikes a table and wanders off-stage, at which point a character named Manager Sun bicycles onstage and

proceeds to unlock all the birdcages. Surprisingly, none of the birds is willing to, or knows how to, fly because they have been caged for so long. This ending suggests the plight of writers and other Chinese intellectuals who endure drastic phases of political censure and repression, and then are too afraid or spiritually empty to produce original creative thought when direct censure is temporarily lifted. Combining internal and transcultural meanings, this ending can also be interpreted as reflecting the impotence of China as a nation (or a people) in the aftermath of its phases of colonization or self-imposed isolation. In all press articles and interviews, Guo Shixing skillfully dodges political interpretations of the play, validating them only to the extent that he suggests the play can be interpreted on many levels. Critic He Xilai similarly attempts to dissuade such musings, warning that such symbolism is “empty dazzle” and, if understood as the theme of the play in its entirety, can “greatly reduce the symbolic meaning of the birdmen . . . and fall short of the great pains taken by the playwright and director.”<sup>14</sup>

Each of the characters and moments in the play are rich with complex cultural and political symbolic meaning, and many semiotic aspects of the production that are absent in the dramatic text invite analysis as well. All three of the aforementioned characters who stand in for the Occident are *literally* marginalized in the blocking: Paul Ding sits at the edge of the performance space—fully visible to the audience but unnoticed by the other characters—until his entrance; Dr. Chen is constantly being pushed aside or ordered to leave by Fatso and thus watches the action of the play from behind a group of trees at stage right, peering through thick glasses and scrawling in a tiny notepad; and Charlie, rarely present, always enters flanked by his tour-guide-turned-wife from stage left and is almost never brought to center stage or permitted to speak independently. Furthermore, when these characters do inhabit the playing space—even marginally—they disturb and disrupt the environment. Foreign penetration of this uniquely Chinese cultural arena results in unharmonious and radical change. Ding’s infiltration in particular is traumatically transformative: he reinscribes Orientalist colonialist strategies by purchasing the park, choosing patients, and rereading their indigenous bird-raising practice as a degenerative disease from which he must save them.

Situated in the midst of drastic change in Deng Xiaoping’s national agenda and in the wake of June Fourth, *Bird Men* alighted on the horizon of cultural crisis; focusing on the indigenous Beijing traditions of bird-raising and Beijing opera, the play enacts longings for an originary past that rendered China an ungraspable entity to its Western intruders who reduced the once



gloriously superior society to a backward “sick man” resulting in China’s paradoxical identity crisis. As Chow elaborates:

The two sides of primitivism go hand in hand: the aestheticizing of old China as “ancient” and “backward” cannot be understood without the images of modern self-strengthening and community building that continue to pervade nationalistic cultural productions with the insistence on the firstness and uniqueness of what is Chinese.<sup>15</sup>

The mise-en-scène throughout *Bird Men* is the corner of a park in Beijing where the old men gather in their leisure time to discuss and raise birds. This “primitive” practice takes on multiple symbolic meanings. Guo specifies that one of the options for staging the play is to use a small space and transform the entire playing area into a birdcage; such an approach irrefutably reduces the human characters to birds themselves and urges interpretation of the play as political allegory.

If staged the way Guo originally intended, the men become caged birds before the audiences’ very eyes: the stage directions include ongoing construction of a huge birdcage enveloping the entire playing area, by “workers” who complete it and drape huge canvas sheets to conceal it at the end of act 1 (during which Ding has taken over the park). Act 2 begins with, literally, the “training” of Ding’s newly acquired patients (the birdmen) in which they perform morning exercises in preparation for the psychoanalysis sessions, which comprise most of the act. The sheets are then removed for act 3, signifying the reversal about to take place, in which the patients/birdmen resist being caged and controlled and turn the tables on their “master,” Paul Ding.

Thus, in keeping with the two possible political meanings suggested earlier (one that is antiestablishment, the other anti-imperialist), the birdmen (representing Chinese citizens or China as a nation), purchased and caged like birds by the hegemonic Dr. Ding (the CCP or the West/America) fight back against their oppressor by using indigenous culture and logic. A further plot development—Master San’s “capture” of an outsider from Anhui whom he subsequently forcibly trains in Beijing opera against his will—implies China’s emulation of its hegemonic oppressor in its treatment of its own minority peoples.<sup>16</sup>

The Beijing People’s Art Theatre chose not to adopt Guo’s suggested experimental staging approach but rather to produce the three-act play in its large proscenium theatre, transforming the revolving stage alternately to two sections of the park. In keeping with its national reputation and audience expectations, *Bird Men* was presented in a production style best identified as standard realism. Articles praising the production described it as having the

same “flavor” as the theatre’s classics like Lao She’s *Teahouse* (*Chaguan*) and *Top Restaurant under Heaven* (*Tianxia di yi lou*) and as “depicting a truthful image of a group of present-day elderly Beijingers.”<sup>17</sup> *Bird Men* is considered to have joined the elite repertoire of the Beijing People’s Art Theatre’s best work, and several of its actors (gathered from the top talents in the troupe) won awards for their convincing and entertaining performances.

Most assessments of the play regarded it as adhering primarily to a realist mode, but did not know quite how to categorize the insertion of Beijing opera in the final act or the rather unlikely premise of the story (i.e., a Chinese American visitor taking over a park to establish a Freudian psychoanalytic rehabilitation clinic for its inhabitants). Thus, in articles advertising, praising, or critiquing the play, a wide range of terms was used to define its style, including “realistic,” “absurd,” and “experimental”; one theatre critic emphasized its combination of “modern,” “traditional,” “profound,” and “relaxed” styles, which make it appeal to the tastes of all audiences.<sup>18</sup> Director Lin Zhaohua described the play this way:

The style of this play is not realist, and it also does not belong to absurdism; it is a hybridization of the real and the ridiculous. Characters and language have humorous local color. The plot has great absurdity to it. The authentic and the fantastic are mutually joined. In today’s world, the more ridiculous things get, the more normal they appear, and conversely, what originally seemed normal often ends up with an incredible result. The greatest reality hides behind absurdity; that is precisely where *Bird Men*’s profundity lies.<sup>19</sup>

Critic Liu Zhangchun, noting that the audience’s engagement with the play is “bizarre” and “fun,” summarized its style in words very close to Lin’s:

The play reflects true life, and the plot of the story is not without absurd ingredients; true and false are mixed just right. Regarding whether the audience can accept his kind of absurdity, Guo Shixing calmly and confidently says, “There is absurdity in life itself, if people look carefully they will see it everywhere.”<sup>20</sup>

Close reading of such commentaries reveals that the use of the term “*huangdan*,” usually translated into English as “absurd,” particularly in theatre discourse (as in *huangdan zhuyi*, the Chinese term for absurdism in the sense of Theatre of the Absurd), is here more general, often equivalent to “fantastic” or “ridiculous” (other possible translations of the compound *huangdan*), rather than specifically referring to its theatrical and theoretical meaning. This is an important distinction, for without it, a reader of the

critical articles and playscript who has not witnessed the performance might misconstrue the genre of the play as belonging to the absurdist mode. The recurrence of the word “*huangdan*” in discussions of *Bird Men* suggests to a native speaker of English that the performance included absurdist theatrical elements (such as those applied in *The Great Going Abroad*), but it in fact did not.<sup>21</sup>

What seemed “absurd” to the critics and audiences was the inclusion of a Beijing opera scene and the unlikeliness of a Chinese American appropriating a bird park and forcing psychoanalysis on its patrons; the word *huangdan*, then, actually means “unusual” or “incredible” in this context. However, these situations in the world of the play are not particularly fantastical: as a retired opera actor longing for a return to his days of glory (and possibly approaching senility), Master San’s enacting a painted-face role from his old repertoire for the amusement of his fellow birdmen is not at all far-fetched; furthermore, the phenomenon of an American or other Westerner of Chinese heritage claiming an authentic “right” to land or economic possession of a Chinese business or residence is also not unusual. It is because the realism of the play is presented through comedy that it appears “ridiculous,” not because of the actual composition of the plot or its representation onstage. The events of the play are no more unrealistic than unusual plot elements in other realist plays, though they are considerably surprising and amusing.

In fact, a group of actual birdmen from Shanghai, each with several decades of bird-training experience and so devoted that they rarely venture out in the evening (because of their early morning obligations to their birds), were moved and validated by the experience of seeing the play—and regarded it as an extremely realistic depiction of their own experience:

The “birdmen” felt that all of the content before their eyes was very close to their own lives. The actors’ performances were also a kind of natural revelation, with the flavor of life, touching them deeply. Some of them said that seeing this play was like raising birds together with their brothers in Beijing . . . The “birdmen” said that the deepest impression this play gave them was its thoroughly meticulous, accurate, and enlightening depiction of the inner thoughts of birdraisers.<sup>22</sup>

The Beijing People’s Art Theatre’s production of *Bird Men* was presented in a mode entirely recognizable as conventional dramatic realism, particularly in terms of acting technique and technical production elements (set, lighting, sound, props, costume, makeup, etc.). The prop master, Nie Mingxin, was selected for a special award from the Beijing Cultural Bureau, along with several actors in the production. Among his contributions were live

birds, intricate antique birdcages, authentic Beijing opera swords and shackles, and over one hundred live trees. For the Shanghai production, an agreement was reached with Shanghai Botanical Gardens to borrow trees in order to avoid the convoy of five trucks required to transport the originals from the capital.<sup>23</sup>

Costumes and makeup were true-to-life, including the prerequisite facial hair for the male Caucasian American Other.<sup>24</sup> The sound design included recorded bird tracks as well as the warbling, chirping, and singing of live birds onstage. The lighting included naturalistic sunshine through the shadow-casting trees in levels ranging from peak morning light to late afternoon dusk. And the scores of live trees “planted” on the revolving stage presented alternating views of the most realistic set I have ever witnessed in theatre: the proscenium was actually completely transformed into a Beijing park.

Whether staging the play in the realist manner the Beijing People’s Art Theatre adopted or in the environmental/symbolic method recommended by the playwright, metaphorical connection of the Chinese citizen (particularly the intellectual) to a caged bird and of bird-training to Chinese cultural and political activity is unavoidable. The name of the play itself implies a conflation of man and his feathered friend, and the dialogue repeatedly asks us to consider the similarities, differences, and fine line between birds and people.<sup>25</sup>

In selecting this environment and juxtaposition as the basis for his play, Guo embraces a multiplicity of possibilities in terms of meaning and audience reception: Beijingers are close to this cultural practice, at least indirectly; Chinese outside the capital are familiar with and curious about it; foreigners are perplexed by but deeply interested in it. By introducing characters into the play who possess each of these subjectivities in varying degrees, Guo offers a kaleidoscope of possible readings of what it means to be both Self and Other.

Yang Lixin, the actor who portrayed Charlie (the only racially Other personage), opined that Guo inserted his highly undeveloped character in the play precisely to illuminate aspects of “Chineseness” through contrast with a Western Other. This is consistent, of course, with Edward Said’s contention in *Orientalism* that discursive Othering reveals more about the hegemonic subject than its object (in his case more about Europe than the Middle East).<sup>26</sup> It is important to recall here, however, Chow’s provocative proposition that “being-looked-at-ness, rather than the act of looking, constitutes the primary event in cross-cultural examination,”<sup>27</sup> and not be so hasty to interpret all representations of the foreign Other as gestures of self-articulation (that which Chow terms “autoethnography”), that we miss altogether what

that Self (China) is indeed saying about that which it Others (here, the West). As Chow points out, the process is an intricate give-and-take, rendering categories of “us” and “them” highly indiscernible: “‘viewed object’ is now looking at ‘viewing subject’ looking.”<sup>28</sup> The result in works like *Bird Men* is that the Chinese Self and foreign Other continuously reposition themselves and each other in an endless process of cultural cross-examination.

If we choose to look at the “golden-haired, green-eyed” character of Charlie in a more sophisticated manner than the black-haired, brown-eyed Chinese actor embodying and speaking for/as him, we must include the question of his name (which has a long tradition as a stereotype of black and Chinese Others in American literature, theatre, and film), the issue of his demeanor (particularly his use of Chinese language), his relationship to his female Chinese interpreter (shifting from professional to marital in record time), and the implications of his utterances, all of which combined offer a living, breathing, three-dimensional representation of a presumably sophisticated foreign tourist visiting Beijing. Nonetheless, as indicated earlier, he is belittled for his poor Mandarin pronunciation, ridiculed for his shallow understanding of Chinese bird-raising, and ultimately driven out of the park violently at the end of the play:

MASTER SAN: Who is making noise outside the palace?

FATSO: A woman of our court brings a barbarian to see you.

MASTER SAN: Throw them out!

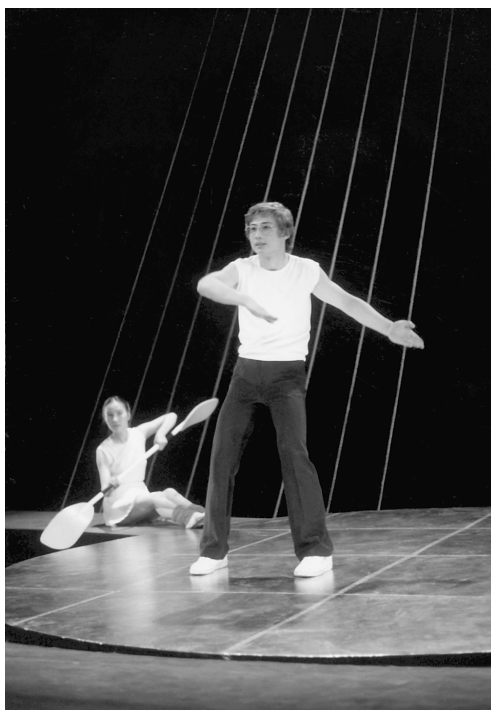
FATSO: This year is the Golden Year of Tourism; your Excellency should be courteous.

MASTER SAN: Bring them in. [To CHARLIE] Now hear ye, barbarian emissary. Return to your tribe and report to your chief. Tell him that the affairs of our Central Plain do not require the attention of outsiders.

[A long pause] Silence! Were it not for the diplomatic immunity you enjoy, you would have been in fear for your life! [To FATSO] Throw them out!<sup>29</sup>

This passage has strong political overtones as well; some of the lines omitted here include Master San’s order to chain and execute “criminals” to which Charlie responds, “I protest. This is trampling human rights!” and Fatso replies, “We cannot discipline our children in front of guests.” Here, the references to June Fourth are unmistakable, and Charlie ironically represents not only the intrusive Western “conscience” during the waning moments of China’s dynastic glory in the face of foreign aggression but also the enlightened conscience of the June Fourth generation who speaks as Other to its own oppressive and feudal government.

*Plate 1. Mingming and John Hodges at the canoe club. Huang Zuolin's theory of xieyi was manifested in the production, shown here through the adoption of influences from Beijing opera. (Courtesy Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center)*



*Plate 2. Zhiqiang and Mingming express their love for one another nonverbally in a scene from China Dream (Zhongguo meng, 1987). (Courtesy Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center)*





*Plate 3. Gao Yuan is visited by the ghost of his murdered twin brother Gao Shan in The Great Going Abroad (Da liuyang, 1991). (Courtesy Zhang Qiuge)*



*Plate 4. After “crashing” their cars, Gao Yuan holds Wen Jun at gun-point while Wen conveys his dialogue by playing the trumpet. A set piece of diminished scale is on left; toy cars used in the preceding car chase are in foreground. (Courtesy Zhang Qiuge)*



*Plate 5. In the 1993 production Bird Men (Niaoren), Fatso (center) mocks American ornithologist Charlie for his superficial understanding of Chinese bird culture. Charlie marries his Chinese interpreter (right). (Courtesy Beijing People's Art Theatre)*



*Plate 6. As Paul Ding (center) takes over the bird park in act I, his female assistant unveils a sign reading "Birdmen Psychological Rehabilitation Clinic." (Courtesy Beijing People's Art Theatre)*





*Plate 7. In the opera trial scene in act 3 of Bird Men, Fatso (right) prepares to execute Paul Ding (in shackles, left) using a zha (a large blade that chops convicted criminals in half). Master San (center) supervises as Judge Bao. (Courtesy Beijing People's Art Theatre)*

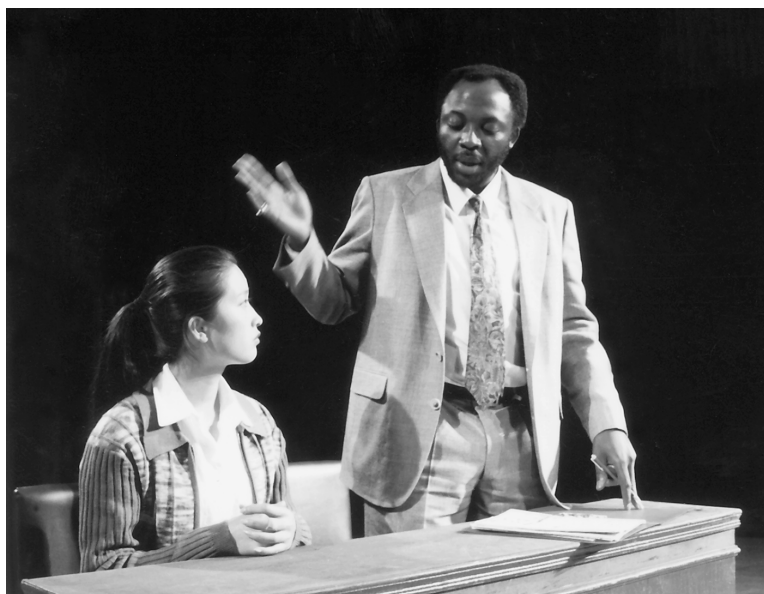


*Plate 8. A scene from Student Wife (Peidu furen, 1995) featuring all four characters. From left: Liao Shen (Xu Zheng), Jordan Speare (Robert Daly), Jiang Zhuojun (Geng Ge), and Lucia Speare (Basia Wajs). (Courtesy Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center)*

*Plate 9. Actors Robert Daly, Basia Wajs, and Geng Ge during a rehearsal for Student Wife. (Courtesy Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center)*



*Plate 10. In the original 1997 production of Dignity (Zunyan), Edward (Patrick Kelly) physically abuses Jin Xiaoxue as his mother Louisa (Basia Wajs) looks on. (Courtesy Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center)*



*Plate 11. Jin Xiaoxue and her American lawyer (played by an actor from Guinea) in the multinational cast production of Dignity (Zunyan) in 1997. (Courtesy Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center)*



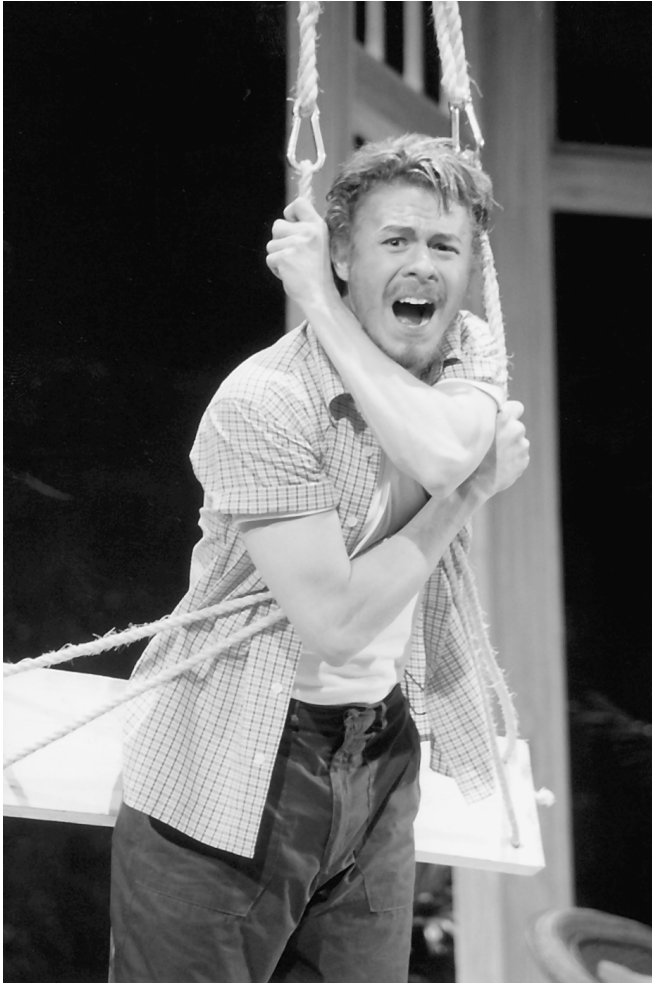
*Plate 12. Jin Xiaoxue, her American lawyer, and the judge (in the same scene as Plate 11) in the Chinese cast production of Dignity (Zunyan) in 1998. (Courtesy Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center)*

*Plate 13. In the 2000 production of Che Guevara, the female ensemble of “baddies” calculate the value of a man’s life to determine if he should risk it to save a drowning child. (Courtesy Li Yan)*



*Plate 14. The promotional poster (also the program cover) for Swing (Qiuqian qingren, 2002), duplicating the image of Brad Pitt and Julia Roberts used for the 2001 Hollywood film The Mexican. (Photo Zhu Zhongren; courtesy Lei Guohua)*





*Plate 15. Bob (Matt Trusch) clings to the swing in agony during his final monologue in Swing. (Courtesy Dvir Bar-Gal.)*

By this scene, Master San has reversed Western dominance over the East by stepping into the role of famed Song dynasty judge Bao Zheng, the most beloved and upright official in many Beijing operas (and in the Yuan drama bearing his name, *Bao daizhi huilan ji*, commonly known in English as *The Chalk Circle*), and putting Paul Ding on trial for his crimes.<sup>30</sup> In act 2, when Ding purchases the park and converts it into a rehabilitation clinic, his action is likened to both a “joint venture” and a “concession,” conflating aggressive imperialist images of foreigners from two different historical periods. His intrusion into the indigenous culture causes rupture and forces each of his patients to radically redetermine his (cultural/national) identity through oral psychoanalysis in a *literal* personal act of “inventing, forgetting, remembering,” the process that Japanese scholar Takashi Fujitani identifies as crucial in nation-state identity formation.<sup>31</sup>

The challenge of the peaceful coexistence of Chinese and Western culture “in one place” presented by Guo is thus depicted not only in the general sense of an American official visiting China or of Westerners with varying interests in Chinese bird-lovers visiting the park, but it is inscribed on the site of Paul Ding as he tries to reconcile his Chinese cultural identity with his American upbringing. Lin Liankun, who played Master San in the production, explains Ding’s conflict this way:

For Westerners, or people who have received a Western education, they can’t understand things which are normal to Chinese people, and it’s the same the other way around . . . in the West, people seldom train birds just to entertain themselves—so Paul Ding, the psychiatrist, who is a representation of Western culture, wants to help them . . . However, the bird lovers consider Paul as abnormal, for they can’t understand his psychoanalysis; their conflicts make the audience laugh.<sup>32</sup>

Ding typifies the Chinese longing for that “authentic . . . something lost” that Eastern artists whose societies have been traumatically influenced by Western hegemony seek to recover.<sup>33</sup> His psychoanalysis of Master San reveals precisely the former actor’s “impotence” and yearning for the past. Read in political terms, Master San’s nostalgia for his old days of glory on the Beijing opera stage and his search for new pupils becomes an impotent Communist Party in Beijing clinging proudly to the past and refusing to admit its own decline as it engages other territories and chains its own subjects, forcing them to sing its worn-out tunes.

Returning to Chow’s ideas, then, Paul Ding is a tangible locus of the negotiation between viewing subject and viewed object, a flesh-and-blood site of the destabilization of Us and Them, an axis of the interplay between

looking and being-looked-at-ness. He is neither Chinese nor American and yet both, and as such, claims the right to evaluate Chinese culture from a Western perspective, only remotely aware that his engagement in that act (or, indeed, even his peripheral presence at the edge of auto-ethnography, as when he observes the beginning scenes of the play, perched on the border of the playing area) irrevocably alters both that which he examines (China and Chineseness) as object, and his Self as subject. His effort to “cure” primitive Chinese culture (bird infatuation) is necessarily answered with a reinscription of primitive culture (Beijing opera) that pronounces him guilty of ethnographic interference.

In attempting to unravel the complex layers and interplay of the foreign Other and national Self in Guo’s play, it is useful to keep in mind that the very issue of national identity and the very artistic genre that serves as the field for its investigation are both Western imports. Nationalist movements began in late-eighteenth-century Europe before spreading globally, making nationalism a Western idea that has since been appropriated to East Asian contexts;<sup>34</sup> the modern sense of a quest for Chinese national identity began with terms like “*minzu*” taken from Japanese Meiji Restoration vocabulary.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, though all articulation of national identity is enacted in relation to Others and is situation specific and ever-changing, in China’s case the presence of “significant Others” is overwhelmingly the impression of oppressive imperialism at their hands, which is deeply ingrained on the national consciousness.<sup>36</sup> As Michael Robinson reminds us:

The memory of Western imperialism, its threatened or realized domination, plays an important part in East Asian nationalism . . . this presence is still felt.<sup>37</sup>

In this sense, the convention of spoken drama itself is a trace of Western hegemony, for the dramatic form, though imported via Tokyo and for the express purpose of helping to carve a new Chinese national identity during the New Culture Movement of the May Fourth Enlightenment (terms that hardly conceal Western philosophical origins themselves), is entirely Other and Western in relation to indigenous Chinese theatrical genres. Thus, Guo’s insertion of a lengthy parody reenacting a Bao Zheng court scene in Beijing opera form to combat Western imperialist elements in the dramatis personae (Charlie, Ding, and Chen) is an ingenious choice on his part as a subversion of the Western spoken dramatic form. Guo sets up the staged trial both aesthetically and thematically as resistance to domination by foreign culture:

MASTER SAN: I know how to do it [analysis], too.

DING: How would you know?

MASTER SAN: I don't use your imported chatting technique. I use our Peking opera and get to the bottom of things.

[ . . . ] DING: Analysis by amateurs is dangerous.

MASTER SAN: I don't analyze. I judge.<sup>38</sup>

The court scene that follows, comprising most of the third act, brought cheers from the Beijing audience, who rejoiced to see Beijing opera once again infused with humor, liveliness, agency, significance, and innovation; it is hard to say whether they were also exulting at the aggressive humiliation, denouncing, and physical beating of Paul Ding in shackles (which bears striking overtones of Cultural Revolution struggle sessions and Red Guard interrogations, albeit masked in absurd pseudo-Freudian satire), or the violent vigor with which Charlie and Luo Man are driven from (*daxia*, literally "beaten off") the stage at the end of the play (see pl. 7). One of the interesting questions raised by a play like *Bird Men* is echoed by Harumi Befu in his introduction to *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia*: "For whom is the given identity invented? . . . Whom is it intended to serve?"<sup>39</sup>

This in turn leads to the question of whom a given representation of identity actually reaches. As postcolonial feminist filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha has pointed out, the dynamics of spectatorship are paradoxical, fluid, and constantly changing:

The question of the look is at the same time so tangible and intangible that one cannot just summarize it. Who is looking at whom and from what place the look is offered—all this keeps on shifting.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the impossibility of ever actually determining the gaze or, in a larger sense, audience reception, consideration of its shifting dynamics is relevant and necessary in theorizing perceptions and representations of the cultural Other. In exploring the complexity and estimating the repercussions of the multiple images of the American that emanate from a wildly popular production like *Bird Men*, of crucial significance is the fact that hundreds (possibly thousands) of foreigners were among the audience members who purchased tickets and attended performances.<sup>41</sup>

As of the time that *Bird Men* was written and produced, the subjectivity of the foreigner as potential audience member was still not being considered by artists, theatre companies, and critics, even in the context of theatrical events in which foreigners were represented onstage. None of the dozens of articles published about *Bird Men* over the two-year period it ran problema-



tized its images of the foreign, or even mentioned such representation beyond identifying the cast of characters in the play. Actor Yang Lixin confessed that he had never consulted a foreigner in preparing to play Charlie and had not even consciously studied foreigners in order to portray him accurately. He had never thought about the fact that a foreigner might see his representation, let alone considered how one might respond to it. He was surprised and amused that I raised such questions and suggested, “Next time I play a foreigner, I’ll think of you.”

Our conversation about his choices in playing Charlie and his opting *not* to employ a Stanislavskian Method approach to creating the character raises provocative questions regarding performance genre and rehearsal process, both of which will be taken up in more detail in the following chapter. What are the possible consequences when a play like *Bird Men*, though presenting an (arguably) “absurd” situation, employs a realist dramatic structure and projects representational authenticity (through use of real trees, real birds, real Beijing opera), but does *not* attempt to suggest a “real” American? How might the play have been altered if Yang Lixin had approached his character study and preparation differently—or if his role of a Caucasian American had not been played by a Chinese actor at all?

The dawn of foreign self-representation on the Chinese stage came in 1995 with the Shanghai Dramatic Art Center’s production of *Student Wife* (*Peidu furen*), featuring an American actor and Polish actress in leading roles. Such a development indicates increasing acknowledgment and recruitment of an expatriate patronage, and raises new sets of questions about images of the American Other as staged in contemporary Chinese spoken drama.

## CHAPTER 6



# American Self-Representation: *Student Wife*

The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form or representation that [denies] the play of difference . . . the point of intervention should shift from the ready recognition of images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the *processes of subjectification* made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse.  
—Homi Bhabha, “The Other Question”

The 1995 production of *Student Wife* (*Peidu furen*)<sup>1</sup> was the inaugural production of the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center (Shanghai huaju yishu zhongxin), an economic and administrative merger of the Shanghai People’s Art Theatre and its neighboring Youth Spoken Drama Troupe. Like *Bird Men*, *Student Wife* was a box-office success, selling out its two-month run at the highest ticket prices ever charged by a Shanghai professional theatre company up until that time.<sup>2</sup>

As a new beginning for the arts center, it was fitting that the production itself would offer something entirely new: foreign actors playing leading roles. The popularity of the play for both Chinese and foreign residents of Shanghai was undoubtedly enhanced by the simultaneous presentation of both Self and Other: local citizens could come see live foreigners speaking Chinese in a stage play alongside native characters with whom they could more readily identify; foreign residents could see themselves reflected in flesh and blood onstage for the first time in China, while also adding another dimension to their ongoing effort to understand the people and culture all around them.

The duality offered in this unique spectatorial experience is echoed in the ambivalence of the stereotypes of the cultural Other presented in the play. Reaching the stage during a period when anti-Americanism in China was on the rise but curiosity for things foreign was as strong as ever, *Student Wife* elicited an ambivalent mixture of reactions to its sharply defined character tropes, reflecting the public's simultaneous disdain and desire for the American Other. As Louisa Schein points out in her discussion of strategies of Othering in post-Mao China, depiction of the excesses of outsiders is frequently used to reinforce Chinese norms of propriety. In the 1990s this "outside" is a composite of alternative gender roles, marketization, and consumption.<sup>3</sup> In this respect, the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center's production of *Student Wife* succeeded as a means of ideological reinforcement of Chinese nationalism in its centering of the virtuous Chinese woman as protagonist, but at the same time it backfired to some degree because the very excesses in the stereotyped American female embodying her negative counterpart, although repelling most foreigners in the audience, actually appealed to Chinese spectators.

Along with investigating the mixed messages emanating from the images onstage that elicited mixed reactions from the uncommonly "mixed" audiences, closer examination of the play and its production reveals that recognition of the "*processes of subjectification*" in the dissemination of stereotypical discourse to which Homi Bhabha directs our attention can indeed be a more promising point of intervention than mere identification of fixed representations as either positive or negative. Bhabha calls for questioning of "modes of representation" and consideration of the fact that, in different spatial and temporal contexts, "the same stereotype may be read in a contradictory way or, indeed, be misread." He warns against "[simplifying] the politics and 'aesthetics' of spectator-positioning by ignoring the ambivalent, psychical process of identification" and insists that "the stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation," which is very much in keeping with our fluid, paradoxical concept of Occidentalism.<sup>4</sup>

Equally instructive and crucial as attendance to the processes of identification and subjectification is exploration of the processes of representation, or analysis of the intricate means by which images are constructed for consumption by a spectator. Along with the stereotype itself being ambivalent, the agency through which it is embodied, the means through which that embodiment is disseminated, and the subjectivity of the receiver of the image are all shifting, unstable elements that invite the possibility of multiple (even contradictory) modes of representation—an invitation that is at once promising and profoundly unsettling. The evolution of the stage production of

*Student Wife*, from its conception to its final performances, is an ideal case study for examination of the ambivalent processes of stereotype, representation, and identification: it illustrates more than any other play presented here the constantly shifting ground on which theatre in China and Occidental Othering are produced.

The process began with Yu Luosheng's adaptation of Wang Zhousheng's novel *Student Wife*, which tells the story of a Chinese woman who accompanies her graduate-student husband to the United States, where they live with an American couple, the Speares, in exchange for providing day care for the Speares' toddler son. The next phase of the project was Yu's extensive search for foreign actors to play the roles of the American husband and wife (the Chinese husband and wife were played by Xu Zheng and Geng Ge, young actors from the host theatre's own resident company). He hired Basia Wajs, a Polish exchange student at the neighboring Shanghai Theatre Academy, to play Lucia Speare, and then traveled to Beijing and other locations to find a foreigner living in China who could meet his requirements for the role of Jordan. His criteria—fluent Chinese, adequate acting ability, and a schedule permitting a full-time-rehearsal-and-performance schedule from December through April—were difficult to accommodate. Eventually, he recruited American Robert Daly, who had costarred in the wildly popular 1993 TV miniseries *Beijingren zai Niuyue* (A Beijinger in New York).<sup>5</sup>

Daly had no idea he would be making history in Chinese spoken drama when Yu Luosheng called him that autumn in 1994, at 4:00 a.m. (in “typical Chinese style,” according to Daly).<sup>6</sup> After initially turning down the role during their telephone conversation, Daly reconsidered the following day and accepted, without ever having seen the script. He claims that if he *had* read the script before arriving in China, he would not have gone through with the project. Still, he does not regret the experience. Ultimately, as we shall see, his participation was fundamental in the evolution of the piece from an original script that caricatured Americans in an unfavorable light to the significantly more (though not ideally) balanced, realistic, and mature production that Shanghai audiences eventually witnessed from February through April 1995 (see pl. 8).

The involvement of a foreign actor—particularly an American actor—in the production of *Student Wife* fostered a creative environment unprecedented in Chinese theatre. Daly's input throughout the rehearsal process greatly impacted not only the process itself but also the eventual reception of the production by local audiences. Moreover, his influence was not merely due to the fact that a foreigner was brought on board per se; rather, it was the unique and relentless dialogue between Daly as actor and Yu as writer-

director that brought such pathbreaking results. Their individual intensity and mutual respect provides a far healthier model for creative collaboration than most intercultural partnerships, including Yu's first attempt to integrate an American actor playing an American role in a Chinese play, a 1993 joint production of *The Joy Luck Club*.<sup>7</sup>

*Student Wife* thus constituted the third phase of Yu's ongoing exploration of intercultural themes, which began with *The Woman Left Behind* (*Liushou nüshi*) and continued in *Joy Luck Club*. As in *Woman*, he experimented both aesthetically with how to represent foreign locales which are presently "absent" (in effect presencing absence itself) and thematically with how to adequately convey to an audience with varying generational (and, this time, national) subjectivities the complex experience of an exiled Chinese citizen and the effects of that experience on others. Like *Joy Luck Club*, one of Yu's primary goals in his approach to the production was to invite the Chinese actor and the foreign actor to share the same stage; this time, however, the foreign performers comprised the actual ensemble with their Chinese counterparts rather than merely receiving focus in an occasional brief scene alongside actors whose dialogue was virtually incomprehensible to them.

Furthermore, Yu's originality and vision went beyond grappling with trendy intercultural themes and notching semiotic "firsts" (first foreign actor featured in a spoken drama, first bilingual foreigner to embody a foreign character on the Chinese stage, etc.) to embracing dramatic content and a performance aesthetic that fundamentally revolutionized stage technique and audience reception.

Though perhaps he should, Yu Luosheng will not go down in history as a great innovator of Chinese drama like Huang Zuolin. Unfortunately, in the very act of forging ahead, Yu often adopts stances that reinscribe perspectives increasingly held suspect, frustrating many of his collaborators, actors, and audience members. As a senior theatre executive and loyal CCP member, Yu often appears to support the Party line and reify orthodox ideology (such as anti-Americanism and the negative consequences of overseas travel). Nevertheless, he is also single-handedly responsible for the introduction of international casting in Chinese spoken-drama plays and exceptional communication between actors and audiences.

Yu's greatest obstacle as a director is his lack of experience, as he himself acknowledges. A professional actor with the Shanghai People's Art Theatre since his 1961 graduation from the Shanghai Theatre Academy, his production thirty years later of *The Woman Left Behind* was his directorial debut, and he volunteers that his visits to the West were not lengthy enough to form educated opinions or even trustworthy impressions. Still, he chooses to posi-

tion himself in China's professional theatre world as a director who experiments with conventional forms, exploring cross-cultural experiences through the material he chooses as the basis for these experiments.

Despite his limitations, Yu does not lack confidence in his ability to write, direct, and promote his projects. Foreign actors who have worked with him have found that, because of this, he can at times be stubborn or single-minded—but he is not entirely unyielding. He is driven by his ideas; he has a strong vision for how he wants things to turn out in a given project, but he does solicit and consider input from his fellow artists and actors. At the same time, although he continually sets up structures of “collaboration” and “participation,” he occasionally needs to be nudged by a strong elbow to freely allow that participation and be genuinely open to it.<sup>8</sup> Basia Wajs, the actress who played Lucia in *Student Wife*, has worked with several directors in China, and found Yu's politics conventional but his artistic process progressive:

[He] is a wonderful person, but he is respecting the rules (politics); I guess that's something you have to do if you want to survive in China. As a director he is good to work with, because he listens to you. If you as an actor have something to say, you want to change something, he is able to think about it, and that is rare in China.<sup>9</sup>

Daly's reflections on working with Yu depict a partnership of two equally stubborn but mutually flexible men. Though Daly's arrogance shines through here (despite his attempts to qualify it), he generally describes the same dynamic that Wajs and others have noted in Yu's artistic process:

Yu Luosheng is a good guy, but he's a little bit full of himself in some ways and he doesn't listen to people very well . . . but Yu Luosheng is not entirely deaf. I kept hammering at him. He would defer to me when I was talking about the way things are perceived by Americans . . . [I discussed things with him] mostly in rehearsal, because I'm not disrespectful: my feeling is, “Okay, you wanted to use the star quality of the guy who was in *Beijingren zai niuyue*? [A Beijinger in New York] Okay, you got it, with everything it entails. You want an American in this play? Okay, you got it, with everything it entails.” I'm under no obligation to be Chinese or do things the Chinese way. I'm only obligated to treat people respectfully, which I did, but I'm gonna tell him what I think . . . If it was a question of American realities or American perceptions, he deferred to me; if it was a question of theatrical quality, I would make my points, but I certainly deferred to him.<sup>10</sup>

Among the more significant changes in the production fostered by Daly's negotiations with Yu were removal of the heavy anti-Semitism in the original text, and abandonment of Disney's "Small World" as the recurring theme song in the play. Among the influences the casting of Daly effected on audience reception was increased audience feedback, which in turn contributed back to the process itself, sometimes even determining significant alterations in subsequent performances.

The focus of much of the discussion around the play, both by Daly in rehearsals and by audience members in discussions following performances (roughly equivalent to American "talk backs"), was the role of Lucia, the American wife, played by Basia Wajs. She is the most highly developed character in the play, and a primary focus of author Wang Zhousheng's attention in her novel. In the original version of Yu's script, lifted almost verbatim from Wang's novel, Lucia is a Jewish American of European descent, full of racial self-hatred, who manages to be frenetically "cheerful" while at the same time overbearing and controlling. Daly confessed that he could not finish reading the novel because he found the character so offensive:

She's just a sex-obsessed, materialistic, shallow, miserly Jew, with all of the stereotypical anti-Semitic traits. She's married to an Irish Catholic, and originally—this was a big deal in the book and originally a big deal in the script—she told her husband that she was marrying him in order to thin her children's Jewish blood . . . it was really nasty.<sup>11</sup>

When Daly voiced his discomfort to Yu and proposed removing the negative stereotypes about Jewish people from the play, Yu's solution was a speech given by Daly's character, Jordan, in which he directly addresses the audience and explains "why the Jews were miserly and why we should sympathize with them historically and [that] there were good reasons for being miserly."<sup>12</sup> Daly rejected this idea and, over the course of several weeks of rehearsal, convinced Yu to continue cutting references to Lucia's Jewish identity. Yu removed indications of her Jewishness very gradually, and not entirely until after several public performances, due to the opinions of some of the spectators raised in postperformance chats. The deletion of these references altogether thereby removed all traces of possible anti-Semitism in the play.

What remained for the spectator was a representation of an American woman whose constant frugality, heavy-handedness, insensitivity, excessive sexuality, and general hysteria (not to mention her European name) remained curiously unexplained, even by the undesirable explanation of an inaccurate, unjustified, outdated ethnic stereotype. The scene in the original novel and play that prompted most of the discussion during rehearsals is ac-

tually sympathetic to the character of Lucia and helps to explain her shortcomings, but does so in an extremely problematic way. It occurs when the American husband, Jordan Speare, attempts to comfort Jiang Zhuojun (the Chinese “student wife”) after Lucia has accused her of making long-distance phone calls, harassing her to the point where she actually flees the house. (Up until this point, Zhuojun has rarely left the Speares’ home, owing to her feelings of estrangement and fear living in Los Angeles, and a considerable language barrier.) When Jordan catches up with her in the street, he reasons with her:

[JORDAN]: I used to think [Lucia’s] selfishness and miserliness were Jewish ethnic personality traits, but then I read lots of Jewish history and novels, and felt that it wasn’t simply a matter of personality, but an attitude created to protect themselves because of history. The Jewish people have a history written in blood and tears. If you understand this much, you won’t take [Lucia’s treatment of you] to heart. All these years, they have been forced out of their country, murdered, and faced bitter struggle; without money, they have no way to protect themselves. So they have developed getting rich, managing money, amassing wealth into an art.<sup>13</sup>

Yu Luosheng became sensitive to the problematic nature of the Jewish stereotyping in the novel through his discussions with Daly during the rehearsal process and made significant revisions; when audiences (particularly foreigners in the audience) began to give similar feedback, he realized the references had to be dropped altogether. Up until that point, however, Yu honestly believed that Lucia’s Jewish identity was a neutral factor in the play, and that Jordan’s speech would actually promote greater understanding of the Jewish people among the Chinese spectators:

We felt that this segment of the play was in order to *explain* for Jewish people, not at all to emphasize their faults; but this “explanation” itself contains possible prejudice, so the effect this “explanation” has is not very good. Because in the process of explaining it, you blacken it, right? So, in the end, I decided to take it out, and actually discovered the influence on the script was not very drastic. Why? Because her personality is still intact, but we just don’t emphasize that she is this way because she is Jewish. People with a personality like hers are very few (you don’t encounter a lot of people like that), but as a personality type we wanted to avoid national/racial prejudice (*minzu pianjian*), therefore it was a major difference from the novel.<sup>14</sup>



Contrary to Yu's assessment of the impact of his changes to the script, Lucia is ironically made far *less* likable by removing the stereotype and making her more of a unique individual. Without the references to her Jewish identity, Lucia's capacity for compassion toward Jiang Zhuojun is diminished: she herself now has no history of suffering by which to relate to Zhuojun's experiences in China's Cultural Revolution and her current predicament of exile; she has never "eaten bitterness" (*chiku*) and thus seems excessively harsh toward Zhuojun without any basis for empathy. She is less likely to draw sympathy from the audience because, without this context, she has apparently led a very easy and comfortable life, and yet continually complains.

Deleting all references to Lucia being Jewish subsequently required further revision of her character as a whole—revision that did not occur, partially due to the fact that these changes were taking place throughout the rehearsal and performance process, and partially because Yu himself did not recognize the need for them.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, such revision would have changed Lucia drastically from her personality in the novel, which in turn might require further alterations in the actual plot, and significant adjustments in the entire dynamic between the Speares as husband and wife, between the two women, and between the two couples. In short, the entire play should have been transformed when Lucia shed her Jewish skin, because the racist attributes associated with that ethnic background by the novelist should have been lifted from Lucia as well. Instead, Lucia remained a caricature of the stereotypical Jewish woman in the worst possible way, and without explanation. And, because she was no longer differentiated from the "average" American woman, she came to stand in for her, particularly in the absence of any alternative representation. The character of Lucia Speare as a reflection of "the American woman" elicited strong reactions from foreign women in the audience, and surprising feedback from Chinese spectators.

Basia Wajs, the Polish actress who portrayed Lucia, based her interpretation of the character on Americans she had met in Europe and China:

I never went to the States, but I met a lot of Americans. Six months after I arrived to Shanghai I started to teach in the American school . . . Right in the beginning at the [school] something happened to me what [sic] I later used developing Lucia's character: on the steps a teacher came towards me, and asked me in an overwhelming way how I was. I mean, she didn't just ask, "How are you?" but she almost screamed, so I started telling her that it was one of my first days and while I was talking she just walked away—she didn't really want to know! And this is something I think typical American [sic]. People always smile, are nice

to each other, but all this is rather fake . . . So you see, I didn't have any problem accepting the character as a real person, because I am sure this kind of people exist! On the other side I am sure that the audience understood that not all American women are like this. In China people have a very specific picture about foreigners, you know, and with this play they maybe started to think about this picture, realizing that it might be wrong.<sup>16</sup>

The inherent contradiction in Wajs' testimony—of claiming that the essentialized character she portrayed was based in some kind of authentic (even “typical”) reality while assuming the audience would understand that the character does not represent the typical American—displays a simultaneous recognition and rejection of the stereotype, which reflects its ambivalence.

The play's implication (despite a disclaimer indicating otherwise voiced by the protagonist in the midst of her complaints) that Lucia stands in as a reliable representation of an American woman—and the strong negative reaction of Daly and foreign audience members to that very suggestion—stems from the fact that Wang's novel claims for itself a status as “real” because it documents the author's actual experience in America when she accompanied her husband for overseas study. In her postscript to the novel, entitled “It's a Small World,” Wang reveals its autobiographical nature, informing the reader that her family returned from their stay in the United States at the end of 1988. At that time, there were not many self-supporting foreign students returning to China, and everyone she encountered wondered why she came back. Her immediate actions upon her return did not seem much of an answer to their rhetorical inquiry:

This was during the endless wave of people leaving China; it became news for a while . . . I wrote some prose and informal essays, published in *My View of the American Moon*. The America I wrote about was very beautiful . . . Originally, how I loved North America; how I loved those Americans with their high noses and blue eyes! . . . But during those years [I was writing essays] I never really wrote of my deepest impressions.<sup>17</sup>

She goes on to explain that she kept a diary as her “confidant” while in America, daily recording her deep depression and loneliness in its pages. She met other Chinese wives who had accompanied their husbands to America to study and wrote in her journal of their plight as well:

As soon as I left the country, there was a gigantic culture clash and huge feeling of loss—I didn't know what to do. I met several *bandu furen* in

the same situation as I, looking after children, working for no pay, studying with no money, with no family nearby, closed up in the house all day. They couldn't speak the language and the Chinese-Western cultural estrangement made it very hard for them to find anyone to talk to besides their own husband . . . and it was even harder to find their own individual worth . . . I wrote about these people in my diary . . . It is hard to believe there could be a group of people in so much pain in that glorious place, under that shining sun . . .<sup>18</sup>

Friends at home urged her to write honestly about her experiences, but she was reluctant because she “had been silent for all those years.”<sup>19</sup> When she finally did decide to write a novel, it took her more than a year to complete it, and she recalls the writing process itself with its reopening of past wounds as “excruciating.”

The novel's autobiographical content as an “insider's” firsthand perceptions is so personal and lifelike that Wang relates to her fictional record of real events as her own “daughter,” thereby both personifying and engendering (feminizing) the tale. Furthermore, in describing the process through which the novel was eventually adapted, she reinscribes the rhetorical gesture of the original work itself. Identifying her “daughter” (the novel) with Jiang Zhuojun—who had high hopes for her new life and instead faced a barrage of disappointments—Wang describes the popular reception of *Student Wife* upon its publication and the several lucrative offers for television and film versions that followed, only to end in a series of empty promises and a broken contract. She tells of having to refuse potential “suitors” because her “daughter” was already “engaged” (under contract with a deposit); but she was left waiting for a year and a half, with no wedding—not even a phone call—and thus lost excellent opportunities for television and film “marriages.” Employing the same attitude and voice of victimization that she displays in the novel, Wang says, “Even up until today, no one has ever explained to me or uttered a single word of apology; my daughter was just incomprehensibly abandoned!”

“Fortunately,” Wang continues, “there is still honesty and mutual respect in this world. Two years ago, my heart pounded when Yu Luosheng, a director from the People's Art Theatre, called.”<sup>20</sup> She goes on to describe the “destiny” (*yuanfen*) of their collaboration, Yu's search for an actor to play the husband, her own excitement at the news of Daly's involvement, and their mutual faith in waiting to begin rehearsals until Daly could complete his commitments in the United States. In the end, Wang was more than satisfied:

My “daughter” *Student Wife* is married, and just like any mother, I feel proud and lucky. I am grateful to the cast and crew who worked so hard for her; and thankful to her “in-laws,” the Shanghai People’s Art Theatre, for treating her so sincerely . . . .”<sup>21</sup>

Yu’s enthusiasm for the project was equally strong. He repeatedly expressed admiration for Wang’s novel (which he read just after it was published), even confessing that it moved him to tears in three different places, and that such emotion was very uncommon for a “macho man” (*nanzihan*) like himself. He added that Wang’s account was the deepest, most illuminating example he had seen of literature about overseas students (of which there were plentiful examples throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s) and that he was immediately interested in adapting it for a small theatre.<sup>22</sup> It was not until a year later that he actually began to work on the script, which he wrote completely independently, remaining as true as possible to the original. In fact, if not for the participation of an American actor in the production, the play performed in Shanghai would have been nearly identical to Wang’s novel in both character and plot (including the use of the “Small World” theme song, lifted from Wang’s postscript).

As a play, *Student Wife* maintains most of the structure and content of the original novel, with the addition (by Yu) of a narrative and performative frame that changes the action of the play from occurring in the present (as is the case in the novel) to being an enacted reconstruction for the audience by the two couples, who have been reunited in Shanghai at the home of the Chinese couple and are reminiscing about their time together in America.

In essence, it is a memory play that reconstructs vignettes of a Chinese woman’s experience living in an American home. As the title indicates, the woman, Jiang Zhuojun, has accompanied her husband (Liao Shen) to the United States for his graduate work in science. They are in their mid-thirties and live in the home of an affluent Beverly Hills couple of approximately the same age, Jordan and Lucia Speare. Jordan is a public defender and Lucia (in keeping with her original stereotype) is a banker. In exchange for boarding in the Speares’ home, Zhuojun cares for their two-year-old son, Tommy. (Liao and Jiang also have a young son, who is conspicuously absent in the play version.)

The two major themes of the play are East-West (specifically Sino-American) culture clash and the painfully lonely exile of a displaced Chinese spouse. Both themes are immediately introduced in the first reenacted scene of the play, when Lucia harshly criticizes Zhuojun’s caretaking methods:

LUCIA (*At top of stairs*): *Ai-la! Ai-la!* [Ella!] How could you let Tommy sleep this way?

ZHUOJUN (*To guests*): Excuse me . . . What's the matter, Mrs. Speare?

LUCIA: How could you let Tommy sleep on his back?

ZHUOJUN: I'm sorry . . . is that wrong?

LUCIA: Of course it's wrong! Infants must sleep on their stomachs, didn't you know that?!

ZHUOJUN: Sleep on their stomachs? Why must they sleep on their stomachs?

LUCIA: Your Chinese infants don't sleep on their stomachs?

ZHUOJUN: Our Chinese infants sleep either on their backs or their sides; my son, Sen-sen, has always slept this way.

LUCIA: Oh, my god. There is actually this kind of thing in the world—how frightful! Infants should sleep on their stomachs in order to prevent them from suffocating while breastfeeding. (. . .) Our American children sleep on their stomachs all along; doctors say this is an important security safeguard. I want you to do it the American way. You can do that, right?<sup>23</sup>

This sequence sets the tone for the rest of the play in terms of Lucia and Zhuojun's relationship: they are constantly comparing notes on mutually alien cultural practices, and Lucia is forever dominating and criticizing Zhuojun, who grows increasingly uncomfortable, alienated, and miserable in the Speares' home. The ultimate embodiment of Lucia's hegemonic tendencies is her renaming Zhuojun "Ai-la" (Ella?) without her consent. In the novel, Zhuojun merely thinks silently of how offended she is by Lucia's imperialist gesture, but in the play she actually voices her objection in this same first scene:

ZHUOJUN: [. . .] Lucia, . . . but, why don't you call me Zhuojun? That is the most wonderful name and my father chose it for me.

LUCIA: Eh, "Jiang Zhuojun"—those two words are too hard to say. "Ai-la" means "wings." Think about it, Ella, wings—wings are so important! If one has wings, one is free and can fly wherever one wants. You're really lucky to get such a nice English name so easily—you should pay me a reward.<sup>24</sup>

Here, the dynamic that Wang projects in her novel as a whole is encapsulated: Lucia represents an America that entraps the overseas Chinese individual even as it presumes to welcome her. The American form of integration is in fact imposed assimilation, with the expectation of gratitude in return. Indeed, in the novel, this exchange between Lucia and Zhuojun is followed by

the latter's inner reflections on the phenomenon of Chinese students in America assuming Western names. She also recalls being purged by Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution because of her name and yet refusing to change it nevertheless.<sup>25</sup> Lucia, in successfully changing Zhuojun's name, is thus more ruthless than a crazed Red Guard when it comes to intimidating and manipulating her.

Without the firm foundation of her own soil, Zhuojun is too weak to stand up to Lucia's imperialist onslaught and has no choice but to continually acquiesce. Lucia's equation of Zhuojun's new identity with liberating wings is thus thoroughly ironic: she personifies an America that accepts foreign students on its own ethnocentric terms, claiming to save them from a less desirable fate. This Lady Liberty requires the displaced Chinese citizen like Liao Shen to sacrifice his own selfhood in exchange for the meager existence of a lab rat; or, in his wife's case, to forsake her own child to care for a stranger's. Zhuojun is asked to trade her own worth for a pair of useless wings: imprisoned in the Speares' home, she is too afraid to even leave the house, let alone "fly wherever she wants."

Her only release, in fact, is her limited ability to share her feelings of alienation, frustration, and depression as days turn into months. As mentioned earlier, it is the detailed journal Wang kept as a "student wife" in America that became the main source for her book. In the novel, these entries surface as the inner thoughts of the protagonist; in the play, Zhuojun's diary is transformed into monologues in which she "converses" with the audience—either in the function of narrator, providing background information and introducing events and characters, or in a more personal dialogue, divulging her true feelings.

Interaction with spectators occurs on a more casual and interactive level as well. During the discussion of infant sleep habits in the opening sequence, Zhuojun turns to the audience to solicit English translations of the unique Shanghainese phrase "*lazhubao*." After the first scene with Lucia, she pauses to describe to the audience the two male characters; this is followed by the next memory sequence, in which the two husbands join their wives for dinner—a Chinese dinner prepared by Zhuojun in the Speares' home.

This dinner is the first time all four characters share the stage in a flashback—and they come together again only twice: for another dinner halfway through the play, and once more in the final scene of the play. Even though both the husbands and wives are present for the initial dinner, the focus is still primarily on the contrast between Lucia and Zhuojun. Zhuojun has prepared a special meal for everyone, and Lucia's first response is to become hysterical when she sees a fish head on the table. She throws back her

chair screaming, completely over(re)acting, whereupon Jordan criticizes her harshly.<sup>26</sup> The scene is a humorous (if overly obvious) attempt to highlight cultural differences, but it also reinforces the dichotomy between Zhuojun's traditional, unselfish nature and Lucia's careless self-absorption.

The dinner scene concludes with Zhuojun overhearing the Speares having sex in their bedroom, thanks to a baby monitor left on upstairs. This amusing moment was actually Robert Daly's idea and does not appear in the original novel or play script. It reinforces the image of Lucia as sex crazed, and also strengthens Jordan's explanation to Zhuojun later that "at night, [I] feel incomparably lucky, the happiest husband in the world, but in the morning, [my] troubles return. . . ." (this line does appear in both the original novel and the initial version of the play).<sup>27</sup> The baby monitor provides a verbal cue of the American couple in their bedroom without a visual component that is inverted in scene 7 when Liao Shen and Jiang Zhuojun enact quite a different scene in their bedroom, which the audience sees but does not hear.

Between the two dinner scenes, there are several examples of East-West culture clash and Lucia's abuse of Zhuojun. Scene 3 is a conversation between the two wives (while Lucia shaves her legs) in which they compare Chinese and American bodies, men, and relationships. Scene 4 shows everyone but Zhuojun leaving for work in the morning. In scene 5, Zhuojun complains about the way Lucia mistreats her, and Jordan is kind to her.

The sixth scene is the second group dinner, which includes the "mandatory discussion of the Cultural Revolution" (according to Daly) and Jordan's description of his new court case, in which he represents a Chinese immigrant client. In scene 7, Liao Shen returns from the lab and is rude to his wife, which brings us to scene 8, in which, as indicated earlier, Lucia wrongfully accuses Zhuojun of making an eighty-three-cent long-distance phone call, driving her from the house. Scene 9 shows the dangers of the Los Angeles streets, as Zhuojun searches for help and Jordan finally comes to her rescue (here the hint of a possible romance between the two becomes apparent). A reconciliation follows in scene 10, after which the two wives discuss sex, while peeling potatoes. In the next scene, Jordan and Zhuojun admit (but do not act on) their mutual attraction; and in the twelfth and final scene, the couples celebrate Zhuojun's thirty-seventh birthday. At this point, the two negative characters—the Chinese husband and the American wife—both have sudden personality changes: Liao Shen, who has neglected his wife throughout the entire play, surprises her with a birthday cake; and Lucia has been transformed into a content, kind person virtually overnight.

Despite Wang Zhousheng's firsthand experience in America and discussions with various compatriots who had also lived there, she presents four

polarized—and heavily gendered—characters in her novel, with little overlap. The American woman, as we have seen, is by far the most negative stereotype; the Chinese husband is also negative, as he is frequently absent, distant or rude when present, and apparently oblivious to the pain his wife is suffering (and to the overall atmosphere in his own residence, for that matter). On the positive end of the stereotype spectrum are the American husband and the Chinese wife. The former is a public defender, working for the common good, in contrast to his wife's selfish goals (how they can afford a home in Beverly Hills is never explained); he is courteous, restrained, and exceedingly understanding and kind. Most praiseworthy, of course, should be Jiang Zhuojun, the main character: our sympathies should lie with her in all her Chinese virtue. Yu Luosheng described her to the cast as the “ideal Chinese woman who came of age during the Cultural Revolution.”<sup>28</sup>

According to Yu, however, Chinese audiences of the stage production did not take to her the way the readers of Wang's novel did. In his estimation, they felt that in comparison to Lucia's frank openness, Zhuojun is “a totally Chinese character—very internal, keeps everything bottled up inside, very depressed, very worried, doesn't say what she's feeling—perhaps if she did there wouldn't be such a problem.”<sup>29</sup> Daly's reflections indicate that the Chinese audiences were less reflexive than this (“there's still this never questioning of this perfect Chinese woman figure”) and that foreign audience members resented the contrast between Lucia's negative traits and “Jiang Zhuojun [as] the receptacle of all Chinese virtue.”<sup>30</sup> He also indicated a generation gap between Wang/Yu, who wrote the character, and twenty-eight-year-old Geng Ge, the actress who portrayed her:

To our lead actress, . . . Jiang [Zhuojun] was pathetic. If inability to move beyond noble poverty and patriotic racism was ever an ideal, then for [Geng Ge] the ideal was dead and the sooner buried the better. Her generation, she said, couldn't care less about the Cultural Revolution . . . [Geng] sounded like a mall brat telling an MIA activist to get a life. But she was right that Yu's themes wouldn't resonate with Shanghai's young hipsters.<sup>31</sup>

Likewise, there was a generation gap regarding the question of representation itself. Where Yu was very comfortable reinforcing the East/West binary—the us/them mentality—and in fact saw extrapolation of such constructions as one of the accomplishments of the play, the young Chinese actors were frustrated by such antiquated thinking. Deeply affected by the wave of “individualism” that had swept China during their adolescence, these twenty-something actors could not buy into the role types that were substi-



tuting for developed characters, created by writers from the previous generation. Xu Zheng, the actor who played Liao Shen, reflected, “The novel keeps saying, ‘Americans are such-and-such; Chinese are such-and-such.’ It loses sight of the most basic thing—that everyone is a person.” Referring to Daly, he said, “He is very smart: he said people are all the same, [not to] always be saying, ‘Americans, Chinese; Chinese, Americans.’”<sup>32</sup>

Yu misinterpreted this impasse as a purely cultural difference—specifically, a difference between Daly’s view of the world and a “Chinese” perspective—without considering the generation gap at all:

The image of Americans in the play is very acceptable to me and is similar to my own impressions of them. I’ve been to the U.S. three times; I find Americans to be very open (*kailang*), unaffected (*tianzhen*), and forthright (*minglang*), and they are all very polite and very good at helping people . . . During rehearsals, we would often have a difference in viewpoint with Dai Bo (Daly): he would say, “What’s this ‘American,’ ‘Chinese?’” He didn’t agree at all with this terminology: [he’d say] “People are just people; you are you, he is him (she is her); ‘person’ means ‘individual’ (*ren jiushi geren*) . . . Lucia is just Lucia, Dai Bo is just Dai Bo,” et cetera. But we Chinese are extremely used to using this kind of language: “Americans are . . . ; English are . . . ; Japanese are. . . .” We are inclined to talk about our views this way.<sup>33</sup>

Ironically, Daly, employing a similar mentality, opined, “The Chinese think in stereotypical terms; those are the building blocks of their thinking about race.”<sup>34</sup> Clearly, the ability to truly avoid reductionist generalizations when speaking across cultures is an impossible dream; and even the Westernized “hipsters” in Shanghai, peers of actors like Xu Zheng who objected to such a mind-set, often begin intercultural dialogue, on both general and personal levels, with phrases like “you Americans . . .”.

The U.S. citizen in China embodies the ambivalence of the stereotype in that she is perpetually standing in for her compatriots even as she is the living specimen of American “individualism”—much the same way Lucia stands in for all American women despite the fact that Zhuojun reminds us Lucia is somewhat of an exception.<sup>35</sup> The main reason that the character of Lucia functions this way, of course, is the sheer paucity of stage images of foreign women at all. There are many competing and standard representations of native women on the Chinese stage, but there are far fewer examples of Western women, and most images that do appear surface in the context of adaptations of foreign plays, in which the entire cast is Other. It is in native plays with both Chinese and foreign characters that cultural contrast

comes into focus: the American woman's presence highlights what it means to be *Chinese* by embodying that which the Chinese woman is *not*. But it also isolates a foreign essence. In this light, Lucia's character takes on heightened significance. In Chinese American critic Lily Tung's words:

These connotations of America can become dangerous when the audience is primarily a Chinese one who doesn't know about America and will look to the narrator [Chinese wife Jiang Zhuojun] for guidance. And it becomes especially dangerous surrounding Lucia's character, mak[ing] statements such as: "American women marry for money."<sup>36</sup>

A summary of *Student Wife* in Hongshan Li and Zhaohui Hong's book about the role of images and perceptions in Sino-American relations condenses commentary of the entire play to a description of a single scene in which the two women compare cultural notes:

The play tried to tell audiences that feeling did not matter in American marriages. Women married for money and men married for sex. Women had to keep an eye on their weight because if they were fat, they would not marry rich men. They had to shave their body hair in order to make them sexy.<sup>37</sup>

According to Li and Hong, Chinese intellectuals in the 1990s emphasized issues of race, class, and gender in their anti-American views.

Even more significant, then, is the very first attempt to offer a theatrical embodiment of a foreign woman in the actual *body* of a foreign woman. The "real" physical presence of the foreigner thwarts the psychic attempt to recall that this is just *one* woman among many—even, perhaps, an exception—and inevitably reflects an image of everywoman. This is particularly so in this instance, since there is no competing representation within the production itself: Lucia is the *only* American woman in the entire play.

It is quite ironic that Basia Wajs did not express concerns about playing a stereotype of an American woman or seem at all offended by extension at the image of the Western woman it presented. Daly elaborated on this point, surmising that it was due to her lack of direct experience in the United States:

Basia doesn't really have many notions about America or Americans. She's Polish; she's never been to America; she's not particularly curious about America. She was just playing a caricature of an American woman. The character in the novel was a caricature also, so I don't blame her for that . . . she's inclined to be a ham anyway, to be melo-

dramatic, very playful, very exuberant, very loud, very boisterous, and Yu Luosheng comes out of a tradition of really terrible overacting, so they seem to mesh in those ways: he thought it was great when she threw the chair on the floor and jumped back [in the dinner scene, scene 2].<sup>38</sup>

In contrast, the oversimplification of role types was perceived as an unfortunate challenge by each of the other three actors involved. Both of the actors who played the husbands felt that all four roles were basically stereotypes. Daly summed it up thus:

Jordan was a little less of a stereotype, but also because he was less of a character. He doesn't emerge as a flesh-and-blood character—he's got nothing to *do*. For most of the play, all that Yu Luosheng wanted him to be was a "nice guy": those were the instructions—*hen xiangjie renyi*, that kind of thing . . . [Zhuojun] is just perfect and upset, and stays that way through the whole thing. And her husband is just a jerk, who then comes in and says, "Oh, I'm sorry, I've been a jerk. I'll try not to do that anymore."<sup>39</sup>

Xu, who played the "jerk," expressed similar opinions: "I don't think the foreigners in the play seem like people at all. Do you think the character Robert plays is like a living person? . . . He's not complete." Regarding Lucia, he asked:

Do you think this play offers many likable traits in Lucia? I don't think she has many . . . Even though she is always scolding [Zhuojun], I don't think she could be that evil. I don't see how one person could get liberated (*ziyou*) to that degree—even an American couldn't be that *ziyou*—I think [Wang Zhousheng] combined several *ziyou* Americans into one being.<sup>40</sup>

Audiences had similar reactions. When asked how expatriates who attended the show responded to it, Daly's first words were about Lucia: "Most American women who came were very, very offended by the portrayal of Lucia. They thought it was an insult to American womanhood—that it was a caricature, that it was one-dimensional, and that it was quite offensive."<sup>41</sup> According to Yu, however, local spectators reacted quite differently from foreign audience members:

The Chinese spectators really liked Lucia! Men and women both really liked her. They didn't think she was "bad" at all. They thought she was straightforward: she says what's in her heart. This is a very interesting

subject: because Chinese like these kinds of forthright, cheerful characters—she just says what she thinks. Chinese people don't like hypocrisy; they appreciate her honesty and even though she has weaknesses, her weakness is not "evil." In the end, she is very caring toward Zhuojun, so Chinese think this is a very likable (*ke'ai*) character.<sup>42</sup>

Yu did acknowledge that this opinion of Americans is a recent phenomenon and is related to political reform and opening to the West; twenty years ago, Lucia could not have been so popular. Such a range of interpretations of the same performance attests to the ambivalence of the stereotype emphasized by Homi Bhabha, supporting his notion that under differing circumstances, stereotypes can take on diverse—even contradictory—meanings. In the case of audience members attending the same performance of a play, the physical conditions of time and place may be uniform, but the subjectivities of individual spectators include a variety of psychic "times" and "places" from which they engage with the representations before them.

Lily Tung, a Chinese American expatriate correspondent living in Shanghai at the time, acknowledges this ambivalence and echoes Yu's assessment of spectator reaction in her published article reviewing the play; her discussion of the character Lucia concludes by asserting that some audience members "actually find Lucia's brashness more likable than Zhuojun's spinelessness."<sup>43</sup> Tung herself was deeply offended by the portrayal of women, both Chinese and American, in the play.<sup>44</sup> Her spectatorial position as an Asian American—in effect, *both* Chinese *and* American—leaves her doubly frustrated, for either avenue of identification open to her is roadblocked by a judgmental stereotype: as a lively, opinionated, assertive Chinese American woman, she lacks the idealized cultural virtue of Jiang Zhuojun and simultaneously bears the shame of even slightly resembling the negative embodiment of American womanhood exhibited by Lucia Speare.

It is precisely this kind of consideration of the various possible levels of audience subjectivity that is required in China's theatre circles today; and Yu Luosheng, though not the ideal model for such endeavors, is the first and only theatre practitioner in China to truly take this step. Tung seems to recognize the overall significance of the project and praises several aspects of Yu's effort, including applauding him for relying on Daly's input as a counterbalance to his own limited vision of America. In concluding her review, she writes:

The play is a testament of China's great interest in America. And one can't deny that it's fun to see two talented western actors working with two Chinese of the same caliber. Before and after the show, you can

even speak with them in this warm, intimate theatrical experience. Despite its flaws, cultural issues surrounding the play are interesting talk in themselves. And in that respect, *Peidu furen* cannot be missed.<sup>45</sup>

The unique ensemble cast and interactive performance environment to which Tung refers made *Student Wife* the pathbreaking production it was, and qualify Yu Luosheng as one of the most important—and overlooked—directors in China today. His persistence in using both foreign and Chinese actors together on stage, which began with *The Joy Luck Club*, paid off in *Student Wife* (see pl. 9). The use of Western actors to play Jordan and Lucia Spere allowed for thorough intercultural collaboration for the first time in China and gave fuller dimension to the cross-cultural issues raised in the play. The performance that resulted was far different than if the parts had been played by Chinese actors, as has been the custom since spoken drama was first appropriated in China.

Likewise, the use of foreign actors allowed Yu to create the performance environment he desired: an informal, intimate atmosphere with abundant interaction between actor and audience on several levels. This could not have been accomplished using the conventional approach of Chinese actors in foreign “drag” without detracting hugely from the content of the play. Indeed, the use of foreign actors allowed Yu to bring the audience so close to them that they did not require makeup (though Wajs chose to wear heavy makeup anyway). It also drew to the theatre for a Chinese-language play without simultaneous translation a larger percentage of foreign spectators than ever before in China. Both Yu and Daly confirmed that there were foreign patrons at all performances of the play, sometimes composing as much as half the audience, which is unheard of in any performance venue that is not a tourist attraction.

In short, the choice to assign roles with racial accuracy resulted in artistic innovation in all aspects of production and reception. As with each of the plays examined in previous chapters, insertion of an Occidental Other into the text and onto the stage led directly to creative innovation in physical theatre technique itself, as well as serving to illuminate themes the playwrights desired to bring to the fore. When an American is written onto the page, and given agency (even marginally) in the story, it offers a unique invitation to the director to explore new possibilities as he gives life to the character on the stage. The “significant othering” that occurs has the potential to open new dimensions in local theatre practice, and usually does.

In the case of *Student Wife*, Yu Luosheng was empowered to create the entire vision for this thorough innovation, since he scripted the play himself.

The only major change he made in adapting the novel was to shift its action spacially and temporally somewhat to another place and time; the result is not a radical displacement, but a friendly framing—almost a bracketing in the phenomenological sense. Rather than the events taking place in the Speares' home in America in the present tense, they unfold as a series of stagings as the couples reminisce during an informal reunion (presumably when the Speares have traveled to Shanghai to visit Liao and Jiang). The intention is to invite the audience into the Liao/Jiang home as guests, to “participate” in the “party.” In order to produce this desired effect, Yu arranged for the audience to sit on comfortable sofas, such as one might find in a friend's living room.

The obvious question arises regarding what kind of sofas one should use: Chinese or American? When the audience enters, they are in a Shanghai residence, but as soon as the flashbacks begin, and for the remainder of the play, they are in an American home: on which setting should the designer focus when creating the set? This sandwiching of locales resulted unfortunately in an unsatisfying set, because the designer's decision was apparently to avoid making one and to arbitrarily blend the two influences so that neither dominated. In fact, according to Daly, the designers—and most Chinese audience members—probably did not even recognize there was a choice to be made:

I think they were comfortable with it. But they don't make those distinctions: if it's a high-class karaoke bar, that's fine for them. It's not western, but it's acceptable—it's other than their everyday lives, and as they walked into the door and into the theatre, it was a very nice space. I think to them it was just the set of the play. A few people mentioned it, and *all* of the returned *liuxuesheng* (overseas students) who saw it mentioned it—that this feels nothing like America, that the set doesn't work at all. A number of people who had been to the States came, and almost all of them commented on how Chinese the set was.<sup>46</sup>

Xu Zheng echoed Daly's thoughts: “As soon as we take the stage and sit on the sofa, we are supposed to be in our Shanghai home, but it's also their home in America—and I don't know if that is clear.”<sup>47</sup> Although Xu and Daly both raised concerns with Yu about the set on numerous occasions, they had very limited success. Both actors were severely disappointed with the final results but were powerless to do more than complain; their ideas were tolerated but ignored. Daly in particular had some strong opinions about the set:

I thought the set was terrible. There was absolutely no attempt to make it seem like a home, let alone an American home. It looked like a high-class karaoke bar. It was colorless, it was gray and brown. I brought that up a few times, until I started to make myself obnoxious, then figured “okay, it’s not my job.” They hadn’t coordinated anything, it was very unprofessional. They didn’t put any paintings on the wall. I said, “This needs color—it’s supposed to be a wealthy home in Beverly Hills. There should be big, splashy abstract paintings on the walls. It’s very easy to go to some young abstract painters in Shanghai: they get to have something on the wall—they can sell it, it’s up there—it’s good advertisement for them, it’s good for us.” No, they wouldn’t do it; they said that’s not the Chinese way. They ripped 8½ x 11 terrible paintings out of a calendar of European cities and sort of tacked those to the walls. It was pathetic, it was embarrassing—I was embarrassed by the set.<sup>48</sup>

Xu’s concerns about the set were more closely related to the style of performance and overall effect of the play as a complete sensory experience for the audience rather than questions of authentic representation. His reflections about the set were linked to acting, physical use of performance space, character development, and the overall structure of the piece:

Since the space in a little theatre is so small, you want the audience to feel, as soon as they walk in, that this is a place people really live—but it didn’t seem that way. It was too fake. At that time, I suggested we put real food in the little kitchen and actually eat and drink real things during those scenes, but we grabbed imaginary plates and pretended to eat and then the next minute drank liquor that we did have—that is unbalanced, you know? Either it’s all fake or it’s all real . . . [The living room] becomes the street for a little while: a chair is brought over to represent the car, but what is the point of adding the sound effect of the [car] door? It is unnecessary.<sup>49</sup>

This apparently random combination of naturalistic and symbolic elements that was unsettling to the actors can also be interpreted as an innovative aesthetic choice to blend modified realism (real food in some scenes, but not in others; a chair accompanied by a car sound-cue) with hyperrealism (food shared by the audience; couches for house seating).

Xu Zheng was further frustrated by the uneven pace of the scenes and the lack of follow-through in plot development.<sup>50</sup> Yu’s displacement of linear action from the novel into isolated memory enactments—the flow of which,

though still sequential, was broken up by Zhuojun's intermittent narration and reflection—was the main source of this choppy structure. As a result, some scenes would seem to drag while others were utterly undeveloped. Yu, however, seemed content to make this trade-off in order to obtain the intimate environment he sought, which he did rather successfully.

As previously mentioned, this was not Yu's first attempt at bringing an audience into the world of the play: his production of *The Woman Left Behind* in 1991 was a similar endeavor. Like *Student Wife*, the plot of *Woman* centers around a Chinese man who studies abroad; but, in this case, as the title implies, he leaves his wife at home. Ironically, the play focuses on her misery in being *excluded* from his overseas experience and on the temptations she faces in his absence. In *Woman* the racially Other characters are not represented on the stage—they are merely mentioned.<sup>51</sup> Since the characters physically present are all Chinese, Yu was able to bring the audience close to the actors without overly straining their suspension of disbelief, as would have been the case with Chinese actors portraying the Speares in the same intimate arena.<sup>52</sup>

When I attended Yu's production of *Woman*, I was substantially impressed with the unprecedented atmosphere he had created. While the Shanghai People's Art Theatre had always led the way in environmental "little theatre" in China, with productions of Sun Huizhu's *Old B Hanging on the Wall* (*Gua zai qiangshang de Lao B*, 1985) and *Tomorrow Hell Come Out of the Mountains* (*Mingri jiuyao chushan*, directed by Richard Schechner in 1989), they had never attempted anything like Yu's *Woman*. For one thing, Yu was fighting fully armored the trend of young people abandoning the theatre for the trendier entertainment of swank karaoke bars. He responded by turning the third-floor space into a replica of such venues, complete with tables and chairs, a disco ball, and catered refreshments. Patrons entering the theatre were led to the "dance floor" to waltz under the flashing disco ball; other audience members promptly followed suit. Yu remembers it vividly:

We made the theatre like a café—the audience at tables, not in rows; the action occurring in a corner of the café. The action could happen anywhere, all over the space. When the audience came in, actors helped them to their seats, offered them refreshments, so the audience and actors were equal. I got rid of the "acting feeling" (*biaoyan gan*) altogether: I put the audience in an entirely different aesthetic realm from seeing a play.<sup>53</sup>

*Student Wife* was the follow-up to this first experiment, continuing the aesthetic of bringing the audience into the world of the play, and extending the air of glamour as well (the leads in *Woman* were famous screen actors,



with the same kind of star appeal as Daly—audiences love being personally “greeted” and addressed by such personalities, and some attend purely for this purpose).

Yu’s main goal is to narrow the gap between actor and audience, and to provide genuine interaction between the two. Though, inevitably, postperformance interaction risks being reduced to autograph-signing sessions (a recent phenomenon that is now a common practice at plays in Shanghai and Beijing), the “talk backs” that often follow—as well as the initial contact of performer and audience before the rehearsed performance begins—are significant achievements. In *Student Wife* Yu strove for the environment of a family party, with Geng Ge (the actress playing Jiang Zhuojun) welcoming the audience like guests to a party at her home, sitting among them, explaining that they have been invited to help welcome her American friends:

I have the actors be hosts and greet the audience at the beginning when they come in. I attended home parties when I was in America, and we’re starting to have them here in China, too: the hostess casually chats with guests, so I had actors chat informally with audience members . . . This pulls the audience and actors closer together, both in terms of space and in their minds.<sup>54</sup>

Yu confirmed that there was no way to persuade all audience members to regard the actors as their characters, particularly the two foreign actors. Allowing such close access to an oddity like a foreigner speaking Chinese—let alone in a professional theatrical role—inevitably gives rise to the standard questions of nationality, origin, local occupation, and so forth.

In Daly’s case the exchange acquires an additional layer: some patrons addressed him as his character, some as himself, but many as “David” from *A Beijinger in New York*. Indeed, audiences seemed to have difficulty distinguishing Robert Daly from David McCarthy, and the fact that Yu insisted on Daly growing a beard for the play (just like the one he grew for *Beijinger*) did not help clarify the distinction. Besides the identification with his character in the television serial, adding facial hair to Daly’s Jordan enhanced his appearance as the foreign Other. Full beards and blond wigs are often used on Chinese actors playing Western characters in order to connote otherness, because these are physical attributes that Chinese men do not possess. When I brought this fact to Daly’s attention regarding his appearance in the play, he readily agreed:

Sure, I think that makes a huge difference. That’s one of the reasons they wanted a beard—because, otherwise, I’m just not different-

looking enough. I'm not blond, I have dark hair; I'm not enormous. But the beard sort of nails it, I think, in their minds.<sup>55</sup>

Whether Daly was consciously aware of it or not, the audience that came to his play was seeing a *real* beard on a *real* foreigner for the *first* time in the history of Chinese theatre. He estimated that the effect of seeing a foreigner play a foreigner was both amusing and validating for the audience—that patrons felt “respected by the realism of it.” Perhaps what Daly sensed here is appreciation on the part of young cosmopolitan audiences of the effort to simulate a “reality” that is becoming increasingly common to them. Where an earlier generation of Chinese theatergoers could only encounter a breathing, walking, talking foreigner with a beard in the form of a Chinese actor in heavy disguise, this generation of urban elite passes by them on the streets of Shanghai every day.

This fact invites theatre companies to continue to train and recruit actors of international origin who can play such roles, the frequency of which will surely increase as Chinese artists continue to have contact with the West, both through their own travels abroad and in their own city streets. It is conceivable that any other mode of representation will one day be restricted to comedies (consequently reduced to farce) or overt experiments. Daly's conversations with audience members already hint at this:

I think that now, for most of them, a Chinese [actor playing my role] would just be silly; for most audiences—and they commented on that—it would be absurd. The play wouldn't really work with Chinese actors, it would just be ridiculous. And the Chinese know enough: even if they don't know much about Americans, they know that Americans are not Chinese—and therefore they know they're not getting the real thing, or even a reasonable approximation of it, if they had Chinese actors.<sup>56</sup>

This raises the unanswerable question of whether the spectators who “commented on it” would have made the same assessment if they had seen the play performed by an all-Chinese cast in a proscenium setting. Presumably, if directors like Yu wish to continue to bring the actors and audience into close contact in little-theatre or environmental settings such as that of *Student Wife*, foreigners must be cast in foreign roles in realistic dramas or plays with serious themes. Changing audience demographics also present a demand for foreign self-representation, as theatre spectatorship continues to globalize along with the rest of urban China.

Of course, Robert Daly's subjectivity as an American participating in his

own representation as determined by a Chinese novelist, playwright, director, and team of designers is rich terrain for cultural analysis, particularly in illuminating the shifting hegemonies and complex strategies of othering embedded in discursive practices such as Occidentalism. Daly clearly positions himself as an “authentic” American who can more accurately represent a “real” American on stage. This implies an obviously problematic assumption that casting a foreign actor necessarily ensures a more realistic performance, while discounting the potential for a talented Chinese actor to convincingly portray a Western Other. Furthermore, it projects an assertion that “true” representation is actually possible, a stance that resists the postmodern, postcolonial claim that distortion, essentialization, and misrepresentation are inevitable in such efforts.

What actor Robert Daly, critic Lily Tung, and many audience members who attended performances of *Student Wife* responded to is the duplicitous illusion of theatrical realism; this deception is enhanced by novelist Wang Zhousheng’s claim to be telling a “true” story and Yu Luosheng’s effort to be “true to” that story in scripting his adaptation, as well as to direct the play in an interactive environmental style that pushes realism to its limits. In other words, when a play is cast and presented in a realist mode in terms of theatrical genre and production style, the spectator anticipates “real” situations and representations. As Una Chaudhuri has pointed out, “the characters of realism [are] written to be taken more seriously as ‘real people.’”<sup>57</sup> This gesture, while effective, is of course deceptive, as Josephine Lee explains in her analysis of the politics of dramatic realism:

Although realism purports to be a faithful representation of ordinary life, it is in fact a more complex ideological practice, a manufacturing rather than a mirroring of some construct of “real life.” Less important than how faithful or true to life the play is are the ways in which it constructs relationships that viewing communities must agree on as being “life like” and therefore meaningful.<sup>58</sup>

Lee’s account, while accurately explicating the coercive tendencies of dramatic realism, conceptualizes a theatre audience as a unitary communal spectator rather than accounting for the multiple subjectivities that lead to uneven audience reception and contradictory resonances of stage representations considered in our discussion of the ambivalent nature of the stereotype. Such temptations to universalize spectatorship are to be avoided along with illusions of authentic representations.

One of the inspirations—and the primary objective—of Yu’s project was an idealistic desire to promote mutual understanding between Chinese and

Americans, and he truly believed, as Wang Zhousheng had before him, that her story accomplished this. They both felt her experience reflected that it really is a “small world after all.” Unfortunately, Yu’s play, as a faithful adaptation, cannot escape the trap set up in the novel. Wang’s message is ultimately a confusing blend of essentializing difference and fabricated utopian universality: we are not all the same any more than we are all different, and that is why neither blatant stereotype nor absolute individualism will ever assist us in wearing each other’s skin, donning each other’s wigs, or speaking each other’s lines.

Even the best-intentioned, most progressive of us can not always overcome our own prejudices, developed over miles and years of repetition and reinforcement. One could delve deeper into Wang’s novel and Yu’s script and unearth further racial stereotyping, such as the voice of a “black man” frightening Zhuojun in the street when she flees the Speares’ home following Lucia’s groundless accusations. Though his original draft maintained this trace from the novel (trivial in function, but significant in meaning), fortunately Yu replaced the reference with an “old man’s” voice in the final production script, and the voice they used in the production was “just a guy’s voice” (Yu didn’t even realize it specified “black man” in the script, explaining, “it said that in the novel, so I just copied it down”). Elaborating further in an attempt to justify the original reference—in essence, defending Wang—Yu said:

You know why I agree with the way it’s written? Because actually when I was in America, I felt that black people were a problem. Sometimes I would see black people just standing around the streets—Los Angeles has this problem, so does New York, and I’ve also heard it said that blacks are a problem in American society . . . Chinese people have said it, too—Chinese in America say it. So I didn’t think this was a problem, but I also didn’t emphasize in the script that it was a black person.<sup>59</sup>

A similar moment, in which Yu revealed that he subscribes to some of the images presented in Wang’s novel, occurred after our lengthy discussion about the centrality of Lucia’s Jewishness and the negative stereotype it perpetuates, when he paused and asked, “But there are still Jewish people like this, aren’t there? There must be. . . .”<sup>60</sup>

The shift Haiping Yan identifies in Chinese spoken drama from “experimental modernism” in the 1980s to “critical realism” in the 1990s is reflected in the progressively more realistic staging approaches employed in plays from *China Dream* in 1987 to *Student Wife* in 1995. The open, uncluttered space

of *China Dream* and *Going Abroad* foregrounded the actor's body and allowed it to move inventively through space; absence of scenery (total in *China Dream*, partial in *Going Abroad*) enabled multiple locations to spontaneously surface and then transform, and this nonspecificity invited fluid movement from past to present. *Going Abroad* displayed a similar spirit of experimentation to *China Dream* and also blended absurdist elements in plot, aesthetics, and physical scale with sequences of emotion that welcomed fleeting moments of identification usually associated with realist constructions of character.

*Bird Men*, by way of contrast, presented a naturalistic outdoor set complete with full scenery, sunlight, and live (and recorded) bird sounds. While the story line is comic and imaginative, the characters are complex and portrayed through acting that is as naturalistic as the play's environment. Pushing environment to extend beyond the fourth wall, *Student Wife* recreates a domestic space and then reenacts events that took place there, of which the audience is intermittently a participant. Though presented through flashback and interrupted by extradiegetic monologues delivered by the protagonist (in which she steps outside the dialogue structure to provide narration, context, and interior monologues directly to the audience), the play as a whole is presented in a realist framework.

In the case of *Bird Men* and *Student Wife*, the later two of the four plays, the trend toward critical realism noted by Yan is discernible, but is also subverted to some degree through their Occidentalist gestures. The traumatic presence of an American character in the world of each play requires creative strategies for handling his or her excess: in effect, characters like Master San and Jiang Zhuojun *must* step outside the confines of realism in order to come to terms with the American Other who shakes their cultural foundation. Master San does this by performing Beijing opera as Judge Bao; Jiang Zhuojun does so through her monologues addressed directly to the audience.

Employing multiple spatial layering, the action in *Student Wife* moves from the theatre as a living space to a Chinese living room to an imagined American home that serves as the primary presence (despite its visual absence) without clear transition: Zhuojun's initial greeting of her "guests" is interrupted by Lucia's harsh cries from upstairs about the baby's sleeping position, thrusting the audience into the action of the play without warning. Mirroring this geographic fluidity is temporal layering of past and present, again on multiple levels: first, the "real" present of the theatre; then, the "un-real" present of the Speares' visit to China; next, the reenacted past of the events that constitute the majority of the play; and finally, the "frozen" moments when Zhuojun directly addresses the audience.

This splitting and displacement of time and space is, significantly, *not* echoed in split or doubled subjectivity, as was the case with each of the other plays examined earlier (John Hodges/Zhiqiang in *China Dream*, Gao Yuan/Gao Shan in *Going Abroad*, Master San/Judge Bao in *Bird Men*). This suggests that representational rather than presentational casting (foreigners playing foreign characters rather than Chinese actors embodying them) may dispel the need for fragmentation and reintegration. Since the Occidental Other is given considerable agency, there is a sense of wholeness (albeit illusory) that is unattainable in the other plays.

Although Zhuojun comments on her experience and displays the classic traits of the search for “home,” the causes of her discomfort (culture clash with the American couple with whom she lives) are explored and resolved within the action of the play thoroughly, if not satisfactorily: the healing conclusion does not necessarily flow logically from the previous sequence of events of revealed information, but it *does* occur, as the result of a process of working through difference.

Several scholars identify this psychoanalytic process (comparable to Freud’s “remembering, repeating, and working-through”) as central to resolving the geopathic trauma of exile.<sup>61</sup> Chaudhuri suggests that the process of performance itself is a physical enactment of this therapeutic sequence.<sup>62</sup> In *Student Wife* this enactment instead becomes a reenactment, since the action of the play is occurring as a flashback; but in this conflation of past and present (and “here and there”), the two couples in the play fully act out their complex relationship, and it is in the recreation and “working through” of their most difficult times together that we arrive at Zhuojun’s birthday party and its ritual of healing at the end of the play. Significantly, we never return to the present where the play began but are left in the transcendent moment of the past when troubles were transformed and tensions among the four characters were magically erased.

Yu Luosheng’s production of *Student Wife* offered a unique opportunity to its four young actors, and to 1995 Shanghai audiences as well. It also provided a new model for intercultural theatre projects, which was a fitting inaugural project for the new merger of the two theatre companies that pooled their resources to form the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center. At the level of performative aesthetics, it succeeded in transcending outdated and uninteresting conventions; at the level of technical design, it presented a new (if unsurmounted) challenge; at the level of text, it virtually demanded radical reinterpretation and rigorous discussion between director and cast—a generally uncommon practice in China.

From the moment he first lifted his pen to write *Student Wife*, Yu envi-

sioned Western and Chinese actors sharing the space and time of his unique environment. He heard both Americans and Chinese speaking Mandarin; he imagined both his own repertory actors and foreign actors chatting with the audience; and he pictured seated on the audience sofas both loyal local patrons and expatriate spectators seeing their first Chinese play. Even if he saw a full beard on Jordan—and exaggerated hysterical gestures and high-pitched screams coming from Lucia—the beard wasn't glued to a Chinese face and the screams were not coming from an actress in a wig. Yu's intention, imperfect as it was, was to give the American Other its first chance to speak for itself. And, in some ways, it did. Crucial to that event was not the mere choice of an American actor to play a central role, but rather genuine collaboration throughout the rehearsal process with that actor. Despite his somewhat arrogant and naïve adherence to the belief in "true" representation, Robert Daly's intervention at fragile points of rupture in the text and creative process did prevent the foreign Other from merely mimicking the stereotypes of its creator.<sup>63</sup>

Though his power of revision was limited (ideally, Jordan would be a more developed, more human, and more interesting character, and Lucia would possess some redeeming qualities that would not repel identification with her on the part of Western female audience members), Daly's participation transformed Yu's already transformative vision, and between the two of them, they offered the Chinese theatre community and public a compelling proposition for future cross-cultural work. The appearance of the Other on the Chinese stage in its own body—and quite literally in the audience's face—uncovered a whole new range of possibilities for subsequent productions and collaborations.

## CHAPTER 7



# Anti-Americanism: Dignity and *Che Guevara*

To some people, the Western world is a heaven . . . But to other people . . . the West, and the U.S. in particular, has always been our enemy, oppressing us, invading our motherland, and even killing our countrymen . . . In short, the West to these people is nothing but a hell.  
—Wang Ning, “Orientalism versus Occidentalism?”

On the heels of the closing of Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center’s production of *Student Wife*, mounting political tension between the United States and China peaked when the Clinton administration granted a visa to the Republic of China (Taiwan) president Li Denghui. Though traveling to the United States under the auspices of an “unofficial visit” to attend his reunion at Cornell University (where he received his doctorate in agricultural economics in 1968), the diplomacy involved came perilously close to official recognition of Li, which would have constituted a breach in U.S. policy toward Taiwan (the American government officially withdrew its recognition of the Republic in 1979).

Amid patriotic demonstrations by local Taiwanese and protests by mainlanders, Li arrived in Ithaca, New York, on June 8, 1995. The next day, he delivered the reunion’s Olin lecture, which began with expressions of gratitude and the following words:

I deem this invitation to attend the reunion at Cornell not only a personal honor, but, more significantly, an honor for the 21 million people in the Republic of Taiwan. In fact, this invitation constitutes recognition of their remarkable achievements in developing their nation over



the past several decades. And it is the people of my nation that I most want to talk about on this occasion.<sup>1</sup>

Openly referring thus to Taiwan as a “nation,” reporting that “Communism is dead or dying,” and quoting Czech president Václav Havel, Li emphasized his desire to fully democratize Taiwan and gain more legitimate recognition from the international community. His visit was the first time a Taiwanese president had ever stepped on American soil, and neither the visit nor the speech sat well with the Beijing government. A poll published in the Chinese press that September named the United States as the most hostile and disliked nation.<sup>2</sup> Several months later, just before Republic elections in March 1996, the PRC conducted missile tests off the coast of Taiwan, escalating tension between the island and mainland governments and exacerbating Sino-American political tensions in the process.

Soon after, the first in a series of *Say No (shuo bu)* books was published in China, riding the rising tide of neo-nationalism and making its own significant splash. With chapter headings such as “Decline of the West, Rise of the East,” “Don’t Be Afraid To Go To War,” “American Diplomats Are Dishonest and Unreliable,” “Burn Down Hollywood,” “America’s Narcissism and Ultraselfishness,” “How Much Is the U.S. Willing To Pay for Taiwan?” and “America Has No Right To Criticize China on the Issue of Human Rights,” the runaway best seller *China Can Say No* convinced millions of Chinese readers that they had had enough of American neo-imperialism. A sequel by the same authors followed several months later, titled *China Can Still Say No (Zhongguo haishi neng shuo bu)*.<sup>3</sup> Officials in Washington were concerned enough about the popularity of the books among ordinary Chinese citizens that they invited the authors to visit the United States as their guests to reevaluate their strong negative opinions.

Just before the *Say No* sequel was published, a second book with the theme hit the presses; whereas the original *Say No* was written by a group of young journalists, this collaboration, called *Why Should China Say No? (Zhongguo weishenme shuo bu?)*, brought together scholars and experts in international relations and included sections on economic relations, human rights, military, Tibet, and the Taiwan issue. Following this book came the publication of recent Cornell graduate Jia Qingguo’s doctoral thesis about failed Sino-American relations during the Cold War period (1950s), retitled *China Doesn’t Only Say No (Zhongguo bujinjin shuo bu)*. The final publication of the year in the “Say No” genre was *Behind the Demonization of China (Yaomohua Zhongguo de beihou)*, in December 1996.<sup>4</sup> The writing team for this volume combined scholars and journalists, led by Chinese professor Liu

Kang of Pennsylvania State University, and Li Xiguang, a senior journalist of Xinhua News Agency formerly stationed in Washington, DC. They mentored the other contributors, including a lawyer, graduate students, and journalists, collectively representative of China's new elite in the United States.

The "Say No" fever abated somewhat with improved relations between the Chinese and U.S. governments, prompted by Jiang Zemin's official visit in 1997 and Clinton's reciprocal trip to China in 1998, and that year scholar Shen Jiru published his book *China Won't Become "Mr. No"* (*Zhongguo budang "Bu Xiansheng"*), calling for cooperation with the United States and a concerted effort not to impose self-isolation by "saying no" as the Soviet Union had done in the past.<sup>5</sup> But the entrenched anti-American hostility of the 1990s lay just below the surface in the later part of the decade, enhanced by neo-nationalist excitement regarding the imminent return of Hong Kong to Chinese governance, and reappearing with a vengeance when NATO forces bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in May 1999.

During this period, *Student Wife* director Yu Luosheng continued his experiment in transnational, multiracial casting by staging Sha Yexin's new play, *Dignity* (*Zunyan*). Drafted in 1997, *Dignity* was cast with an international group of actors (drawn from both the professional Chinese acting ranks and the expatriate business and foreign student communities) and opened at the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center in December, continuing its run for several months in 1998. Later that year, it was revived with an all-Chinese cast (because the foreigners had to return to school or work). The original multinational cast production toured to Beijing, where it was praised by Zhu Rongji and other high-ranking CCP officials. The second mounting of the production eventually dovetailed with the renewed Sino-American tensions that resulted from the embassy bombing in Kosovo.

A brief exploration of this next play in China to figure the American Other onstage reveals complex layers of possible interpretations even as it rather conventionally follows the representational formula evidenced in *Student Wife*. *Dignity* was produced by the same theatre company and directed by the same director, who once again employed multinational casting, but Sha Yexin is a very different writer from novelist Wang Zhousheng, and his plays cannot always be taken at face value. Closer examination of *Dignity* situates it in the context of its creation in 1997, when the "Say No" phenomenon had tremendous impact but was beginning to (temporarily) abate, and vigorous anti-Americanism was as socially and politically palatable as ever, but could withstand Sha Yexin's unique brand of complication.

*Dignity* is another play focusing on the trials of overseas Chinese students in America, this time quite literally. Though eventually staged in huge pro-

scenium theatres with only partial set elements, Sha's original play script requires that the entire (presumably small) theatre become a courtroom as the protagonist, Jin Xiaoxue, sues her elderly American employer and son for mistreatment (with the intended effect that the audience becomes an extended jury or spectators in the courtroom rather than theatre patrons peeking through a "fourth wall"). Jin lasts only three days in her new job as Louisa's housekeeper: the first day, she is forced to eat leftovers after running them through the food processor; the second day, she watches as the fried chicken she has bought for dinner is fed to the dog; and on the third day, Louisa's son (a prominent banker) comes to visit and ends up beating Jin savagely when she stands up to his hate-filled racist remarks (see pl. 10).

After being coerced into not pressing charges, Jin is denied a criminal proceeding by an American judge, misrepresented by an American lawyer, cheated by a Taiwanese law firm, reprimanded and fined by a corrupt Chinese American judge, but is finally aided by a Chinese lawyer from the Asian Anti-Discrimination Alliance, hired by the foundation's vice director, Mr. Larsen. Larsen is the only sympathetic American character in the play, but he is physically absent: we merely hear about him in passing when Jin tells her best friend that he has provided her with a Chinese lawyer and a book to help her understand the American legal system. It is the Chinese lawyer (Du), his client (the protagonist, Jin), and her best friend (Yu Xiuxiu, a nurse) who are the only heroes of the play.

Jin perseveres for two years with a civil suit against Edward (the banker), while he runs for state senator and uses his connections and famous Manhattan legal team to intimidate her. In the end, Jin Xiaoxue prevails: in a bitter, self-righteous closing monologue, she demands Edward's public apology three times, declares reclamation of her human dignity, and tears to pieces the \$5,250 check awarded for damages, proving that overseas Chinese can not be bought off (earlier, she had refused a \$500,000 out-of-court settlement in her desire to bring the banker and his mother to justice through trial). This final speech evokes Chinese national pride in the face of American discrimination:

[JIN]: You all think this Chinese girl dragged out this lawsuit only for the sake of money and that for money she will put an end to it. You think I'll be satisfied and shed tears of gratitude. I would like to ask these three great lawyers: if a white woman were beaten like I was, would you use \$5,250 to get rid of her? Recently, an elderly white woman scalded her lips at McDonald's and got \$600,000! In your eyes Chinese people are that worthless! But you are all wrong, at least with this Chinese person

. . . I brought this lawsuit to reclaim my human dignity! Dignity! [ . . . ] Money cannot buy the dignity of this small Chinese woman! That is why I pursued this lawsuit: to tell these people who discriminate against us: don't think we Chinese overseas students—who travel so far across the ocean to come here—come to beg for handouts, or to steal your money, or that we are of a lower class than you or lack human dignity. *No*. What we foreign students bring to this land is youth and wisdom, all our respect, and we are not less than anyone else!<sup>6</sup>

Jin hints at the geopathic trauma common to the protagonists of the other plays examined here and goes on to link her perseverance in adverse overseas circumstances to the “marginal psychological state” discussed earlier that is characteristic of Chinese students in the United States:<sup>7</sup>

[JIN]: During these past two years of this lawsuit, while I was still under the exceedingly difficult conditions of carrying these psychological and physical wounds, I diligently studied for my doctorate in elementary education. I can say very proudly that I did well! American dollars in the face of my dignity have no value at all.

She ends her speech—and the play—with the exclamation: “American dollars, go to hell!” Here, neo-nationalist condemnation of American neo-imperialism is less than subtle, and the hostile Occidentalism that will be recognized by both Chinese and Western scholars in response to the Belgrade embassy bombing and the South China Seas spy-plane incident has already materialized; in fact, Jin's rabid insistence on an apology from Edward foreshadows the eleven-day standoff that will occur in 2001 when Chinese officials insist that the Bush administration apologize in response to the collision of an American E-P3 surveillance plane and a Chinese F-8 jet fighter—and the United States finally capitulates.

In the initial staged version of *Dignity*, the ugly American (the abusive employer Louisa) was once again played by Polish actress Basia Wajs; but this time, her supporting cast went beyond an underdeveloped character like Jordan Speare to require a multiracial ensemble to portray her vicious banker son, Edward; a Mexican housekeeper; a black female judge; a white doctor and cop; and several American and Chinese lawyers.

In all, the cast of seventeen called for more foreign actors than Chinese, probably due to the fact that, after being published as a newspaper article, *Dignity* was scripted as a television serial before being adapted for the stage as part of China's ninetieth anniversary of spoken drama. For Chinese television, it is easy to find local foreigners to play racially Other roles, which are

later dubbed by professional native actors; but it is quite difficult to find foreign residents with the linguistic and acting skills to play stage roles—not to mention schedules flexible enough to allow for daily rehearsals and performances. The original Shanghai production featured an international cast that included a half-Chinese Bulgarian, along with foreign students and workers from Africa, Romania, France, Australia, Canada, and of course Poland. Ironically, all of these foreigners played Americans but none were actually from the United States. Both the multinational cast production and the all-Chinese cast production were popular and critical successes, though Chinese actors who participated in both versions have reflected on the unevenness in experience, acting ability, and linguistic competence of the amateur foreign actors who were cast, many of whom had never performed onstage before. This returns us to Yu Luosheng's defense of racial (though perhaps not ethnic) "authenticity" in contemporary casting of foreigner roles in Chinese plays as presenting a "truer" representation of such characters, while others in China—including some participants in *Dignity*—maintain that a quality performance by a trained actor in makeup is in fact more "real" (see pls. 11 and 12).<sup>8</sup>

Veteran actor Xu Chengxian does not welcome integration of foreigners in Chinese plays unless they are trained professionals. As part of the ensemble in *Dignity*, Xu felt frustrated by the presence of so many foreigners who struggled not only with Chinese language but also with the basics of the rehearsal process. Although he admired their work ethic and refers to them in conversation as "foreign friends" (*waiguo pengyou*), he believes untrained outsiders do not belong onstage alongside professional local actors in major theatres. For Xu, these kinds of broad international experiments using amateur actors are better suited for university theatre clubs:

If we were a school, then I could work with untrained foreign students, but we are a professional theatre troupe. If we brought five professionally trained actors from another country to do a play with five trained actors from our theatre, then I think this is a great method and is a mutual cultural exchange. But when you take untrained amateur actors and put them in a play onstage and sell tickets to an audience, this is a kind of experimentation, not an orientation: you can do it once, but you can't base a permanent practice on it.<sup>9</sup>

Xu approaches this question not only from the perspective of actor collaboration but also in terms of audience reception. He estimates that spectators have different standards for Chinese actors and foreign amateurs and that when the latter appear onstage, the audience's attention is shifted to the

novelty of the real foreign presence on the stage and delight at their attempt to perform in Chinese, whereas the spectator watching a professional Chinese actor embody a foreign character is focused on the story being told, the events of the plot, and the competence of the acting. Since the convention of native actors being wigged, costumed, and made-up to portray foreigners is well-established in China, Xu maintains that the audience is willing to suspend its disbelief and does not pause to think, “*Aiyō*, this is fake; you aren’t foreigners!” His opinion is in direct contrast to Robert Daly’s contention that Chinese audiences are no longer satisfied with mere impersonations of foreign characters. Xu’s viewpoint values the ability of a trained, professional foreign actor with no command of Chinese language to project the nuances of his character through movement, emotion, relationship to other characters onstage, and connection to the audience above the ability of a theatrically inexperienced foreigner to communicate in Chinese.

In this regard Xu is also fundamentally at odds with director Yu Luosheng. Yu believes that in the case of *Dignity*, the script itself requires foreign actors. Acknowledging that it is incredibly difficult to recruit capable non-Chinese actors who speak fluent Chinese, Yu privileges the value of the authentic racial presence of the foreign body over language and performance skills. Two years after his production of *Dignity*, he defended his casting choices with a rationale similar to Daly’s (and his own) five years earlier, asserting that the 1990s called for a new aesthetic and that Chinese audiences no longer accept traditional conventions of painting actors black or putting blond wigs on them:

This play differs from other plays before that used foreigners, because it requires many foreigners. I felt the content demanded use of foreigners, because this story happens in the United States: you can’t use actors with all black hair and black eyes . . . I was going for an authentic aesthetic: in the U.S., there are white people, black people, et cetera. From an aesthetic point of view, if we use black-haired, black-eyed actors made up to be blond and blue-eyed, the feeling is completely wrong—that’s the way we played foreigners in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>10</sup>

Yu, like Xu, is concerned with audience reception as well as professionalism, but their analyses are utterly opposed. Where Xu sees professional compromise in working with amateur foreigners, Yu sees progressive innovation indicating the future of China’s theatre practice; where Xu fears audiences being distracted by the unconvincing performance of an untrained actor, Yu recognizes spectators being drawn in by the heightened authenticity of actual interracial representation. Both maintain that their preferred approach is

the one that is more *zhenshi* or has more *zhenshixing*: the terms—indicating truthfulness, authenticity, or realism—surface repeatedly in discussions about international casting.

Other participants in the production of *Dignity*, including the playwright, foreign actors in the multinational cast, and Chinese actors in the subsequent cast, adopt various versions of either Xu's or Yu's perspective. In writing the piece first as reportage and then as a television script before adapting it to the stage, Sha Yexin pictured foreigners in the televised roles and Chinese actors made up to play Americans for the stage performance. The intriguing paradox of *zhenshixing* is best illustrated in the reflections of the two young actors who played the banker son, Edward, in the different casts. Chinese actor Yang Yi sought to apply Stanislavskian Method techniques to his role preparation by watching the film *Wall Street* six times and making his character an imitation of the one portrayed by Michael Douglas.<sup>11</sup> Canadian Patrick Kelly, on the other hand, had his hands full just trying to memorize his lines. Despite weeks of intense preparation, written reflection in a rehearsal journal, and a performance that director Yu Luosheng considered “deeper” (more convincing) than the other foreigners, Kelly maintains that he did not (and still does not) know what the play was about and never understood what other characters onstage were saying.<sup>12</sup> His inability to read the script and his inexperience in playing foreign roles in Chinese media seem to be the two main factors that precluded the kind of artistic and “moral” intervention practiced by Robert Daly in *Student Wife* (and Matt Trusch in *Swing*, as discussed in chapter 8). Even so, it is surprising that Kelly did not regard the role of abusive Edward as overly negative or unfairly stereotyped. It could be that the unprecedented quantity of foreign characters in *Dignity* (exceeding the one or two in *Swing*, *Student Wife*, and *Bird Men*, and even the several in *China Dream* and *The Great Going Abroad*) provided enough variety of negative Occidentalist representations that no one character (or actor) particularly stood out as being deserving of critique and revision to the foreigners cast in the roles. And yet the play's plot, theme, and characters are clearly recognizable as projecting the prevalent patriotic anti-American sentiment of the Chinese government, intelligentsia, and general population.

It is not surprising that the play *Dignity* was particularly popular with Party officials, since it emerged alongside neo-nationalist cultural products such as *China Can Say No*. Playwright Sha himself was intensely aware of this connection. At the time he was ready to publish the original essay (from which the play later developed), he considered holding it back because of the wild popularity of the *China Can Say No* book and his fear that readers



would link his story to the “narrow nationalist sentiment” of the extremist treatise. In the end, his article “Dignity” was published in Shanghai’s *Wenhui bao* and enthusiastically received, inevitably categorized in the “Say No” genre. Sha was assured the article was equally loved by the “Two Olds”—*laoganbu* (old cadres) and *laobaixing* (“old hundred names” or the masses)—reinforcing the convergence mentioned earlier between official discourse in the CCP leadership and public sentiment among ordinary citizens, which, at the time *Dignity* surfaced in its various transformations, were unanimously anti-American.

The play *Dignity* began as a piece of reportage literature Sha Yexin wrote after a brief stay in the United States. He heard about the protagonist of this “true story” when he was in Los Angeles for the filming of his television serial *100 Broadway* (the plot of which, incidentally, is eerily similar to that of *Dignity*). Sha tracked down and interviewed the young woman who had endured the two-year lawsuit, and wrote about her experience when he returned to China. It was the overwhelming response to his original newspaper essay by readers of *Wenhui bao* that prompted Sha to adapt it to a television screenplay, and then a stage script.<sup>13</sup>

The experience of Chinese citizens abroad is a subject Sha Yexin commonly uses; his other works include several plays, television and film scripts, and reportage essays describing overseas Chinese in settings ranging from the United States to Japan. Along with his own extensive travels, the fact that his son and daughter both live overseas earns him public regard as a trusted expert on such matters; thus, his representations of foreigners carry particular weight in terms of their assumed authenticity.

Like Yu Luosheng (who had himself portrayed a Chinese lawyer in a local film just before directing *Dignity*), Sha adapted his theatre piece intending an aesthetic that pulled the audience into the physical space and dramatic action, this time as spectators in a courtroom rather than guests at a party. Yu kept his work as director focused on the surface story of a displaced Chinese citizen avenging her victimization at the hands of imperialistic Americans, using basically the same approach he used to direct *Student Wife*, his straightforward adaptation of a novel that was essentially a story of uncomplicated patriotism and orthodox anti-Americanism. This time, however, the writer was more experienced and sophisticated, which leads to an interesting set of questions about the possible layers of meaning embedded in the play.

Sha Yexin’s standard “formula” for his projects is to begin with a documented “true story” (usually from a newspaper) featuring a Chinese “hero,” but almost always with a complicated political issue lurking beneath the surface.<sup>14</sup> This time, that issue could not be any timelier or more sensitive



than the thorny question of human rights, a topic that was generating much of the heated anti-Americanism due to Washington's continued criticism of Beijing's policies.

Is the play *Dignity* the simple story of a Chinese victim standing up to a hegemonic United States? Or can it be interpreted as an illustration of a United States that, despite its cruelty and corruption, secures the human rights of individuals through its absurdly complex—yet ultimately just—legal system? In the political context of China being censured for human rights violations, this would constitute an anti-official message, quite counter to the orthodox nationalism the play's story and protagonist's rhetoric seem to convey.

Then again, could the play's message be surprisingly pro-establishment, as it takes an example of the demand for basic human rights to a ridiculous extreme? After all, the plot can be condensed as the story of a woman who spends two years and all her energy to avenge mistreatment that occurred during her first three days of employment by a crazy old lady and her bigoted son, and who, in the end, rejects a \$500,000 settlement in favor of a courtroom apology in order to reclaim her dignity.

Clearly, there are layers to this deceptively simple play that can be pulled away to reveal the possibility of different interpretations for different constituencies. In a climate like that of its revival in 1999, when anti-American fervor was so clearly shared by the three main sectors of Chinese society (the state, the intelligentsia, and the masses), a play like *Dignity* seems rather straightforward in its nationalist sentiment. But political winds in China blow with predictable inconsistency, and just as the dramatic shift from 1989 to 1999 brought the opposed views of leaders, intellectuals, and ordinary citizens toward America into rare consensus, ideological cleavage is likewise bound to recur. It is in the midst of such shifts that plays like *Dignity* could move from constituting shamelessly patriotic (even racist) babble to raising less transparent queries about relationships between Chinese citizens, their experiences overseas, and their basic rights in a global (and, by extension, domestic) context.

When Wang Gui, creator of *The Great Going Abroad*, makes a new piece of theatre, we are certain to find an antiestablishment, political subtext masked by theatrical experimentation. When Yu Luosheng, adaptor/director of *Student Wife* and director of *Dignity*, casts his theatrical net, we can be sure of innovative casting and of aesthetics grounded in orthodox ideology. When Sha Yexin pens a new drama, however, our expectations are not quite as clear—and, with his latest play, we are uncertain where the limits of dignity lie after all.

Of particular significance in our exploration of the Occidental practice of “othering” the American onstage is *Dignity*’s unique status as the only play in China to ever be doubly cast and produced with both a multiracial international cast and an all-Chinese cast. Employment of this dual production strategy adds yet another dimension to the embodiment of the American onstage in China and its Occidental implications that extends the experimentation begun in *Student Wife* and the three earlier plays in this study.

Converging ideologically with the anti-American, anti-imperialist theme of Sha Yexin’s *Dignity* performed in Shanghai throughout 1998—but diverging radically from its realist aesthetic and conventional linear plot development—was the collaboratively scripted 2000 Beijing production *Che Guevara*, a “staged poem” (according to one of its creators) that represents Americans onstage symbolically through a group of “baddies” who role-play all negative characters in the play. In particular, the most negative characters that appear in the various scenarios embody traits such as political, military, and economic hegemony, cultural and racial arrogance, and moral corruption, all of which serves as a direct, unveiled metaphor for the United States.<sup>15</sup>

That Argentinean native and Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara should reemerge thirty years after his death as a pop culture hero in China is significant—and entirely logical if seen in the context of the neo-nationalist anti-imperialism that pervaded the Chinese cultural scene by the mid to late-1990s. The object of China’s animosity at the turn of the twenty-first century when *Che Guevara* was produced in Beijing was the same as the object of Guevara’s animosity throughout his lifetime: the United States, particularly the U.S. government’s imperialist agenda. Reenvisioning Guevara for the new millennium (for the Chinese communist government’s response to him had previously been somewhat ambiguous)<sup>16</sup> coincided perfectly with current institutional politics, and thus a production that at any other time would have been on ideological thin ice remained surprisingly untouched by government censors and critics. Even more significantly, it sparked tremendous debate in intellectual circles—and among audiences that attended the show—resulting in excited discussions all over China, both in cities where the play was performed and in public Web-site chat rooms. In fall 2001 a book titled *Che Guevara: Repercussions and Controversy* (*Qie Gewala: fanxiang yu zhengming*), with the subtitle *A Red Storm Engulfing China’s Ideology Circles* (*Xijuan zhongguo sixiangjie de hongse fengbao*), was published, collecting in one volume the eventual production script, the articles that inspired the play’s creators, ideological and artistic statements by the group of collaborators, and responses of critics and audiences to the performances. A closer

look at this production reveals that the increase in hostility of anti-American Occidentalism from *Student Wife* in 1995 to *Dignity* in 1997–1998 is reinforced on stage in Beijing in 2000. The difference in approach to theatrical experimentation between those earlier Shanghai plays and this later Beijing production results in a very different expression of Occidentalism, but one that upholds our contention that creating an artistic niche for representation of the Occidental Other, in turn, opens up a creative space for dramatic innovation overall.

In its very inception, the play *Che Guevara* was quite uncommon. Harkening back to the days of collective *huobao ju* creation in the 1940s–1950s, *Che* was truly a group effort, developed over two years of meetings between collaborators Shen Lin, Huang Jisu, Zhang Guangtian, and Guo Jiangtao, with partial participation of at least two others. The project began with Shen but was collectively developed by Shen, Huang, Zhang, and Guo. According to Shen Lin:

I always think in terms of “we.” The reason is very simple: because I feel theatre is a collective form of art, and you cannot say “I.” Of course, there is always one person who’ll say, “Let’s do a play like this, ok?”—and that was me.<sup>17</sup>

Shen also attributes the collectivist creation of the play to emulation of the style of British experimental director Joan Littlewood, whose radical politics and anticommmercialism in the 1920s–1950s has served as an inspiration to Shen since his doctoral studies in England in the 1980s.

Shen has been on the faculty of the dramatic literature department at the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing since 1991 and is director of the academy’s Theatre Research Institute, which in addition to publishing its academic journal has also occasionally sponsored productions like *Che* (it first produced plays like Ionesco’s *The Chairs* and Pinter’s *The Lover* in the late 1980s, and since Shen’s arrival had produced two plays before *Che*, one a contemporary Israeli play). Shen’s original idea before creating *Che* was to create an adaptation of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* because of the international debates about cloning that seemed to Shen to indicate “utopia had caught up with reality,” but he continually postponed the idea until he lost interest.

Then, in 1997 (the thirtieth anniversary of Che Guevara’s death), Guevara’s remains were discovered and returned to Cuba, and the news circulated among intellectual circles in China. At the end of that year, Cheng Yinghong published a scholarly article about Guevara entitled “Why Guevara Left Cuba” in the reputable journal *Dushu*, which triggered criticism from

the intellectual left and prompted the publication of another article, “Che Guevara: A Cherished Memory Forever” (“Qie Gewala: yongyuan de huainian”) in the same journal five months later, authored by Liu Chengjun (under the pen name Suo Sa) of the Institute of Latin American Studies. It was the Suo Sa article that caught Shen’s attention and gave him the idea to create a performance piece inspired by Che Guevara. When Huang Jisu was given the article, he was so moved that he read it three times before going to bed and then again upon waking the next day.<sup>18</sup> Huang recalls working on an outline of the play in May or June of 1998 (at the time he read the Suo Sa article), and Shen reports that the first recorded group discussion about the play was in October 1998, but that the decision to create the play had occurred long before that—so, by all accounts, the production took two years from its inception to its realization onstage.

During this period of two years, the creative team (often referred to as the “Che Guevara Group” or simply “the Group”) collaborated in a manner quite rare in Chinese theatre circles today (but that, as previously mentioned, recalls a collective aesthetic from an earlier “revolutionary” period): after Shen conceived the idea, Huang Jisu and Zhang Guangtian joined him for a series of discussions, during which they addressed the overall vision for the production, proposed scenarios to be written into scripted scenes, and later discussed scenes, rewrote them, and further discussed them. According to Shen, “[the process] might look chaotic to others, but actually it was very coherent.”<sup>19</sup> Some of the discussions and revisions revolved around matters such as toning down sarcasm or providing either more uplifting messages or more biting criticism of the status quo. While Huang formed their discussions into words on a page, Zhang created pop tunes that would become part of the performance, and which would later also be sold commercially as a CD of the *Che* music sound track. Actors were brought into the process comparatively late, when the material had been more or less agreed upon by its creators.

After the two years of preparation, *Che Guevara* finally opened in the little theatre of the Beijing People’s Art Theatre in April 2000 and ran through May 2000. It was later revived in January 2001, for about twenty performances, and it also toured to cities including Shanghai, Guangzhou, Wuhan, Zhengzhou, and Chengdu. In some of these locations, as many as seven thousand patrons attended single performances, and several television stations (including CCTV in Beijing) aired clips and special programs about the play. Together with the published book in 2001, the play managed to reach a far broader and larger audience than most Chinese spoken dramas.

The atmosphere of discussion that pervaded the play’s creation was ex-

tended to the performances themselves, with each performance being followed by a heated talk with the audience; some spectators would even follow actors from the show and members of “the Group” to a bar or restaurant following the post-show chat in order to continue arguments and discussions into the wee hours. Generating this kind of energy and debate, along with the controversy carried out in print media, was one of the primary goals of the collective that created the play. Shen Lin’s intent in originally choosing Huxley’s *Brave New World* for adaptation was to indicate that China’s current social ills in an age when Huxley’s predictions are being realized is highly ironic in light of earlier Chinese social scientists’ conviction that Huxley’s upholding of the social Darwinism in which they believed held solutions to China’s predicaments. For Shen, the topic of Che Guevara even more than Huxley “was the best topic we could find—perhaps the most sensational—and one that was guaranteed to start a good quarrel, and of course we went for it. We saw everything from the very beginning . . . we aimed at controversy . . . I actually strove for it.” The directors’ statement published in *Repercussions and Controversy* invokes retro-Maoist terminology in suggesting that the production was intended to “provoke the masses and attack and break up the enemy.”<sup>20</sup>

A play simply about the life of Che Guevara written and performed in the socialist-realist vein so familiar to Chinese audiences would not have sparked controversy; spoken dramas of this type about communist heroes of China, the Soviet Union, and other countries have been usual fare for decades. It was the Group’s impulse to focus on “what Che Guevara stands for, what his significance is for us today, what the *idea* of Che Guevara signifies,”<sup>21</sup> as revealed through role-played reenactments of contemporary *Chinese* situations, that divided and provoked its audiences and critics.

In a distinct departure from the conventional socialist-realist formula, the “main character” of Che Guevara never actually appears onstage, though his words are heard in occasional voice-overs and his image is projected on a screen. What does appear onstage is two groups of actors: the “goodies” and the “baddies.” Cheng Yinghong describes the *mise en scène* and the actors’ functions this way:

At one corner of the stage, there are positive characters—serious-looking male revolutionaries in military uniform of Guevara’s style and workmen’s garb who narrate Guevara’s story, recite his words and sometimes ask questions to an offstage presence of Che and get answers from Che’s offstage voice. At the other corner of the stage are arrogant women in fancy clothes who represent all negative characters such as

imperialists—Americans, particularly—and people who become disillusioned with revolution or regret joining it and are now anxious to make up for what they missed while in the revolution. The positive figures justify Guevara's cause, and the negative figures ridicule the hero and his revolutionary idealism. Instead of conventional dialogue, political tit for tat becomes the dynamic of each act.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the discourse of Guevara's involvement with the Cuban revolution (and other Third World revolutionary movements of the 1960s) becomes a form of critique for social issues in contemporary Chinese society, which are thus highly politicized, reflecting cynicism toward current Chinese social discourse.

One role-played reenactment scene depicts a drowning that was based on a real incident.<sup>23</sup> Because it sparked a published debate in the national press, Chinese audience members would have been familiar with the news story about a young college student who drowned while trying to save a child; the debate centered on whether or not the student—being a gifted young man with a bright future ahead of him—should have sacrificed his life. This story was coupled in the play with another real news item about an incident in which no one jumped into the water to save a young child who was drowning, until finally a man over eighty years old attempted the rescue. In performance, these isolated incidents became a single scenario in which the worth of each human being involved was literally calculated to decide who should be allowed to die and who should be spared. In *Che Guevara* the female “baddies” armed with abacuses (traditional Chinese adding instruments) intercept a young student who runs onstage to save a drowning child (see pl. 13). They calculate that the child is worth only 7 points (based on her young age, low IQ, peasant social class, and round face), while the college student is worth 180 points, and they conclude that the rescue would result in an economic deficit:

Stop, will you? I need to calculate you. Age? Eighteen. Have you been to University? Wow, Peking University! What subject? Biology! Have you taken the TOEFL English test? You have, excellent! Parental occupation? Entrepreneurs! And you are so handsome . . . and extremely eloquent . . . and so very brave . . . Grand total: 180 points. Quick! Put your clothes back on! Get back to where you have come from. Be extremely careful when you cross the road! The product is worth 7 points, but the capital is worth 180. That's a huge deficit. Simply an economic crime [ . . . ] (*Suddenly seeing an old man who is not on the stage*) What is your venerable age? Eighty-four? The best age to jump in the water!

Have you cancer or something? You have, and at a late stage! You're not a top official, are you? . . . Off you jump into the water.<sup>24</sup>

In this scene and many others, the rapid push for globalization and economic success in contemporary Chinese society is blamed for constructing social hierarchies and eroding traditional cultural values. The globalization trend, in turn, is portrayed as a screen for Western hegemony and is blamed on the United States, as reflected in Cheng Yinghong's description of one of the most aggressive scenes in the play:

After the negative characters denounce the revolution, the character representing American imperialism comes onstage. "I am going to exploit you," he overtly announces to one of them. "I have been longing for this day for decades!" The one who is about to be exploited answers. Then the American imperialist asks another, "What if I oppress you?" The one who is about to be oppressed complains, "Had you done this earlier, I would be rich and powerful already!" Then the international bully turns to the third, "How about I launch a cruise missile on you?" So grateful, the third one is tearful and can only grip the bully's hands and becomes speechless. After this episode the stage light suddenly turns dim and an air-raid alarm sounds, and a screen above the stage shows photos of Iraqi and Yugoslavian cities after having been bombed. Moments later, many target circles appear on the screen and the noise of American bombers come with an offstage voice of pilots: "Targets pinpointed! Ready for bombing!" With a deafening sound of explosion, the light is suddenly turned dazzling and from the ceiling of the theatre large American dollar bills fall like snow onto the stage and audience. With soft music in the background, the scenes on the screen are changed to footage of the representatives of governments and the International Monetary Fund who are signing agreements and toasting afterwards. Also on screen are long lines for visas in front of American consulates, Third World visitors making a pilgrimage to Disneyland, Asian teenagers with dyed blond hair showing off on bustling streets, and Chinese TV shows with imitated Hollywood style.<sup>25</sup>

The play not only targets America directly, but also young people in China who increasingly adopt American values. Among the cast's ensemble itself was one actress, Yang Ting, who had married a wealthy member of China's rising nouveau-riche class. According to Shen Lin, she felt the play's creators were pointing an accusing finger directly at her and her lifestyle, making her "blush." Shen maintains that the moment the actress realized this, she began

to understand the play, and he recounts with amusement her effort to make amends by “practicing her type of egalitarianism”—buying fruit for her fellow actors and offering them rides home after rehearsals, since she was the only cast member who had a car.

Some audience members also felt targeted by the play’s accusations, while others felt vindicated by the hostility expressed in the play, giving voice to some of their own concerns about China’s recent social transformation. According to Shen Lin, who witnessed only the 2001 revival and tour performances, “I saw tears in people’s eyes; I saw people shaking their heads in annoyance; I saw people fidgeting in their chairs; I saw people becoming very angry towards the end of the performance.”<sup>26</sup>

Surprisingly, few people actually walked out of the performance due to their discomfort, despite a line in the middle of the play that goads audience members to do just that, and might potentially irritate some spectators enough to prompt their unwitting complicity:

If you think that serving your own interest is the only correct lifestyle;  
if you think that capitalism is the surest way for happiness . . . if you  
feel all the more happy when you are driving in your Mercedes-Benz;  
if you see all these impoverished people on the street and you feel that  
your cheap accomplishments are even greater, then you are welcome  
to leave this playhouse.<sup>27</sup>

At one performance, a gentleman from Taiwan did walk out, but later snuck back in and eventually joined the postperformance discussion, during which he explained that he had left not because he disapproved of the idea expressed, but because he felt *someone* should walk out in order to cooperate with the production.

The appearance of *Che*’s clear, uncomplicated agenda is deceptive: though it does openly target U.S. cultural and economic imperialism and China’s emergent nouveau-riche class in a manner that is not overtly threatening to the government, it also engages in more complex ideological debates. Cheng Yinghong perceptively situates the play in the turn-of-the-century intellectual debates between China’s divided intelligentsia—the liberals and the New Left—clearly aligning itself with the latter. This alignment becomes slightly ironic, however, when considered in light of the background of some of the Group’s participants. Actress Yang Ting may represent the economic end of the spectrum the play chastises, but overseas experiences and intellectual leanings not unlike those of cocreator Shen Lin himself are also targeted in the play. In one episode, the character representing the United States establishes an “Exploitation and Oppression Are Good” research fund.



He releases a handful of dollar bills, saying, “Let’s see who can wash their brains into the color of the star-spangled banner!” and several fashionably-dressed Chinese intellectuals scramble on the ground for the money while classical Western music plays in the background. This scene is a bitter parody both of those intellectuals who have left China to hold faculty positions at American universities and those who remain at home but develop their research to cater to an increasingly American academic standard.

Ironically, Shen Lin himself would not be alienated from these categories, since his 1989 doctorate is from the University of Birmingham in England and he has held visiting scholar posts at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC, as well as at the University of California (Davis), among others. His teaching and scholarship engage with the newest trends in Western postcolonial theory, and his personal political affiliation would be difficult to place exclusively in the camp of either the New Left or Western Liberalism, despite Cheng Yinghong’s identification of this breach as the axis of tension in the play and the production’s larger sociopolitical context. In fact, after acting as a key collaborator for the production for nearly two years, Shen was absent when the play enjoyed its initial run in 2000 because he was in residence at the University of California. Shen and *Che* co-creator Huang Jisu have been friends since childhood, raised in the same courtyard where their parents—both employed by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences—were housed. Huang’s father and Shen’s parents were all scholars of modern history, in the same department. Huang has also lived in the United States, as an exchange student in Ohio, where he washed dishes in a restaurant to make ends meet and experienced firsthand the gulf between the dining room’s wealthy patrons and the kitchen’s overworked, underpaid laborers. Thus, both Shen and Huang (and also Zhang) present complex profiles as sons of intellectuals who themselves hold academic faculty positions and have enjoyed various opportunities to live abroad. It is precisely this complexity that resulted in a veneer of hypocrisy surrounding the *Che* production.

Some of the actual production practices of the Group seemed to directly contradict their ideology as presented in the play. While railing against American capitalism and bourgeois social hierarchies inside the theatre, they sold CDs, T-shirts, and posters outside the theatre, like street peddlers; they also tiered ticket prices, refusing to sell 25-yuan student tickets until 80-yuan and 50-yuan ticket holders had been seated. This disjuncture between the play’s egalitarian ideals and its creators’ highly commercial practices was noted by many critics of the play, including esteemed Beijing University professor Dai Jinhua (who herself is an academic celebrity in the United

States and has held posts at Harvard University among other institutions). Indicating that the play commercializes the extreme cynicism pervasive in China's post-Cultural Revolution generation, Dai lamented, "If all of this that has moved us so deeply is only a consumerist fad, an act, and it can be staged so successfully, that is really sad."<sup>28</sup> Another critic, Zha Xiduo, published an article in a journal in Liaoning Province in which he criticized the hypocrisy of the play's creators, whose habits of drinking Coca-Cola, using cell phones, traveling abroad, and surfing the Internet display the same behavior they condemn. In his opinion they are so far from Guevara's example that their "baddies" (the negative characters who represent American imperialism) "unwittingly reveal the creators' own laymen's tails under revolutionary armor."<sup>29</sup>

The significance of the creation, production, and reception processes of *Che Guevara* in the late 1990s through the turn of the millennium in terms of our assessment of Occidentalism in Chinese theatre production lies not so much in its continuation of conflating the Occident with the United States nor its consistency with Sino-American political trends—or even its providing a space for significantly increased experimentation by introducing the Occidental Other into the dramatis personae and mise en scène—but rather in its self-reflexive investigation of the hypocrisy with which the ardently committed New Left (and, by extension, the nouveaux riches and the post-Cultural Revolution generation as a whole) simultaneously invites and vilifies the neo-imperialist practices of the Occident, specifically the United States. The same voices condemning American neo-imperialism inside the theatre reinscribe its practices outside the theatre, desiring its power and craving its spoils. The same artists praising Guevara and invoking his revolutionary imperative for their present society would never survive his theory as praxis outside the theatre, and would surely abandon the call within days once they realized the material comforts and personal opportunities they would be required to sacrifice. Even Zhang Guangtian, the pop singer who claims Mao Zedong as his idol and is the most unyielding in his criticism of American hegemony and the capitulation of his peers, owes much of his success and popularity to the new contemporary performance practice of director Meng Jinghui, who draws Beijing's trendy college-educated urban professionals to the theatres in droves, paying the highest ticket prices yet in China.

Meng's influence on the *Che* production, though not acknowledged publicly in print, should not be overlooked. Meng is China's most talked-about director, with a string of successful adaptations of foreign plays and original creations with collaborators such as Shen Lin, Huang Jisu, and Zhang

Guangtian, as well as actress Yang Ting. Shen scripted Meng's 1999 production of *Bootleg Faust* even as he was collaborating with the others on *Che*. Shen also sponsored Meng's adaptation of Israeli playwright Hanoch Levin's *Jacobi and Leidental*, which Meng retitled *Love Is Like Ants* (*Aiqing mayi*) and directed in 1996. Huang Jisu translated the script for that production, as well as Meng's adaptation of Dario Fo's *The Accidental Death of an Anarchist* in 1998. Zhang Guangtian collaborated with Meng on four of his productions, but the two parted ways after Zhang's involvement in *Che*. Yang Ting had starred in Meng's production of *Rhinoceros in Love* (*Lian'ai de xiniu*) three years earlier, and Meng retained Yang and one other actor when he recast and restaged *Rhinoceros* in 2003. Meng was originally slated to direct *Che*, but discussions led away from this arrangement for several reasons, not the least of which were that his involvement would disrupt the intended group-creation aesthetic and also guarantee more stringent censorship (several of Meng's previous productions had encountered difficulties with authorities). As it was, the *Che* script had to pass censors at both the Central Academy of Drama (which spent an unusually long two months on the censorship process) and the Cultural Bureau; normally, officials attend the dress rehearsal of new productions as well, but for *Che* they were not invited for fear the play would be prevented from opening.<sup>30</sup> Though the play continued its run uninterrupted in Beijing, the staging in Shanghai was curtailed after one performance. The production, even in its collaboratively directed form with the absence of Meng's participation, exuded the unmistakable flavor of his influence as filtered through his long-time collaborators who supervised the production: political irony, playful parody, tremendous physicality, group choral arrangements, sparse stage design with visual projections, creative sound cues, and original pop music compositions are all trademarks of Meng's directing oeuvre and were utilized with great effectiveness in *Che*. Though he stayed securely out of sight during the creation of *Che Guevara* (he was, in fact, rather conveniently consumed at the time with directing his first film), Meng praises the production and confirms its deep impact on both theatrical progress and social discourse in China, and seems flattered by (rather than critical of) the transparent imitation of his directorial aesthetic in the production.<sup>31</sup>

Unique in the field of contemporary Chinese theatrical creation is not only the process through which *Che Guevara* was conceived, produced, debated, and disseminated but also the conscious desire on the part of its creators for it to be so openly critiqued. The book *Che Guevara: Repercussions and Controversy* collected the most scathing criticism of the play and its authors alongside their own manifestos and artistic statements, which were

willingly contributed to the volume. Much of the material in the book had previously been posted on a Web site, and every effort was made by the editor to provide a full and multifaceted presentation of the controversy and its participants. Included in the volume are the original articles that inspired the production; statements by the production's creators; and previously published criticisms of the play, which had appeared in newspapers throughout China; along with the production script itself. Such a volume in and of itself is not rare in China: when Gao Xingjian's play *Escape (Taowang)* was banned after 1989, a script along with previously published criticisms were collected in a volume, and Sha Yexin's play *Dignity* is published in a volume accompanied by the original reportage piece, essays by Sha explaining its origins and relevant issues, and reviews collected from various sources. The difference here is that in the former case (Gao's play and supplementary materials) there is no defense of the piece, and in the latter case (Sha's play and supplementary materials) there is no harsh criticism—but in the case of the *Che Guevara* volume, there are both. There is even admission of the censorship process and the deliberate neglect to inform officials of the dress rehearsal. The artists attempted to lay bare all aspects of the production and its contradictions and complications, rather than interpret and package the play according to convention. This is consistent with their original intention in creating the piece, which was to incite controversy rather than avoid it. This makes *Che* a new kind of Occidental gesture, one that is as equally anti-American as *Dignity* and yet implicates local citizens in perpetuating the United States' successful hegemony and commercial imperialism rather than portraying Chinese citizens merely as passive victims.

The true significance of the *Che Guevara* production lies in its self-consciousness, its transparent hypocrisy, its futile call for a return to Maoist proletarian revolutionary values in a hyper-commercialized contemporary Chinese society—and yet also in the convincing sincerity of its self-reflexive, transparent, futile call. It is the play's unabashed condemnation of the United States that lends legitimacy to this call and that lingers uncontested even when the political stance of its creators is otherwise called into question. With all of the animated debate surrounding the production and its reception—and even with the implication that China's new generation is complicit in its own corruption at the hands of Occidental imperialists—there is little in the way of any voice actually defending the United States against the accusations lodged both directly and indirectly in the play.

The NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade occurred on May 8, 1999, precisely in the midst of Shen, Huang, and Zhang's creation of *Che Guevara*. The one-year anniversary of the incident, which fell in the

midst of the play's original run in Beijing, was utilized by the Group to commemorate and reignite in a boldly creative way the surge of anti-Americanism triggered by the 1999 bombing. Invitation letters were dispatched to both the Cuban and American embassies along with three complimentary tickets, requesting their diplomatic officers attend the performance on May 8, 2000. The invitation letter to the Cuban embassy lauded the Cuban revolution, concluding, "Salute Comrade Castro and the heroic Cuban people." The letter to the U.S. embassy was less enthusiastic, politely requesting that American diplomats come hear "what Chinese people really think" and ending with a satirical promise that no Americans would be "mistakenly attacked" at the theatre. The Cuban ambassador did attend, and delivered a speech, while the American dignitaries failed to appear. The three unoccupied seats reserved for them were labeled and kept empty throughout the performance, and the invitation letter to the U.S. embassy was read aloud at the performance to a response of thunderous applause. During the discussion with the audience following that night's performance, a spectator asked, "What do you think of [the American Ambassador's] absence today?" and a member of the Group replied:

The real purpose of the invitation was to express our thanks to the United States. Without their bombing of the Chinese Embassy, we would not have been able to do this show. Chinese intellectuals once hoped that problems could be solved by looking outside of China. However, this dream was smashed by the bombshells . . . American imperialists feel self-important, but they deceive themselves, believing that people around the world look to them for salvation. They miscalculate. We didn't expect the American embassy to send people to the show. When the seats are empty, they are more eye-catching. In court, you can have a trial without the defendant.<sup>32</sup>

Although diplomats from the American embassy did not attend the production of *Che Guevara*, many other Americans and foreigners living in Beijing did. A new element in the development of theatre in China that my entire project raises for consideration is the presence of the Othered Other not only on the stage, but also in the audience. Yu Luosheng's innovation of multinational casting in productions like *Student Wife* and *Dignity* invites local expatriate citizens with Chinese language capabilities into the theatre in a rather revolutionary way, and engages them in discussion about the plays and their representations in postperformance chats.<sup>33</sup> Even before such occasions in Shanghai, foreigners were increasingly drawn to spoken-drama performances as a form of entertainment and opportunity to enhance exposure

to Chinese culture and social practices (both those represented onstage and those occurring in real time offstage), as evidenced by the blocks of seats for *Bird Men* purchased by foreign students and the various overseas productions of *China Dream*.

Several years ago foreigners did not attend Chinese plays; indeed, during my first decade as a theatergoer in Beijing and Shanghai, I rarely saw another foreigner in the audience. If a Westerner—particularly an American—was represented onstage, I was alone in my strained identification with the heavily costumed, made-up, wiggled figure; if the play was an adaptation of a Western work and the entire cast was thus presented, I wondered who was having more difficulty identifying: me or the Chinese audience? Perhaps the rest of the audience could immediately signify the forms before them as uniquely Other and concentrate on the possibilities for connection to the “universal” message(s) in the story, while I was distracted by the grotesque image of “myself” presented for my consumption, wondering if this was indeed how I was perceived by those around me, or preoccupied with resisting the representation to the point that I resisted the positive potential of the production as well.

Yu Luosheng is one of the only directors trying to keep up with this rapidly changing audience topography. With all of the cutting-edge creativity springing from the hands of young directors like Meng Jinghui, Wang Xiaoying, Ren Ming—and lauded experimenters like Lin Zhaohua, Xiong Yuanwei, and Xu Xiaozhong—it is surprising that none of them seems remotely concerned with the question of the Occidental Other or how to represent the myriad of other Others who cross their paths every day.<sup>34</sup> For now, directors and playwrights can duck behind the shield of “local concerns”—writing for a Chinese audience about Chinese communities—but how will they respond as their audience diversifies? How will they speak to their young public if they begin to exclude its growing number of foreign residents? And how do they explain their passionate interest in foreign culture, travel, technology, relationships—and the simultaneous absence of the presence of these elements in their work? The self-conscious awareness of how their anti-imperialist diatribes might play to local Cuban and American authorities—and, by extension, the constituencies they represent—show that the creators of *Che Guevara*, while appearing somewhat hypocritical in their conflicting affiliations with the very Occidental influences they scorn, are cognizant of these questions.

These questions also loom large when one looks closely at the cast of *Student Wife*: both of the Chinese actors have several foreign friends and considerable overseas experience. Geng Ge, in fact, married an American, in the

Spring Festival break during rehearsals, just weeks before the play opened, and later moved to Los Angeles. Robert Daly is married to a Chinese woman. Xu Zheng said he dreamed of living in France. Basia Wajs has been pursuing an acting career in both Europe and China for more than a decade now—and in China is consistently cast in roles stereotyping foreign women.<sup>35</sup>

One director who has answered the call to address the rapidly shifting experience of China's urban youth in a diversifying local community and globalizing world is Lei Guohua. Together with repatriated playwrights Sun Huizhu and Fei Chunfang, she embarked on a project that would bring together another foursome of actors, this time composed of three young graduates of the Shanghai Theatre Academy and American Matt Trusch, who has played foreign roles in several Chinese television and film productions. Trusch's intervention in the project exceeded Daly's in *Student Wife* to the point that he considered himself coauthor with playwrights Sun and Fei; furthermore, for Trusch, participation in the production was very much part of a grander mission to correct unfair stereotypes of foreigners in Chinese media and popular culture. By unpacking the complex collaboration of the artists and various other agents involved in the April 2002 production of *Swing* (*Qiuqian qingren*), we can assess the emergent trend of "white-collar theatre" (*bailing xiju*) in Shanghai theatre circles, and also reflect upon the changing shape of Occidentalism since Sun and Fei's *China Dream* fifteen years earlier.

## CHAPTER 8



# Self-Occidentalism:

## *Swing*



We must remember that the *form* of the Other is fluid: it expands as “Us” contracts and contracts as Us expands.

—James Carrier, “Occidentalism: The World Turned Upside Down”

Close examination of the creation, evolution, and production of the play *Swing* (*Qiuqian qingren*), staged in Shanghai in 2002, simultaneously leads us into the most recent developments in Chinese spoken drama and takes us back to the first play addressed in this book, thus serving as a suitable case study with which to conclude our examination of Occidentalism and staging the American in contemporary Chinese spoken drama. The same playwrights who created the first complex articulation of the American Other on the contemporary Chinese stage in *China Dream* also scripted its latest incarnation in a play in which the production process as much as its content reflects the enormous cultural, social, and economic shifts that have occurred in China during the past fifteen years.

In 1987 Sun Huizhu and Fei Chunfang worked closely with their mentor, director Huang Zuolin, and created a play that sought to manifest Huang’s vision of *xieyi*, a unique aesthetic that combined principles of Chinese and Western art; creating and staging the play *China Dream* became an effort to apply Huang’s ideas that fused the theatrical approaches of Brecht, Stanislavski, and Mei Lanfang. To this end, Sun and Fei had employed a Brechtian episodic structure in the play and required the actors to combine Stanislavskian internalized realism with Brechtian distancing techniques and Beijing opera stylization.

About five years after *China Dream*, Sun and Fei were still experimenting with this formula of wedding Brechtian structures to realistic themes in order to express their own experiences as overseas Chinese intellectuals trying to make sense of American society. They coauthored another play in English



while living in California (where Sun held a faculty post at California State University at Northridge) in order to address an issue—abortion—that was socially and politically sensitive both in the United States and back at home in China. Continuing their earlier theme in *China Dream* of intercultural romance, this new play, *Swing Lovers*,<sup>1</sup> also featured a Chinese woman and a Caucasian American man, but this time the class/gender roles were inverted: the woman was highly educated (a newly arrived doctoral student in the United States) and the man was from a working-class background (a roofer). This play, like *China Dream*, garnered an award in a university playwriting contest.

The play has four characters—Su Xin (“Sue”), Liu Chao (“Charlie”), Jenny, and Bob: Sue and Charlie are overseas Chinese students, Jenny is an American-born Chinese (ABC, or Asian American), and Bob is a Caucasian American. Bob has just broken up with his girlfriend Jenny because she aborted their unborn child (in order to pursue her dream of becoming a Broadway actress) when Charlie arrives with Sue in tow—Charlie has arranged for Sue to board at Bob’s house for reasonable rent. Unknown to Bob or Charlie, Sue had recently terminated her pregnancy at her husband’s urging in order to follow through with her plans to study in the United States and later bring him over to join her. Sue allows Bob to believe she has an infant daughter in China, and cannot bear to reveal the truth as their relationship deepens: he repairs an infant swing and fantasizes about the day the baby (whom he has named “Angel”) will come to join them. Meanwhile, Sue’s husband back in China has an affair and files for divorce, and Charlie and Jenny fall in love. Finally, Bob proposes to Sue and she is compelled to tell him the truth about her “baby”; he reacts with extreme anger and self-pity, showing little compassion for Sue. In his relationships with both Jenny and Sue, his obsession with having children prevails over his feelings for the Chinese women themselves. The swing (in several forms, ranging from an infant swing and tire swing to a porch swing) is intended to be a central metaphor in the play, representing Sue’s dreams.

As we now know, although *Swing* was to some degree a follow-up to *China Dream*, many things changed during the decade it lay dormant, between its scripting in 1991 and its production in 2002. In terms of cultural and political attitudes toward Americans, there had been an enormous shift, as detailed in chapter 1. When Sun and Fei had scripted *China Dream*, in the late-1980s—and *Swing* in 1990—the government, masses, and intelligentsia were not aligned in mutual disdain for American neo-imperialism as they were in the late-1990s and early years of the new century. Narratives of Chinese *liuxuesheng* (foreign students) studying overseas in the United States fo-

cused less on abusive treatment experienced by the student (as would later become the focus in plays like *Student Wife* and *Dignity*) and more on the general trauma of cultural adjustment and the strain to relationships caused by prolonged overseas separation (as in *The Woman Left Behind*); this element of the “left-behind” (*liushou*) spouse popular in the early 1990s is reflected in *Swing* through the character of Sue’s husband in China and his intention to use Sue to get to America, his jealousy of Bob, his infidelity, and his subsequent demand for a divorce.

By the time the play was produced in 2002, however, attitudes toward and representations of Americans had most definitely changed, as had many other factors in visual and popular culture and in Chinese society. For one thing, the increased prevalence of negative images of foreigners—particularly Americans—on both stage and screen was potently felt by both local Chinese citizens and their Othered counterparts, resident foreigners themselves. While the spoken-drama community in Shanghai was still in early stages of experimenting with the integration of foreign actors into Chinese casts, the film and television community throughout China had been engaging in this practice since the reopening of China in the early 1980s. As the 1990s progressed, increasingly more feature films and television serials included expatriate actors recruited from local universities and foreign or joint-venture companies to play roles that reinforced popular beliefs about Americans; such depictions cast males as sexist, selfish, dishonest, shrewd, aggressive, arrogant, cruel, hegemonic men lusting after money, sex, and power—and cast females as sexually promiscuous, untrustworthy women who inevitably taint those with whom they come into contact. Of course, these traits are all contrasting corollaries to the attributes embodied by Chinese characters in such media representations, who exhibit the desired Chinese virtues and moral codes (unless they have been corrupted by a foreigner). There are few exceptions to this formula, unless the story glorifies a successfully sinicized foreigner (such as Edgar Snow, for instance) who displays traditional Chinese characteristics rather than the conventional Western ways associated with the stereotype.

In the case of intercultural romances, complex and layered interrelations between an American man and Chinese woman such as John Hodges and Mingming experience in *China Dream* had given way to a simple formula of the white male doggedly pursuing the Chinese female and either being rejected in favor of a Chinese suitor (a scenario that clearly reinforces China’s nationalist desire to resist and overpower its perceived imperialist oppressor) or, less commonly, conquering her (reinforcing America’s neo-imperialism itself). The team who rewrote *Swing* in 2001–2002 included professional and

amateur Chinese theatre collaborators who had become accustomed to the late-1990s trope of the unappealing American male Other, and also included an American actor who had been cast to play such roles in several film and television projects during his quest to become a “Chinese movie star”—and he was understandably fed up. He saw his role in *Swing* as an opportunity to correct negative stereotypes of foreigners, even though the character of Bob in the play (created as it was in 1990) did not actually fit the anti-American formula to which the actor had become accustomed. Still, the naïve and negative attributes of Bob (which were certainly present) prompted American Matt Trusch to revise and centralize his character in an effort to infuse him with more complexity and agency—gestures that ultimately led to an Occidental image equally as negative as the stereotype Trusch was attempting to combat, as evidenced in the discussion that follows.

Between the scripting of *Swing* in the United States and its production onstage in China, Sun and Fei’s academic careers led them from California to Massachusetts to Minnesota—and ultimately home to China, where plays, films, and television serials featuring foreign (often American) characters and themes had proliferated in their absence. While amateur foreigners were being cast onstage alongside professional Chinese actors, amateur Chinese playwrights, actors, directors, and producers were investing private and corporate funds to stage their own plays that overwhelmingly reflected their personal life experiences. Adapted to an aesthetic resembling popular television soap operas, the new genre of theatre was dubbed “white-collar theatre” (*bailing xiju*) just after the turn of the millennium. Awareness of these trends that emerged during Sun and Fei’s absence from China—and during the period between when the play was originally scripted and when it was finally produced—provides a frame of reference that is necessary to understanding the complicated network of affiliations and tensions resulting in the version of *Swing* that ultimately materialized, as well as to appreciating the degree to which this production departed from conventional modes of producing plays in contemporary China up until this point. *Swing* marked a convergence of economic decentralization, institutional reorganization, a rising amateur aesthetic and participation in theatre-making, the increasing popularity of spoken drama as an elite and trendy urban entertainment, and the ability of a foreigner not only to integrate himself into the theatrical production process on many levels but also to orchestrate unprecedented self-promotion fueled by a burning desire for self-representation.

As *Swing* director Lei Guohua (herself married to an American, Bryan Pentony, throughout this period) reflected, these conditions were radically

different from the context in which Sun and Fei had first written the script, ten years earlier—and radically different from the social and artistic environment Sun and Fei had left behind fifteen years before—and thus their resistance to this newly ordered atmosphere prompted many tensions that emerged during the creative process. In Lei's opinion, *Swing* as a script was not up to par with Sun and Fei's earlier works *China Dream* and *Tomorrow He'll Come out of the Mountains* (*Mingri jiuyao chushan*, 1989) because the playwrights had become "somewhat distanced from today's China" due to the many years they lived in the United States, while also lacking sufficient life experience (*tian*) to actually write from inside American culture, and Sun in particular had become "too intellectual" (*lizhi*).<sup>2</sup> Lei maintains that Sun had attempted to pitch the piece to CCTV as the idea for a television serial and then circulated it to spoken-drama theatres in Beijing, both without success, before it was also rejected by administrators at the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center. Ultimately, it was funding from an outside investor that finally made an arrangement with the center possible, with Lei agreeing to direct.<sup>3</sup>

The production was staged in the facilities of the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center but was produced independently by Huang Angang ("Tony"),<sup>4</sup> a former actor of the Shanghai Youth Spoken Drama Troupe who earned a degree in mass communications in the United States, remained there for five years doing business, and is now a successful entrepreneur businessman in Shanghai, where he owns several popular night spots and restaurants, including the jazz-themed Cotton Club. At Lei Guohua's suggestion, live performance by the Cotton Club's jazz band was integrated into the staging of *Swing*. During the preproduction negotiation stages of *Swing*, after her first collaboration with Sun and Fei on their murder mystery *Birthday Murder* (*Shengri mosha*) had just been completed, Lei asserted, "I am helping them out a lot—otherwise these plays could not be staged," and long after the production had closed, Lei reiterated that without her support and strenuous efforts, the show never would have happened.<sup>5</sup>

This situation looks considerably different when seen from Sun and Fei's vantage point. As will become apparent from the description of the play's evolution that follows, the end result is hardly recognizable as the piece they created; Fei reflected two weeks after the show closed that it was very painful to watch the performance of a production that ultimately was "not our play."<sup>6</sup> At the request of producer Huang Angang and coproducer and director Lei Guohua, Sun and Fei spent six months revising the script in 2001. Having become accustomed to professional theatre practices in the United States that protect the autonomy of the playwright and the integrity of the

script, Sun and Fei were resistant to being subsequently pressured by both the director, producer, and actors, and an outside writer to make continuous changes to their script even after their earnest attempts at revision had been made. In notes he recorded the day after the play closed, American actor Matt Trusch (who was cast to play the Caucasian American role of Bob) indicates the influence of producer Huang (“Tony”), director Lei, freelance writer Xue Lei (“Shelly”), and himself in recreating the script after Sun and Fei’s revisions:

I read the revised script on the plane from New York to Shanghai on January 23, 2002 . . . Soon after, we worked on revising the script. Tony felt the script needed a lot of work. The Director agreed, but she needed to convince the playwrights to give us free reign to change the script, otherwise the play was off. After much hesitation, they agreed . . . The playwrights attempted more revisions, but we were still not satisfied with the changes. The Director invited a young internet and novel writer named Shelly to work on revisions, ultimately removing the original playwrights from the process. She condensed their 14-scene Brecht-style play into a four-act four-season commercial love story. Things finally started to move in the right direction. On February 25th, my 30th birthday, I received Shelly’s newly revised script via email . . . I felt the script was extremely improved. Over the next week or so, we met a few times and made some intense revisions. The four of us—Tony the producer, Lei the Director, Shelly the writer, and I—all had unique Chinese/American experiences that shaped the content of the script. Ultimately, our four life-stories determined the four characters in the play. Tony spent several years in the US studying, and scraping his way by; [his] experiences and dreams gave birth to “Charlie” as we now know him. Director Lei spent many years living in America, and is even married to an American; she gave birth to Sue as we now know her. Shelly had an American boyfriend, and therefore [became] “Jennie.” And I am an American, with a breadth of experiences living in China, so I created “Bob.”<sup>7</sup>

Trusch goes on to indicate that virtually all of the actors took liberties in revising the script—himself in particular—to the point that he reflected, “Later it would prove to be a bit problematic since I often felt I could change the script at will. Although I really enjoyed it, I don’t know if I would let the actors get so involved if I were the producer or director.”<sup>8</sup> Director Lei maintains that Trusch’s perception of his ability to “change the script at will” is excessive and that she retained artistic control at all times.<sup>9</sup>

While Trusch acknowledges the burden of actors taking extreme liberties with the script throughout the rehearsal process, nowhere in his written accounts or numerous interviews with reporters in China (or with me when I met with him several times during the weeks following the play's run) does he recognize the ethical issue that arises when a businessman, a professional director, a freelance writer, an amateur foreign actor, and professional local actors collectively pressure playwrights, first with the prospect of abandonment of the production if ownership of material is not transferred, and then with eventual exclusion from final revisions of their own script. While colleagues of Sun and Fei (some of whose own life stories are loosely represented in the original plot of the play) questioned why the playwrights entrusted the script to Lei, thus attributing to her the tensions and breach of trust that occurred, Lei herself located most problems encountered during the production process with the subpar script Sun and Fei had written. She points out that Sun and Fei agreed to the collaborative revisions by signing a contract (they own copyright for the original script, while Lei and Huang own copyright for the production script), and that several official meetings (*zuotan hui*) with an invited group of seven to eight playwrights from the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center were held at the theatre to discuss the play, at least three of which Sun and Fei themselves attended.<sup>10</sup> Trusch, on the other hand, was fully absorbed in his own participation (claiming in various interviews to have cowritten the play) while enthusiastically participating in publicizing himself; he scarcely seemed to notice not only the jeopardizing of the personal and artistic friendship between the director and playwrights but also the larger questions that emanated from the collective co-optation process in which he was a key player. In the case of Lei and Huang and others on the Chinese side, it is possible that the political tradition of playwrights changing scripts to garner the approval of censors or collaborators—or of collective creation of plays stemming from the political practices of *huobao ju* (living newspaper plays) and other street theatre as well as earlier ventures in Chinese spoken drama—results in a different cultural perspective regarding collaborative revision of the script vis-à-vis the integrity of the two original playwrights.<sup>11</sup> But it is harder to understand Matt Trusch's disregard for the rights of the creators of the play, considering his claims to be an experienced and trained American actor, who would thus be familiar with the legal rights of playwrights in the West.<sup>12</sup>

A closer look at the participation of this American actor in the most recent representation of an American character on the Chinese spoken-drama stage reveals an intriguing dialectic of Occidentalism and self-representation taken to a new level since Robert Daly's initial efforts in *Student Wife*. What

emerges is both a progressive collaborative innovation (the full participation of the Occidental Other in his own representation) as well as a transgressive collaborative struggle (since displacement of China as the “speaking subject,” “othering” America as its discursive object, occurs when the object itself attempts self-definition, and thus such an act contests Occidentalism as a practice in and of itself). The result, ironically, is *not* a dismantling of Occidentalism but rather an unwitting gesture of self-Occidentalizing on the part of the American actor, akin to Said’s postulation of the entrenched practice of self-Orientalizing. Though Matt Trusch perceives that he is “improving” the image of the American male on the Chinese stage, he inevitably reinscribes an exaggerated stereotype that is just as damaging and oversimplified as (and not entirely unlike) the one he tries to replace.

Like Robert Daly who, despite his lack of training, had starred in the wildly popular television serial *Beijinger in New York* before joining the cast of *Student Wife*, Trusch had accrued understanding of professional artistic processes not from previous experiences in the West but from participation in *Chinese* television and film projects, primarily in small supporting roles. Thus, Trusch actually had no professional acting experience outside of China and was probably not entirely aware of the ethical breaches he was involved in with the wresting of the script from the artistic hands of Sun and Fei. Trusch’s background in Chinese studies is actually far more impressive than his background in theatre. He began studying Mandarin Chinese at a language-intensive high school in Houston, Texas, and in 1988, after his sophomore year, studied at Beijing Teachers’ College through a Duke University summer program, and “fell in love with China.”<sup>13</sup> As a freshman at Dartmouth College, Trusch completed the fourth and final level of the Chinese language curriculum and, later, spent the second semester of his sophomore year in Harbin in order to continue his language development. After returning to Dartmouth for the summer, he spent his junior year in London, first at the London School of Economics and then at University of London, where he focused on a drama curriculum. Upon graduation, Trusch’s linguistic ability and a 1993 summer internship with an investment consulting firm in Beijing led to employment with Merrill Lynch, but after two years his frustration with the corporate world and the company’s failure to make good on its commitment to send him to China prompted Trusch to resign. He went on to earn a master’s degree in regional studies, East Asia, at Harvard in 1998, and although he was subsequently admitted to the doctoral program there, he opted to live in Shanghai and try his hand at an acting career instead.

During the second year of his master’s studies, Trusch was living in Shanghai and had already been cast in a minor role on television and had



also collaborated with two friends to film a documentary on the Jewish community in Kaifeng. Early in 1998, he was asked by actress/producer Luo Yan to scout locations in China for her film *Pavilion of Women*. He was also busy translating subtitles for that year's big box-office "main melody" (*zhu xuanliu*) propaganda film *The Diplomatic Affairs of Zhou Enlai* (*Zhou Enlai waijiao fengyun*, translated by Trusch as *Zhou Enlai in Tumultuous Times*). In 1998 and 1999 he began to get small roles in television serials. In 1999 he appeared regularly on the Shanghai weekly variety/game show *Weekend Surfing* (*Zhouyi da chonglang*) performing in *xiaopin* comedy sketches. His first feature-film supporting role came the same year, in a project directed by Shazon Jiang, an overseas Chinese living in New York, who is the daughter of the late Chinese film star Bai Yang. *X-Roads* (*Xin shizi jietou* [literally "new crossroads" in Chinese]) is a remake of the 1937 film *Crossroads* (*Shizi jietou*, which featured Bai Yang and Zhao Dan, whose son Zhao Jin plays the lead in the remake), and features *Growing Pains* dad Alan Thicke in the lead foreign-male role of Steve, "a typical, self-centered, superficial, money and status crazy New Yorker,"<sup>14</sup> who is also exceedingly mysoginistic toward his Chinese girlfriend, the main character. Trusch, using an exaggerated slapstick style to play a "roguish bartender,"<sup>15</sup> who is the "looney friend" of Zhao Jin's character,<sup>16</sup> considered participation in this film a major breakthrough in his acting career and suggests it was a critical success, though the film actually received dismal reviews.<sup>17</sup>

Then, in 2001, Trusch was cast in the play *Swing*. Although his self-designed and reproduced promotional brochure leads one to believe otherwise, Trusch had very little experience performing in stage plays, and none beyond some high school and college productions, which had been performed at least eight years earlier. The following excerpt from Trusch's brochure, written by the actor himself, is quite misleading in terms of its representation of his previous accomplishments:

Matt gave up a lucrative job in finance at Merrill Lynch and later a PhD at Harvard to pursue his dream of making movies in China. Matt has been thrust into leading roles in Chinese film, television and stage due to the fact that he is one of the few Western actors who can speak flawless Chinese . . . Matt is a classically trained actor, having studied under actors from the Royal Shakespeare Company in London, and has performed in *Hamlet* (Hamlet), *Romeo and Juliet* (Juliet), and *As You Like It* (Orlando, Rosalind, Silvius).<sup>18</sup>

In actuality, Trusch never began a doctoral program at Harvard, but rather was accepted, deferred, and then forfeited his fellowship when he opted to



remain in China. His “classical training” was a semester at University of London through the foreign-study program at Dartmouth College, during which he did in-class scene work from the Shakespeare plays listed above. The only roles he ever played in full Shakespeare productions were supporting roles in high school, and he himself acknowledges elsewhere (in contrast to claims in his promotional brochure) that until the play *Swing*, he had rarely been cast in a leading role in any medium: “Honestly, I rarely ever got leading roles in all my life . . . In China, I’ve never had a leading role (only supporting roles a few times), and this [*Swing*] was my first time on the Chinese stage.”<sup>19</sup>

Despite his relative lack of experience, Trusch exhibits tremendous confidence, in person, in published interviews, and on his self-designed Web site, <http://www.china-films.com>. In fact, his humble admission above ends with the remark, “But I kicked ass.”<sup>20</sup> In discussing his experience as an actor playing the role of Bob in *Swing*, Trusch acknowledged enjoying comparisons to Brad Pitt and collaborating with others on the production team not only to assume a physicality modeled on the popular Hollywood actor but also to design the play’s poster and program as a replica of the image used to advertise the 2001 film *The Mexican*, starring Pitt and Julia Roberts (see pl. 14). Trusch’s effort to reinvent himself as China’s Brad Pitt is quite earnest, reflected in his changes to his physical appearance for *Swing*, his pursuit of romantic leading television and film roles in which he can “get the girl,” and his desires to profit personally in the Chinese film industry, assert his authority in choice and range of roles he plays, be highly publicized and widely recognized by local residents, and replace Paul Kersey (Caucasian American husband of Chinese actress Ning Jing) as China’s leading foreign-film star:

I’m trying to replace him. I would like to be the foreigner they cast. I hope next time there’s a film where the foreigner is the starring role—one of these films that come out maybe once a year—I want to be the starring role in [that] movie. I want to get that role, and I think I’m better than him. He [Kersey] is back in Hollywood and she [Ning] is back in Hollywood, and they call him up when they want him to do a film. Hopefully I will get some kind of star quality so they can look for me.<sup>21</sup>

Although Trusch is unique in his efforts to establish an acting career and star reputation in Shanghai, he is not alone in his overconfident approach to representing himself. A popular bilingual magazine, *METROzine*, published twice a month in Beijing and monthly in Shanghai, featured a “Last Word” editorial by expat David Pandt in a spring 2002 issue. Titled “On the Shang-

hai Game” and penned by a journalist who has worked for several local and overseas magazines during his half-decade in Shanghai, the article addresses the growing narcissism of the city’s resident foreigners, which Pandt defines as “the shoddy game of self-promotion and wanton deceit.” He provides a vivid description of this growing epidemic in the rapidly developing metropolis of Shanghai:

Joe Expat at the Expat Bar waxes large about his corporate pedigree, the number of Chinese girls he’s slept with or his budding side-career as nightclub owner—where he also spins the records, of course . . . You think I’m joking. But this scenario is a disease in this town . . . For some reason, this city, like the whole China phenomenon, makes unrealistic dreamers and wanton opportunists out of us and on some occasions spawns delusional liars. Maybe “liar” is a bit strong, but a half-truth is not the truth and pipe dreams are not the world we live in—least of all here in the shifty and shady arena of city-on-the-make Shanghai. We’re stoned on possibility and drunk on our own BS . . . [T]he Shanghai way of things [is] a kind of *modus operandi* where it’s par for the course to exaggerate, massage, or even flat out misrepresent yourself with the sole purpose of improving your standing . . . Even without embellishing our credentials and basking in half-truths, we foreigners—more precisely, Westerners, even more precisely Western males—are already regularly elevated to a status in China that in turn affects us enormously.<sup>22</sup>

Pandt seems to have his finger on the pulse of an increasingly habitual practice among foreigners in Shanghai (“a routine I have come to witness in this city with disturbing regularity”) that helps to explain the image projected by and about Matt Trusch in the local and foreign press and in his own promotional materials. Furthermore, in the absence of the type of “industry” publicity agent that is standard within networks for actors in environments like Hollywood and New York, Trusch is left to manage his own image in China, in partnership with a Chinese media that has a long tradition of packaging and consuming the foreign Other. Responsibility for the persona of “Matt Trusch, Chinese Movie Star” that circulates publicly thus lies with both Trusch and the local organs that capitalize on it and profit from it, as well as the general public that voraciously consumes it. Though a familiar face to some Shanghainese, Trusch’s notoriety pales in comparison to Beijing’s Mark Roswell, a Canadian citizen who has lived in China and performed on Chinese television for some twenty years now and is commonly known as Da Shan or “Big Mountain.” By contrast, Trusch’s Chinese name

(Cai Manshou) is hardly a household word; nevertheless, Trusch created a slogan—"Beijing has Big Mountain, Shanghai has Little Cai" (*Beijing you Da Shan, Shanghai you Xiao Cai*), effectively putting himself on a par with Roswell—that has been adopted and disseminated in the local Shanghai press.<sup>23</sup> Are these and other boasts and exaggerations by and about Trusch just part of the prevalent expat culture described by Pandt, in which case Trusch is guilty merely of adhering to "the way of the world," as Pandt calls it? Or is Trusch, as Pandt warns, engaging in practices that are "severely damaging to the integrity of [the] soul"—and, by extension, damaging to the credibility of the foreign community in China as a whole? In uncanny resemblance to the "Joe Expat" persona described by Pandt, Trusch's self-authored marketing brochure also asserts that "he is known around Shanghai as the 'Salsa Man' for his spicy Latin dance moves" (he teaches Latin dance on Thursday Salsa nights at DD's, a local club),<sup>24</sup> and, though he does not boast of sexual conquests of Chinese women, he does take great pride in progressing in his acting roles to the point that he now "gets the girl." In past projects, Trusch's character would fall in love with—and subsequently be rejected by—his female counterpart. This changed with his television role opposite Chinese star actress Shi Ke, which Trusch saw as a turning point in his career:

And in the end, I get her! We actually get to kiss on screen, and we get married in the church, and live happily ever after, so it's amazing. So, I thought that was a big step, because in the past, I would always fall in love with the Chinese woman and she would always dump me for the Chinese man.<sup>25</sup>

Before returning to Trusch's collaboration/intervention function in the 2002 stage production of *Swing*, let us examine more closely his earlier roles opposite Chinese female characters/actresses, as well as other casting experiences that have fueled his desire to participate in his own representation in Chinese media (inclusive of film/television roles and press articles). These experiences, along with the prevalent expat ethos suggested by David Pandt, help us to understand that, problematic as Trusch's gestures of self-representation are, they are extremely well-intentioned: although they resemble the rhetorical strategies exhibited by "Joe Expat," they indeed flow from a very different motivation—that of combating negative Occidental images of foreigners (particularly Americans) in Chinese film, stage, and television. Whether Trusch is aware of the myriad of implications resulting from his interventions is doubtful, particularly in the case of his participation in *Swing*, which may

have done more harm than good to the image of the American male intended by its playwrights.

Overall, then, we can see through Trusch's brief but significant acting career in Shanghai that the increased agency of the foreigner to shape his own representation does not necessarily lead to the effective redirection of Occidental "othering" practices that occurred to some degree with Daly's interventions in *Student Wife* but can actually reinforce Occidental strategies despite attempts to subvert them. It may be that Trusch's involvement did open a space for self-determination but that Trusch ultimately failed to use the opportunity effectively. The lack of progress (in terms of complexity and alternative images of the American) in the representation of the Occidental Other (specifically, the character Bob) in *Swing* may be a result of Trusch's own construction of his character inadvertently aligning itself with the anti-American impulses that prevailed on the Shanghai stage at the time.

According to Trusch, the main objective of his acting career in China is to combat the negative stereotypes of Western foreigners that are so dominant in Chinese popular culture. Echoing one of the primary dynamics analyzed in the preceding chapters of this study—one that is characteristic of plays created and staged during the anti-American period of the 1990s—Trusch attributes the prevalence of such images to the need for Chinese people to "gain some semblance of cultural superiority to compensate for their years of 'victim' mentality."<sup>26</sup> Asserting that "there is no end to the 'stupid' foreigner roles that I refuse," Trusch indicates that when he first arrived in Shanghai, in 1998, he was consistently cast as the prototypical ugly American when given roles in television serials:

I was playing the Imperialist Guy, raping women, shooting women—in the beginning it was always like this. These shows were so crappy. They would hand you the script when you walked in, look at you and say, ok, he's foreign, his Chinese is good. We could do a whole other [interview] about the differences between casting in China and America.<sup>27</sup>

Trusch often recounts one of his earliest experiences that served as the inspiration for his private mission to contest negative images of foreigners (particularly Western males). In his minor role in the twenty-part television serial *Sons and Daughters of China* (*Zhonghua ernü*), his character is supposed to look on with delighted amusement as his friend (another foreigner) beats and rapes a Chinese woman and then murders her husband. According to Trusch, "I had a big argument with the director and I wouldn't do it." When Trusch

expressed to the director his desire to react to the scene with horror rather than amusement, the director replied, “You are a foreign villain; you must laugh at this.” In the subsequent trial scene (set in the foreign concessions of 1930s Shanghai), the foreign judge and lawyers humiliate the woman during her testimony. Suddenly, the Chinese hero springs from the shadows with a sword and kills all three foreigners right there in the courtroom.

This scene, of course, is reminiscent of the trial scene in *Dignity* discussed earlier; the Chinese female must be vindicated after abusive treatment by Westerners, and true vindication cannot occur through a tainted legal process. In the case of *Dignity*, the cash settlement is heroically rejected in favor of public admission of guilt in the form of an apology, and in the case of *Sons and Daughters*, the unfair verdict is thwarted by a display of heroic vengeful retribution. Whereas Patrick Kelly, as Edward in *Dignity*, willingly (albeit naïvely) embodied the ugly American—a violent, egotistical, insensitive white misogynist—as a necessary part of the formula for such plots, Trusch refused and attempted to transform his character into a sympathetic but helpless bystander, much to the director’s bewilderment.

Trusch applied a similar strategy of changing the portrayal of an evil foreigner into a more sympathetic version when he was asked to play a Nazi in one of his comic *xiaopin* skits for the Shanghai game show on which he was regularly featured:

I always took these opportunities when I was playing a foreigner to play it very realistically or normal. For example, there was this one scene where I play a Nazi, and the Chinese are in the gas chamber about to get killed—and I’m Jewish, right?—so I could have played this really mean Nazi, but I was a German Nazi standing outside the gas chamber listening to these people scream, so I ended up playing a sympathetic Nazi . . . It was obviously humorous, but I would try to do things in ways that sort of challenge [perceptions].<sup>28</sup>

Trusch is clearly aware of the prevailing antforeign narrative driving many of the projects in which he is cast, but he is overly optimistic about his capacity to alter that narrative and he may not be choosing the most effective strategies for promoting more complex representations of foreign characters, particularly since his focus seems to be on making simplified caricatures instantly more (in his words) “realistic” or “normal.” This is an almost impossible task, particularly when it runs directly counter to the stated goals of a director or producer.

Trusch’s decision to play a sympathetic Nazi is especially intriguing in light of his deepened connection to Judaism that coincided with the launch-

ing of his acting career in China. Though he is the son of a Rabbi, Judaism was not a personal focus for Trusch until his most recent period of extended residence in China. This new commitment to his Jewish faith is quite sincere, as evidenced by his involvement in the Kaifeng documentary project and his regular observance of religious practices. He now observes Shabbat weekly with other foreign Jews and includes in his professional acting arrangements refusal to labor on the Sabbath. For television and film, this means suspending shoots from sundown Friday until sundown Saturday; for the stage production of *Swing*, this translated into cancellation of rehearsals on Saturday, as well as kosher meals during the several weeks of rehearsal and the run of the show. When it came to the issue of performances, Trusch had to compromise, since Friday night and Saturday matinee performances were necessary for box-office success; Trusch worked around this by considering performances “recreation” rather than “labor,” and by not specifically accepting income for Friday night performances (though this is difficult to determine, since Trusch was actually paid in one lump sum for rehearsals and another lump sum for performances, both of which were at least twice the income paid to each of the three Chinese actors).<sup>29</sup>

In 2001 he played a small role in the television serial *Neighborhood Representative (Zhuwei zhuren)*, as the son of a Jew who had lived in China during the 1930s and returns with his family decades later. For this project, he was able to participate in the writing process for the first time, which for Trusch set a precedent for his future acting work:

The director gave me the script beforehand and I changed some things, historically and accurately, about Jews. I rewrote the script [of the] two scenes [I was in]; I wanted it to be more accurate and have a positive outlook on Jews being in China and wanted to say things like that . . . From now on, if I do things, I always participate in the screen-writing process, because they portray foreigners in negative ways or in ways which are inaccurate or just stupid.<sup>30</sup>

Before he began demanding authority to revise scripts prior to taping his scenes, Trusch did portray some foreign male characters in plots that pleased him, inevitably involving a romance with a Chinese woman. As previously mentioned, he considered his role of an appealing American male who wins the heart of a Chinese woman (played opposite Shi Ke in *Don't Say Goodbye [Bushuo zaijian]*) to be ideal, saying, “After that, I would only accept roles that were like that.” As the second male lead appearing in twelve of sixteen episodes (that eventually aired in twenty parts), Trusch played Mr. Leman, an executive at one of three competing technology companies (a Chinese com-

pany, a Japanese company, and an American company—this competitive triangle is a common motif in recent Chinese television serials). Similar to the plot of many stage plays, television serials, and films of the mid through late-1990s, the female protagonist is an overseas Chinese student. In this case, Mr. Leman hires her to accompany him to China to assist his American company in competing with the other two companies to introduce a certain new technology in China. He of course falls in love with her, but his Chinese friend advises him, “You cannot use Western ways to woo an Eastern woman—you have to do it the Chinese way.” Thereupon, Leman studies Confucianism and Daoism (much like *China Dream*’s John Hodges), and transforms from “this very heated American [to] this very peaceful and calm *tonghua* (one who is assimilated) in order to get this woman to love me.”<sup>31</sup>

What is interesting here is that this image of a foreigner that is so appealing to Trusch is as much a stereotype as the villainous character he refuses to play: characters like Leman are sympathetic only to the degree that they assimilate and submit to the superiority of Chinese ways. Though certainly a more positive character than the villain, the assimilated foreigner is an equally simple trope with an equally long history in Chinese cultural representations, and serves as much to validate the cultural superiority of China and contest its image as semicolonial victim as does the ugly American. In contrast to Sun and Fei’s creation of John Hodges in *China Dream* as a means of exploring cross-cultural identity and (mis)understanding, Leman is extremely predictable and shallow. For Trusch, it is not an increased complexity or even what he would call “accuracy” of the character that is appealing but rather the fact that his character successfully woos the Chinese woman. This kind of gendered, Orientalized appropriation is actually quite problematic in China, both on-screen and off, in that the frequency of local women paired with Western men both in Shanghai and overseas is in fact a hotly debated issue. Trusch must be aware of this, though he seems cognizant neither that his role as Leman in this particular television serial is complicit in it, nor that the role is not as sympathetic or progressive as he imagines. Echoing this misguided conflation of improved images of foreigners with characters who assimilate and/or win the hearts of Chinese women, Trusch describes a subsequent role in the serial *Bohemia Flower Prize* (*Zijing shizhang*, about the return of Hong Kong to the Mainland):

Originally, my character was a very bad guy, but they split him up into two: the father hates China and was very racist and the son is very pro-China . . . again, I started to like these things where I was the one who fell in love.<sup>32</sup>

Granted, successfully courting a Chinese woman is a more positive image than savagely raping her, but can't both practices be read as a form of imperialist possession? Such a question does not occur to Trusch in reference to his television portrayals but nevertheless becomes crucial in examining the character of Bob that he refashioned and performed in the 2002 play *Swing*.

Bob as originally conceived by playwrights Sun and Fei is a quite sympathetic character: a blue-collar American who opens his home to a Chinese foreign exchange student and displays a touching love for children. When they wrote the play, Sun and Fei felt that most Chinese only saw representations of white-collar Americans and were unaware that the United States, like China, has a huge working-class population that contributes to the nation's economy and social structures through physical labor. Their creation of Bob was an earnest attempt to write a new kind of American character interacting with Chinese citizens. This was in direct contrast to the emerging *chuguo* narratives of overseas Chinese students that were so popular throughout the 1990s: such novels, plays, films, and television serials implied that *liuxuesheng* came into contact only with educated elite during their experiences in America, in spite of the fact that many of them were working as busboys, dishwashers, waitresses, and nannies to make ends meet during their studies. These circumstances are reflected in the plays *Student Wife* and *Dignity*, as well as in the real-life experiences of Che Guevara Group member Huang Jisu and *Swing* producer Huang Angang, among others. Although the two plays' Chinese female protagonists are employed as a nanny and a caretaker for the elderly, all other characters in the plays are highly educated white-collar elites: doctors, lawyers, judges, bankers, executives, et cetera. In *Swing* as Sun and Fei scripted it, each of the three characters with whom the overseas student protagonist Sue interacts is blue-collar: Bob is a roofer, Jenny is a struggling actress, and Charlie is working long hours as a restaurant delivery boy. Bob may even be taking in a housemate as much to help pay his rent as to show his hospitality to strangers. Potentially, the play offers an intriguing glimpse of life in America that Chinese have never seen portrayed in the media or onstage.

Ironically, herein lies one of the sources of tension in the project, though the director, playwrights, and actors did not identify it as such. The strategy through which *Swing* was ultimately staged in 2002—investment by a private businessman, participation of a young freelance Internet writer, supervision by an energetic female director, casting of relatively inexperienced actors (in this case, newly graduated from the local theatre academy), involvement of an amateur foreign actor, and integration of a local band from a popular nightclub—is the very recipe for the newly emergent genre in Shanghai



called “white-collar theatre” (*bailing xiju*). Characteristic of this new style of theatre is a collaborative process similar to that described above—more often than not with female writers, directors, and protagonists—and content focused on the careers and romantic entanglements of the young urban elite. Many of the collaborators themselves are not trained in theatre but are employed in the private corporate sector by high-tech, consulting, or finance companies. Today in Shanghai as well as Beijing, going to the theatre has become a trendy pastime for the young nouveaux riches, and making theatre has become an increasingly popular amusement as well. The key difference between usual white-collar theatre projects and *Swing* is that the latter was executed by a talented and innovative professional female director with a very impressive career stretching back to the mid-1980s, and her creative vision and professional experience prompted her to maintain a depth and complexity in the narrative (particularly regarding the issue of abortion and the challenge of cross-cultural romance) that exceeds the comparatively superficial love stories of most white-collar plays.

As Lei Guohua asserted, the change of conditions in Shanghai during the decade between the writing of the play and its production required a new approach to making the play a success, and thus revisions carried out were intended to reflect this updated milieu that would strike a chord with young urban audiences. What seemed to go unnoticed by the production team—including actor Matt Trusch—was that the very changes being made to the play undermined nearly every aspect of its original plot and characterization. Though Sun and Fei never articulated their disappointment in these precise terms, it is clear that this was the source of their profound disappointment—as well as the cause of the ultimate failure of the play to achieve more substantial critical and popular success, or to offer a progressive alternative to the range of Occidental practices exhibited in the plays previously discussed in this study. Considering the personal affiliations and experiences with foreigners enjoyed by nearly all of the show’s collaborators (from writers to director to producer to actors), one might expect *Swing* to offer a considerably enriched image of the American in terms of depth, complexity, and originality. And yet, the image of the American man ultimately presented onstage—in spite of everyone’s best efforts—was that of a selfish, sexist, Orientalist, violent, immature caricature.

Simply stated, creators of white-collar theatre do not want to tell blue-collar stories, and they assume that audiences do not want to see blue-collar characters with whom they cannot personally identify. Curiously, as this form of theatre was emerging in urban China just after the turn of the millennium (along with fashionable clothing boutiques and other businesses bearing the

name White Collar), the corollary term of “blue-collar” (*lanling*) did not even surface: some colleagues I asked could easily define what the general category “white-collar” indicated but had not even heard of a Chinese term “blue-collar” and did not know that the term existed in English or that these phrases were used to delineate hard labor (or the working class) from soft labor (or the educated class).

Creators of this new kind of theatre are able to rent out rehearsal and performance space at the few major professional theatres in the cities, whose declining subsidies necessitate generating alternative sources of revenue. This often leads to procedural tensions: in the case of *Swing*, despite the fact that Lei Guohua is a member of their company, the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center had a greater interest in promoting its own fully sponsored productions and even coaxed ticket buyers to see those shows rather than *Swing*. Competition for patrons was fierce, as there were several productions running concurrently at different theatres in Shanghai, four of them opening on the same night, April 12, 2002.<sup>33</sup> This led to an obvious conflict of interest for the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center, who had agreed to provide marketing and box-office ticket sales for *Swing* but was in direct economic competition to sell tickets for its own shows that would run before, during, and after the fifteen-day run of *Swing*. Producer Huang Angang became so frustrated with this that he bought large blocks of the 80–100 RMB (approximately \$10–12 US) seats for *Swing* and simply gave them away.

What audiences who did come to *Swing* saw was very different than what Sun and Fei had originally envisioned. First of all, rather than a Brechtian episodic drama, they saw a realist linearly plotted narrative with a sentimental tone, exaggerated acting, and English-language music—all characteristics of white-collar theatre. In contrast to the original script’s suburban New York atmosphere that would have been the habitat of Bob the blue-collar roofer, the lights came up on the white frame of a Long Island seaside Victorian complete with wicker patio furniture and tropical plants.

As the performance begins, the Cotton Club jazz band plays in silhouette against a royal blue sky. The *mise en scène* and live music are visually and orally soothing and aesthetically pleasing. Enter Bob and Jenny, in the midst of a heated argument. Bob is dressed in torn jeans and a flannel work shirt unbuttoned to the waist, revealing his bare chest. Jenny is dressed in fashionable high boots, a black miniskirt, and a tight knit top. Bob pushes Jenny repeatedly as he screams at her, and finally throws her to the ground. Jenny retaliates. Bob continues to be violent and uncontrollable in his anger, even jumping atop the kitchen table to emphasize a point. When Jenny finally storms out of the house, Charlie leads Sue inside and introduces her to her

new housemate, Bob. After Charlie exits a few lines later, Bob proceeds to slouch on a chair and drink a beer, belching loudly and repeatedly, then throwing the beer can on the floor.

Perhaps this caricatured depiction of Bob would have been suitable (though unfortunate, since it stereotypes blue-collar American men) if Bob were still a roofer, but in the rewriting process, Bob became a successful freelance photographer. The production team chose a career for Bob that could be considered professional and artistic (i.e., sufficiently white-collar), but still allow the flexibility for Bob to be home at any given hour of the day, as the plot requires. Trusch, however, seems to have adhered to a negative, comical stereotype of Bob's former blue-collar persona, though curiously juxtaposing Bob's tattered clothing and brutish mannerisms with a stylish blond haircut and trimmed beard that are more characteristic of his Brad-Pitt-in-China persona. It is difficult to comprehend this interpretation of Bob being Trusch's attempt to create a realistic, accurate, normal, multifaceted representation of a contemporary American freelance photographer living in New York.

Bob's evolution from roofer to photographer is similar to what happened to the character of Lucia in *Student Wife* when Robert Daly succeeded in convincing Yu Luosheng to delete all references to her Jewish ethnicity. Just as Lucia's embodiment of a combination of negative Jewish stereotypes became a negative image of *all* American women in the absence of any specific explanation and by virtue of her being the only American woman represented in the play, so Bob's behavior becomes the typical behavior of all American men due to the same factors. His "savage" dress and demeanor—physical brutishness and rude language and habits—can no longer be explained by his lack of education and exposure to the elements through physical outdoor labor, but rather become universal traits of all American males, particularly in the absence of a contrasting American male character in the play. At no point in the play is Bob's appearance or behavior discussed, explained, criticized, or reevaluated by himself or any other character in any way; in fact, in Charlie's interactions with him, we see his Chinese friend attempting similar displays of masculinity for comic effect. Despite Trusch's insistence that it was the seriousness and complexity with which the issues of abortion and intercultural relationships are treated in the play that drew him to participate in it, he began his performance with a decidedly comic interpretation of Bob.

In his enactment of Bob, Trusch often played for the laugh in scenes with Charlie and Sue, and then abruptly erupted in violence or a sentimental account of his troubled childhood. Trusch believed that his character's nearly

obsessive love for children could not be credible without an explanation, so he created a past history for Bob in an attempt to enhance his character's integrity. Trusch often creates biographical histories for the characters he is assigned to play in China, both as a way of compensating for lack of character depth in scripts he is given and to help himself as an actor get into character. For instance, he created a background for Mr. Leman in *Don't Say Goodbye* and gave him the first name David (though it was never actually used): such Stanislavskian "biographical" exercises are not unusual for actors in their efforts to internally develop their characters. What is significant in *Swing* is that Trusch did not merely employ this strategy of creating a history in order to make his character more believable to himself, but he insisted on including it in the play in order to make the character's love of children more believable (in his estimation) to the audience. What resulted, unfortunately, was the creation of a character not only predisposed to wanting children but one predisposed to physically and psychologically abusing women; furthermore, incorporation of his character history into the play created a host of absent characters who previously did not exist, including an American male (his father) who is an even more negative stereotype than Bob, and American females (his mother and unborn sister) who are victims of the father's abuse. In the history Trusch created, Bob's father is a drunk who has been beating him and his mother and brothers for years; finally his mother is driven to shoot herself in spite of being pregnant (carrying a baby the children had all hoped would be a girl and had already named Angel), taking both her own life and that of her unborn child. According to Trusch, this family history was "the only rational" explanation for Bob's overwhelming desire to be a father.<sup>34</sup>

The invention of Bob's childhood—complete with tragically suicidal mother, murdered unborn sister, abusive alcoholic father, and victimized brothers—not only creates an altogether negative view of the American family and its dysfunctional survivors, but also serves (along with other gestures on Trusch's part) to displace Sue as the story's main character. Formerly, the only absent character in the play was Sue's husband, who had pressured her to have an abortion so she could pursue her plans to study in America and later send for him. After Sue moves in with Bob, her husband calls from China and Bob's flippant remarks upon answering the phone lead Sue's husband to believe they are having an affair, at which point he has an affair himself and sends Sue divorce papers.

The play was intended to privilege the overseas Chinese character of Sue and her complex dilemmas regarding her abortion, her marriage, and her growing attraction to Bob. Several devices in the original story kept the focus

on Sue, including the presence of an additional absent character (her husband) connected only to her, as well as the central metaphor of the swing, which was intended to represent her dreams and desires. Trusch succeeded in co-opting Sue's position as the central character not only through invention of absent characters that shift focus to Bob and his troubles, but also through a final physical and interpretive co-opting of the swing itself.

It would be nice if these "colonizing" gestures replicating cultural and gender dynamics that reinforce negative perceptions of Westerners were unintentional—and nicer still if they at least succeeded in offering an alternative image of the American in contrast to Occidental representations of the past—but unfortunately they were neither inadvertent nor productive. When Trusch read the script for the first time in January 2002, he felt that the play should really be about Bob:

My first reaction was, "Wow, this is really great. What they should do is they should move the play to Shanghai. I should move in with a Chinese person instead of her moving." [T]hat would defeat the purpose of wanting to reflect the life of the *liuxuesheng*, but I thought that would be more interesting . . . I also thought I should be Sue and Sue should be me. The things Sue said—I felt I could play the Sue character.<sup>35</sup>

The object of the swing in the play maintained its function as a central metaphor as Sun and Fei intended, but Trusch managed to shift its meaning from a barometer of Sue's development during her postabortion adjustment to life in New York and the changing of her dreams to a direct symbol of the connection between her and Bob and an extension of Bob's obsession with having children. Since the swing is the element of the *mise en scène* infused with the greatest signification, Trusch's alteration of its function again shifts focus to Bob rather than Sue as the main character of the play.

Sun and Fei chose the symbol of a swing because of its flexibility and also because of its novelty. Swings, especially in the early 1990s when the play was drafted, were rather rare in China compared to the United States: when they lived in the United States, the playwrights were impressed by the abundance and variety of swings at parks, playgrounds, and private residences, and by the fact that they were used by children, adolescents, and adults alike. They cleverly saw the swing as an object that could be transmuted throughout the play as Sue's life and dreams progressed, and as her relationship with Bob deepened. The swing changes from an infant swing to a tire swing to a newer, more conventional porch-type swing during the play.

In the original 1991 script (and still in Sun and Fei's second and third drafts of October 2000 and September 2001), the first scene is between Sue

and Charlie, not Bob and Jenny (as described in the performance plot summary above). As the play begins, Charlie escorts Sue to Bob's house and then exits, whereupon Bob emerges onstage and he and Sue become acquainted. In the second scene, Sue is onstage, playing with a musical infant swing she has purchased secondhand from a neighbor, when Bob enters.<sup>36</sup> The infant swing is of course a symbol for her abruptly ended pregnancy and unborn child, of which both the audience and Bob at this point are still unaware. In the play as performed after revisions by Huang, Lei, Xue, and Trusch, the first swing we see is not purchased by Sue but is a broken infant swing she finds in Bob's yard, which he explains was previously used in photo shoots with young clients. Bob then recounts a story about his friend's son Mendel (which Trusch based on the child of an actual friend of his), who loved being in the swing and would joyfully call Bob "Daddy!" much to his delight. Bob insists that Sue accept the swing as a gift, and he later repairs this broken swing for her in one of his early attempts to win her affection. The change in the function of this first swing from the original script (in which Sue purchased the swing as a symbol of her aborted child) to the performed version (in which the swing, which Bob gives as a gift to Sue, is a tool of his photography trade and symbolizes his potential fatherhood) shifts agency from Sue to Bob, and such transference persists throughout the collectively revised version of the play.

In the original script, Bob gives Sue a tabletop musical figurine of a girl on a swing, in scene 5, which prompts Sue to tell him of her childhood "swing dream": as a young girl, she would dream of having a swing on which she could swing as high as the clouds, and could even fly like a butterfly—but in China, there were few swings, and when she would wait in line at her kindergarten to play on one of the two swings in the schoolyard, bullies would often come and make her get down. Hearing this sad story, Bob grabs an old tire in the yard and ties it with rope to a tree so that Sue can have her swing. Sue has never seen this kind of swing before and is delighted when he helps her use it; at this point Jenny enters and, seeing them together, tells Bob she never wants to see him again. Up until this scene in the Sun/Fei script, Jenny and Bob have been having arguments about Jenny pursuing her acting career versus starting a family, but always make up afterwards; in the eventual performed version, however, they break up in the opening scene.

The next significant swing scene is the pivotal love scene of the play, when Sue and Bob finally recognize their mutual feelings of attraction. In both versions of the play, Bob gives Sue a new swing for her birthday, and the scene ends with them swinging on it together, but it is only in the later version that this scene becomes one in which they act upon their feelings

with sensual physical intimacy. In the original script, Bob comes out at night to swing in the moonlight and returns to his room when Sue appears in her pajamas. After Bob goes into the house, Sue takes a turn on the swing, imitating Bob's movements in order to make the swing go higher, but not daring to swing as high as Bob. Bob returns and soon Sue feels his presence behind her. He joins her on the swing, and she wants to step down, but he swings them higher, saying he wants to fly with her like a butterfly. Sue tells him to let her get down because she is tired, but Bob tells her not to move and insists that he can help her fly. Dim light then comes up on another part of the stage, showing the shadows of Charlie lying down and Jenny spreading her arms like wings and moving up and down as if to fly; when her movements reach their peak, she lets out an excited call. Sue lets out a yelp of surprise, whereupon the shadows on the swing fall to the ground, and another shrill cry is heard. This rather abstract pair of tableaux interrupted by the dissonant series of vocal sounds by Jenny and Sue ends the scene, with resolution of Sue and Bob's romantic attraction deferred.<sup>37</sup>

This scene changes drastically in the later version revised by Trusch. Here is what was actually played out onstage in the performances:

*(The jazz band starts to play "Summertime," led by the horn.)*  
*Bob runs over to Sue and grabs her from behind. His face is buried in her hair, and he is overwhelmed by her scent. Bob runs his arms down hers, caressing her soft skin. He pries her hand open, and envelops her. Bob spins her around and looks deep into her eyes. Their breaths quicken. Sue struggles with her emotions. She pushes Bob away, and runs to the swing. Bob runs over to the swing, and pulls her back toward him. They pivot around the swing, until Bob is behind her. Sue grabs for the rope, and Bob follows her arm to her hand and gives her a sweet kiss. Sue turns and looks at Bob, who is now completely focused on his goal . . . Bob delicately caresses Sue's graceful neck. Sue touches Bob's neck. Then Bob's other hand, then Sue's. Near embrace, they both slowly sit down together on the swing. Bob moves closer for the kiss. Sue arches backwards, and sweeps along in a graceful pose. Bob brings her close again. He kisses her two cheeks very lightly and moves closer to her lips. Sue pulls herself up along the rope, and now stands looking down at Bob. Bob stands, and turns around the other rope. Now he aggressively tries to kiss her, but Sue evades. She spins around, her dress flying in the wind. She sits down again on the swing. Bob pushes her gently from behind. Each time she returns, Bob's face gets closer to hers. Suddenly, Bob jumps onto the swing. He is the picture of strength and freedom. Bob looks down towards Sue, who looks up, smiling at Bob like a happy child. Slowly, slowly, Bob kneels down on the swing. Sue lifts her head, and time stops. They share a beautiful, perfect kiss as the swing rocks them back*



*and forth. Finally, the swing slows, and Bob kneels on the ground, as their embrace continues. Bob finally sweeps Sue into his arms, and carries her off into the bedroom.*

*(The lights fade as the romantic horn finishes the song.)*<sup>38</sup>

These stage directions, markedly different in tone than the rest of the script, were added by Trusch in his English translation of the play. Even Trusch's own Chinese rehearsal/production script from April 2002 does not include the sensual love scene on the swing, though it was ultimately performed. The Chinese stage directions in the rehearsal/production script describe Bob pushing the swing lovingly and then joining Sue on the swing, whereupon Sue senses the romantic energy between them and jumps off (up until this point, it is much like Sun and Fei's original). Bob approaches her after she dismounts from the swing and declares his love for her. She threatens to spray him with the garden hose if he approaches again, and the scene ends in a romantic yet playful exchange with the hose.<sup>39</sup> The discarding and drenching of clothing can be considered somewhat sexually suggestive, but their actual demeanor is not. The mere suggestion of physical attraction in the original script became flirtatious innuendo in the rehearsal version used in early April, but by the time of the performances (April 12–27, 2002), Trusch's intervention had prompted the scene's development into a prolonged and very sensual physical love scene. These kinds of "graphic" displays onstage are increasingly common and popular in plays targeted at the young "white-collar" patrons that have started coming to the theatre in increasing numbers since the late 1990s. Undoubtedly, the interracial nature of the love scene made it even more intriguing to the contemporary audience.

In redesigning the scene, Trusch not only played into an increasingly common dynamic of white-collar theatre, but he also accomplished two goals that were part of his own agenda. First, he again shifted the focus of the scene and of the central metaphor of the swing to his own character by taking control of both the physical domain of the swing and of Sue's body; second, he succeeded in "getting the girl" in a very tangible way. Although Trusch sees romantic conquest of the Chinese female lead in his stage and screen performances as a positive development in the depiction of foreigners, it can also be read as fulfillment of the imperialist, Orientalist fantasy of Western male domination of the feminized East. In fact, Zhang Lu, the actress who played Sue, was extremely uncomfortable with Trusch's approach to the play and the relationship between both their characters and themselves as fellow actors throughout the rehearsal process.

Trusch indicated that he makes a habit of trying to get to know his leading ladies outside of rehearsals through working dates (meeting for coffee



to discuss the play and their characters, etc.) and believes that developing closeness between himself and his costar contributes to onstage chemistry; though he attempted to describe this as an innocent practice, he admits he has a tendency to “fall in love with young starlets.”<sup>40</sup> Actress Zhang Lu was extremely resistant to Trusch’s suggestions that they spend time together outside of rehearsal, and was accompanied by her boyfriend on all such occasions. Trusch interpreted this as an over-possessive jealous boyfriend, despite the fact that his own descriptions of Zhang Lu’s behavior toward him in general reveal her extreme discomfort. Trusch also recounted an earlier experience when he was working on the television serial *Bohemia Prize* and actress Yang Gongru (a former beauty-pageant queen) had also refused his offer to meet outside of rehearsals and then proceeded to ignore him on the set.<sup>41</sup>

While Bob’s seduction of Sue during the love scene on the swing replicates an Orientalist possession fantasy, his desperate desire to “save” Sue and her (imagined) daughter reinscribes the West’s hegemonic paternalism. Likewise, his refusal to see her as she really is and learn the truth about her “baby” can be read as a metaphor for America’s continual misreading of China’s political situation due to being blinded by its own agenda, with Bob’s reactive tantrum when Sue finally explains things to him thus mirroring America’s unsympathetic response when its own demands are not met in relations with China, be they economic or humanitarian.

Clearly, the roles Trusch had previously played, in which he lost the love of a woman to the Chinese hero of the piece, were screens for China’s assertion of its cultural superiority during a strongly neo-nationalist period peaking in the mid to late-1990s. If seen in light of the anti-American attitudes being reflected in plays like *Dignity* and *Che Guevara*, Trusch’s tendency to be cast on-screen as an American villain, a buffoon—or at best a *laowai* suitor who comes up short—makes perfect sense, and his manipulation of the character of Bob in *Swing* becomes not the victory that he interprets it to be but rather the reinforcement of entrenched negative stereotypes of the American man, complete with the sexual transgression of overpowering the Chinese woman against her wishes. What Trusch saw as a “beautiful” love scene with Sue unfortunately still bears some of the basic elements of the violent rape scene Trusch so often recounts with disdain. A woman is regarded not as a complex human being but as a sexually desirable Other that can be used for the Western male’s satisfaction (in this case, procreation as well as sexual fulfillment). Bob’s relationships with both Sue and Jenny are based more on power and desire than respect or love; both are driven by his quest to father a child.

By the end of the play, Trusch/Bob’s process of co-optation is complete:

Trusch has transformed the character of Bob according to his own designs, and Bob has co-opted Sue's position as protagonist of the play. This happens in the final moments of the play with a return to the central symbol of the swing. In Sun and Fei's original ending to the play, Bob finds out through a letter from Sue's husband that they do not have an infant daughter but that Sue had an abortion back in China when she was four months pregnant. He expresses his shock and anger, breaking the swing as he exits, whereupon Sue gives a long monologue reflecting on Bob's disappointment at not being able to be a father. Just after Sue exits with her suitcase, Charlie and Jenny enter, fearing she may have attempted suicide. Bob reenters and delivers a remorseful monologue in which he recalls Sue's observation that swings swing both high and low, and that one who seems like a butterfly up high is only a person once the swing returns; addressing the absent Sue as his "butterfly," he begs her to return. When she reenters, she explains to him that she is not his butterfly and that "the time for Madame Butterflies has passed" (here, Sun and Fei reference the Orientalist butterfly trope familiar to Western—and, to some extent, contemporary Chinese—audiences). She concludes with, "Thank you for teaching me such a good lesson. Goodbye," to which Bob responds, "Where are you going? Back to China? Wherever you go, I'll follow . . ." The final line of the play is Sue's: "You'd better fix that swing first. It looks terrible."<sup>42</sup>

In the revised version of the play (as it was performed onstage), Bob's apology and recollection of Sue's wise words are gone, and his brief angry response to the letter is replaced by several extended emotional outbursts after Sue tells him the truth:

You mean you really killed Angel? [ . . . ] No. I can see Angel sitting on the swing. She's crying. She's laughing. She's playing. She's . . . No! This all doesn't even exist. Sue, why did we build those swings? Why did we create this nightmare? No. I don't want this nightmare anymore [ . . . ] I lost my mother, lost my sister, lost my chance to be a father. This pain . . . I always feel it deep in my heart. But now, now you've killed my Angel. Our baby. How could you? Why did you lie to me? Why? I thought you and she were a gift from God. But you're not a gift from Heaven. You're a nightmare from Hell! You're a devil! [ . . . ] Where's my Angel? Where's my Angel? [ . . . ] God . . . Why are you punishing me like this? Haven't I already suffered enough? Now you've made me lose my woman, my love! God!!!<sup>43</sup>

While delivering his final emotional lines, Bob passionately embraces the swing before breaking it, then exits in agony (see pl. 15). This revision of the

play shifts the symbolism of the swing from representing Sue's dreams of motherhood, freedom from the control of her husband, freedom from guilt, and reclamation of the joy of her childhood to representing the location of Bob's desire for Sue, his shattered dreams of fatherhood, and the inevitability of "life's ups and downs."

The play ends not with Sue's sense of agency, but with Bob's grief, followed by a brief appended epilogue:

SUE: Can the swing be fixed?

BOB: I'll try.

*(Bob fixes the swing.)*

SUE: Will it ever fly again?

BOB: Life is like a swing, as we reach for the Heavens.

SUE: Life is like a swing, as we suffer through Hell.

BOB: Heaven and Hell: Life's ups and downs.

SUE & BOB: But life must go on.<sup>44</sup>

These final lines were delivered in both Chinese and English during performances, and were written by Trusch himself, who expressed dissatisfaction with an epilogue that had been added, and he suggested replacing it with the metaphor about the swing's/life's ups and downs.<sup>45</sup> Thus, Trusch completed his transformation of the play by rewriting the ending in addition to his other interventions, such as adding both the steamy love scene and the entire background of Bob's character. All were part of Trusch's attempt to make his role more complex, sympathetic, and important than roles he had played in China in the past. As illustrated in the discussion above, although Trusch was extremely well-intentioned, the results of his efforts were extremely problematic. His interventions were intended to improve the script, enhance the appeal of the production, and ameliorate negative images of the Occidental Other in Chinese popular culture, but they ultimately contributed to tensions between the playwrights and director (as well as between Trusch himself and the actress playing Sue) and reinforced many negative aspects of existing stereotypes of American men.

Overall, in Sun and Fei's original script, despite its episodic alinear structure, Bob's character displays more substantial complexity and some redeeming qualities, and relationships between combinations of all four characters are far better developed and more interesting than in the revised version that was performed. For instance, both Bob and Sue have individual scenes with Jenny in which the dynamics of their respective relationships with her shift considerably. In the Huang/Lei/Xue/Trusch restructuring of the text from nineteen episodes into four "seasons" (winter, spring, summer, fall), the

events and dialogue of the play are rewritten to adhere to a more popularized soap opera format. Through the conversion of Bob from a blue-collar roofer into a white-collar photographer, along with Trusch's interpretation of the role through both his rewriting and his acting, Bob is reduced to a selfish, overbearing, uncivilized, clownish, emotionally immature and romantically greedy brute. This is an unfortunate image of the typical American guy, especially considering the loftiness of Trusch's intentions.

Even Trusch admits with bewilderment that what seemed to him to be Bob's most moving line of the play—"Why did you kill our angel?"—often misfired with Chinese audiences. In Trusch's opinion, Chinese do not consider an unborn child a life and thus do not understand Bob's reference to killing (*sha*) it.<sup>46</sup> In a published interview, when Trusch conveyed his concern about spectators greeting this line with laughter at performances, the reporter suggested it is the audience's discomfort with such a serious issue that causes them to laugh.<sup>47</sup> However, it could be that Bob's transformation of the fetus Sue aborted in China into his own daughter (whom he has named without consulting Sue and for whom he has created an entire life in the United States) seems illogical or even ridiculous to the audience watching the play. In contrast to soliciting identification and sympathy from spectators, Bob's caricatured appearance and behavior, violence toward Jenny, essentialist idealization of Sue, insistence on sending for and raising Sue's (nonexistent) child, sexual conquest of Sue on the swing, and self-centered emotional outbursts throughout the play function as constant reminders of his Occidental otherness.

Contrary to Trusch's hopes, the character of Bob he ultimately created serves as a negative Occidental contrast to the three remaining characters in the play, all of whom are Chinese. Though Jenny can be interpreted as having adopted negative attributes of selfishness and promiscuity from being raised in the United States, she is still a likable character who in the end chooses the redemptive love of a good Chinese man, Charlie. Charlie and Sue are extremely sympathetic characters who embody many of the traits commonly portrayed as being "Chinese," such as loyalty, humility, and privacy. Although Sue has not been entirely honest with Bob about her abortion (because he jumped to conclusions and never actually gave her a chance to explain), she still embodies a kind of purity akin to that of the female protagonists Jiang Zhuojun in *Student Wife* and Jin Xiaoxue in *Dignity*. The original plot of *Swing* closely resembled these other two plays in their motif of the trials and tribulations of an overseas Chinese female during the period of heightened emigration of mainland citizens to study in the United States.

The America of *Swing*, much like that of *Student Wife*, *Dignity*, and other

plays examined here, is consistent with Una Chaudhuri's *geopathic* concept of America as a land that simultaneously privileges and suppresses individualism. At the end of the play, Sue, like her predecessors in earlier Shanghai spoken dramas, has learned to stand on her own two feet in spite of the efforts of the white American to control her and prevent her independence. Trusch himself clearly never intended Bob to be interpreted as an overbearing brutish American caricature who selfishly victimizes a nice Chinese girl, and yet, in spite of his considerable efforts, he created such a scenario; his mission to combat negative images ironically resulted in the enactment (and enhancement) of a stereotype. How did this happen? Was it Trusch's inability to see past his ego that blinded his view of the process in which he participated? Or was it an inevitable result of his effort to transcend the discourse of Occidentalism within the parameters of a project that was deliberately engaging it? Was Trusch's only choice in the end between being either an Occidentalized object or a self-Occidentalizing subject? Ultimately, though Trusch's motives were very similar to Daly's in *Student Wife*, their approaches and results were quite different: Trusch ended up dedicating himself to a futile and unwitting process of self-Occidentalism, marking yet another new development in Occidentalism as a theatre practice in contemporary China. What is perhaps most intriguing is that he did not recognize his activity as such, and in fact was quite pleased with the results of his performance (inclusive of both his "performance" as a cocreator of the production and his performance onstage in the role of Bob).

In an interesting postscript to *Swing*, and as an update to Trusch's odyssey of pursuing an acting career in China, he recently decided to turn down several lucrative offers onstage and on-screen in order to help an Israeli friend start up a business in China. This decision was made after Trusch spent two months in Israel studying Judaism after *Swing* closed. His deepened investigation of his religion led him to a soul-searching discovery that his priorities needed adjustment:

[P]art of my religious struggle has been to put my material concerns in better perspective . . . as an actor, I've been consumed with striving for fame. Often at the expense of what is right. What is the benefit of fame? Who does it benefit except my own ego? What have I really created, except an illusion of something? . . . I guess I realized I could continue to be "Matt Trusch: Chinese Movie Star," but would it get me where I want to be?<sup>48</sup>

Trusch's revelation suggests that his unabashed self-promotion may indeed be a product of the rampant "Joe Expat" culture in urban China identified

by David Pandt, rather than merely a result of Trusch's own personal crusade, since extended removal from that environment offered him a different outlook. So far, Trusch's change of heart has not led to further introspection regarding his discursive and performative strategies in the *Swing* production, but it may foster an altered perspective for him as he continues to embody the Occidental Other in future representational and collaborative processes.

The most compelling question to emerge from this case study of Trusch's casting and involvement in the 2002 Shanghai production of *Swing* is whether indeed we can imagine a Chinese play production featuring an American character or characters (and perhaps an American actor or actors) that can actually avoid engagement in Occidentalist practices. I believe this is impossible, and that it is thus naïve to disparage Occidentalism as a corollary to Orientalism that should (and actually can) somehow be avoided. Rather, it must be recognized and analyzed—"confronted," so to speak. As evidenced by the 1987 example of *China Dream*, Occidentalism can be articulated as a complex interplay of cultural images challenging our notions of East and West as readily as it can be invoked as a hostile weapon to claim national and cultural superiority (as reflected in *Dignity* and *Che Guevara*). In writing *Swing*, the same playwrights who created *China Dream* attempted to suggest similarly multifaceted views of culture, citizenship, gender, cross-cultural relationships, and the sensitive moral issue of abortion; however, the production team, in its attempt a decade later to make the play more relevant for its young elite audience, proceeded to demystify the play by changing it to a linear, "realistic," literal level that ultimately reproduced a more simplified form of Occidentalism, which had become quite common during the mid to late-1990s. Ironically, the more focus was shifted—and layers were added—to the character of Bob (and to Sue's experience in America) within this structure, the more unappealing the Occidentalist image of Bob (and the United States) became. It remains to be seen how such images will continue to be developed by Chinese theatre makers and received by both Chinese and expatriate audiences, but it is my hope that this present study will provide historical and analytical tools to aid in examining future productions and their reception.

The most significant aspect of Trusch's career in terms of the questions I attempt to raise here about Occidentalist "othering" practices and the subjectivity of the foreigner in the midst of such practices is that Trusch attempts direct intervention in and resistance to the "framing" of foreigners in contemporary Chinese visual culture, a practice that radically departs from habitual "coping" strategies among most foreign sojourners in Chinese cities. It is not that there is no resistance to the Occidentalizing gestures of the Chi-

nese media (and ordinary Chinese) that overdetermine and stereotype the foreign (particularly Western, and especially American) Other in China on a daily basis—it is just that this resistance is usually conveyed via networks of expatriate expression (such as English-language publications, Internet Web sites, social groups, workplaces, churches, athletic clubs, foreign-student dormitories, hotels, embassies and consulates, and popular night spots) within the “ingroup” rather than in local Chinese contexts. Furthermore, as indicated in my prologue, any attempt at openly expressing resistance, challenge, or outrage toward negative portrayals of Westerners carries with it the possibility of reinscribing Orientalist colonialist gestures in its very enactment—as bears out in the interventionist strategies of Matt Trusch summarized here. Even if Trusch were to become cognizant of the potentially contradictory implications of his words and actions, he would then carry instead an awareness (a “residue,” so to speak) of imperialist guilt—the very phenomenon with which Chinese stereotypes of Americans engage.

Any gesture of stepping outside the frame (resisting the process) of Occidental construction wherein one is constituted as the American Other necessarily risks an imperialist co-optation of the narrative—in other words, participation all too easily becomes appropriation. Though Trusch understandably wishes to ameliorate stereotypes of American men through the shaping of his character in *Swing*, text cannot be divorced from context: the narrative of racial, ethnic, national, and gender roles presented in the play cannot be regarded in isolation from the negotiation—and material effects—of those same identities as manifested in Trusch’s statements and actions. In short, the Occidentalized Other’s effort to subvert its own appropriation becomes an act of appropriation itself—and its net result is self-Occidentalism.

So, what’s a foreigner to do? Is Trusch, like the imprisoned sleepers in Lu Xun’s “iron house,” better off not being awakened?<sup>49</sup> Already, awareness of the ways in which his framing by the Chinese gaze and consumption by the hungry Occidentalist mouths of local audiences satiate their nationalist desires has resulted in consistent frustration with roles he is asked to play and doubt as to whether he can ever succeed as a movie star in China on his own terms. When Trusch begins to recognize that his strenuous, well-intentioned efforts to improve the image of the foreigner on the Chinese stage and screen inevitably lead to reinscriptions of parallel and equally negative stereotypes—that whether he gets the girl or loses the girl, he is still the “Imperialist Guy”—what then? How can he develop his career and further his anti-Occidental agenda within an apparently closed system? Does consideration of the pervasiveness and complexity of Occidentalism in Chinese

representations of the American Other necessarily lead to resignation to such images and recognition of the futility of ever trying to change them?

I do not believe the situation is so hopeless. Each of the plays investigated in this book—including *Swing*—presented opportunities for Chinese artists to explore diverse images of the American while simultaneously experimenting with innovative spoken-drama techniques. The degree to which such innovations and Occidental representations actually varied and the relationship of these strategies to political and cultural discourses that prevailed during the moments of their creation, development, and public performances have been the topics of my study. In the case of *Swing*, all involved in its creation and realization were passionately devoted to the project and wished for its success: Trusch saw it both as an important event in his acting career and as a genuine opportunity to improve negative images of foreigners; playwrights Sun and Fei nurtured the script—based on personal experiences of themselves and of close friends—for a decade; producer Huang Angang invested tremendous personal resources in the production out of philanthropic devotion to the theatre (and according to director Lei Guohua, he was so personally connected to the play that he wept whenever he came to the theatre for rehearsals); freelance writer Xue Lei was brought on board by her friend Lei to improve the script when Huang was prepared to give up on it. Lei herself likens the long, laborious process of bringing the play to fruition to “having a baby” and is proud of her offspring; as the literal intersection of the multiple agendas and constituencies among the various participants, she bore the brunt of all conflicts that resulted and deserves credit for their resolution and for the ultimately successful staging of the production.<sup>50</sup>

Along with their rigorous discussions of the script, had the many collaborators who collectively created *Swing*—including original playwrights Sun Huizhu and Fei Chunfang, producer Huang, director Lei, freelance writer Xue, American actor Trusch, and the remainder of the cast—further recognized and discussed the social, cultural, artistic, and ethical issues emanating from both their unconventional collaboration and the stage depictions it effected, the resulting deployment of Occidentalism (and self-Occidentalism) may have indeed been very different. Recognition and interrogation of Occidentalism itself as an artistic and discursive practice is necessary in order to recognize the insufficiency of an essentialist discourse of “stereotype” as well as to construct more complex articulations of the American Other vis-à-vis the Chinese Self in an increasingly multifaceted global context. Occidentalism is not necessarily the dragon that needs to be slayed; it is, rather, the proverbial elephant-in-the-room that needs to be acknowledged.







## Epilogue

. . . making the difference between the real and the fake in dangerous times.

—Frank Chin, “Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake”

In pulling together this investigation of Occidental representations of the American in Chinese plays of the past fifteen years, the endurance and ambivalence of the stereotype and the complex substance of processes of identification once again emerge as prominent and problematic. This study ends as it began, with considering the subjectivity of the spectator (or actor) who is “othered,” although, as clearly evidenced, articulations of Occidentalism in the plays included here involve parallel processes as well. The range of interpolations of the American Other that occur in these plays, for diverse and sometimes even cross-purposes, reflects the variety of manifestations of such images in Chinese society in general, and their synthesis of both positive and negative essentializations of the foreigner emanating from China’s long history and contemporary proliferation of cross-cultural contact.

In terms of audience reception and identification, the most appropriate model for comparison may be discussions of stereotype and spectatorship in Asian American drama. Contemporary scholarship in this area remains centrally concerned with images of Asian Americans onstage and their effects on spectators of both Asian and non-Asian descent. James Moy’s influential study of displays of Chinese in the United States, *Marginal Sights*, employs the idea of panopticism and the “anthropological gaze” to describe the visual “othering” practices of Americans during various phases of Chinese immigration and assimilation. He bemoans the trend of contemporary Asian American playwrights to create “laughable and grossly disfigured” stereotypes that are complicit with such outmoded viewing strategies, concluding, “between the cinematic stereotype and this disfigured Chinese actor, little space exists for a new ‘real’ Asian American.”<sup>1</sup>

This idea of a “real” Asian American is of course, highly illusory (as is the idea of a “real” American that can somehow be represented in China);

equally problematic is the suggestion of a role-model approach to representation in a postmodern age that calls into question such clear-cut Self/Other paradigms of subjectivity. Una Chaudhuri raises this question in her discussion of Asian American plays, critiquing both the plays themselves and critics like Moy for subscribing to “the narrative of individualism” that proceeds from the “master narrative” of “traditional Western representation.”<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, since she equates this paradigm with association of identity with culture and culture with place, and since this is the basis on which her theory of geopathology is built, she ultimately offers us no exit from this role-model-identification trap of “realistic representation (see me as I really am).”<sup>3</sup>

In plays like *Bird Men*, *Student Wife*, *Dignity*, and *Swing*, which present representations of Americans within a theatrically realist aesthetic, the role-model-identification tendency for foreign audience members is virtually inevitable, for, as Chaudhuri suggests, the structure and style of realist plays themselves actively promote such a viewing practice. It is in plays like *China Dream*, *Going Abroad*, and *Che Guevara*, which continually subvert attempts by the spectator to see things—including characters—as they “really are,” that a postmodern spectatorial subjectivity and exposure of the constructedness of stereotypes can emerge.

The closest thing to a solution to this dilemma in Chaudhuri’s study is her command to “acknowledge and accept the pluralism of identity [in] multicultural representation.”<sup>4</sup> Clearly, this is easier to do when there are multiple representations to choose from, when there are competing images of the cultural or racial Other within a single play, among plays in a season, or among theatres in a geographical area. It is the lack of such an abundance of representations generated onstage that make the “role-model argument”<sup>5</sup> a persistently viable polemic for scholars of Asian American theatre and representation—or its emerging counterpart (foreign representation) in China.

Josephine Lee is one Asian American scholar who upholds ideas of “ethnic identification”<sup>6</sup> similar to Moy’s. Though she sets out to deconstruct the acceptance of a white-male gaze as assumed subject position of the spectator of realist drama, her attempt to create a space for subjectivity of an Asian American (male?) spectator serves to reinforce the necessity for identification with an authentic reality:

I suggest that the desire for the authentic might be satisfied with a lesser degree of mastery, and spectators might identify with the reality in even grossly insufficient characterizations of Asian Americans.<sup>7</sup>

She is thus not in disagreement with Moy regarding Asian American representations on stage being distortions of the “real” Asian American but rather suggests that Asian American spectators can salvage a healthy or useful identification with such characters.

A central question emerges here regarding whether this kind of individual identification process highlighted by Chaudhuri, Moy, and Lee is in fact a “natural” or “initial” impulse in the spectator that can be subverted or manipulated, but not entirely eradicated. This in turn points to the larger question of whether such processes of identification are therefore as compulsory for communities as they are for individuals. In other words, is it premature to dispose of the role-model paradigm altogether in terms of the relatively young development of Asian American theatre—and even younger development of foreign self-representation in Chinese theatre?

Lee compares the contemporary efforts of Asian American professional theatres to the early Abbey theatre and the Harlem Renaissance, indicating that Asian American theatre is at an equally formative stage in which attempts to represent the diverse “realities” of Asian Americans (which contest earlier representations by the white mainstream) are crucial to an Asian American cultural and political voice. Implied here is a gradual process that all minority artists must undergo in order to escape domination by a white-majority culture that denies agency to minority subjects as both characters and spectators in the theatre. This paradigm can be transferred to the very recent emergence of American subjectivity in Chinese theatre, both in audiences and on-stage, and would help to explain the passionate intervention of foreigners like actors Robert Daly and Matt Trusch and critic Lily Tung (as well as the minority spectator) in their desire for something more “real,” “true,” or “authentic” to represent them in Chinese spoken-drama performance.

This is the very impulse that prompted David Henry Hwang to write his play *M. Butterfly*:

I am interested in cutting through . . . all the crap about the way people write about characters from the East. I mean, when these people are written about, it's always in this inscrutable poetic fashion. It's so untrue, and kind of irritating. So my tendency is to go to the other extreme and make it so slangy and contemporary that it is jarring.<sup>8</sup>

As James Moy reflects, “Hwang’s hope, then, is to offer a truer view of Asian-ness within the space created by the tension between the audience’s stereotypical knowledge and his ‘slangy and jarring’ contemporary reality.”<sup>9</sup>

How can this drive for authenticity be reconciled with the postmodern assertion—and the claim of this book—that identity and its manifestations

(including strategies of “othering” like Occidentalism) are complex, fluid, often paradoxical constructs that both invoke and resist binaristic expression and interpretation? Karen Shimakawa, in her recent study of Asian American stage performances, runs head-on into this dilemma, attempting to address it through close examination of “abjection” (a term adopted from Julia Kristeva), which she identifies as the process through which the Asian American is determined not as a subject or even object, but as “occupying the seemingly contradictory, yet functionally essential, position of constituent element *and* radical other.”<sup>10</sup> This idea is not neatly applicable to Occidentalism as manifested on the contemporary Chinese spoken-drama stage because the American is clearly never considered a constituent element of Chinese society but rather a consistently radical Other, whatever the specificities of its role and interaction with the Chinese Self. Still, Shimakawa confronts the same conundrum of the “real” versus “fake” image of the Other that faces us here. Responding to the contradictions emanating from “‘fake’/‘real’” approaches (similar to those of Moy and Lee described above, and Frank Chin before them), Shimakawa warns, “in concretizing and endorsing a ‘real’ Asian Americanness in opposition to orientalist stereotypes, a new, perhaps equally fake stereotype of Asian Americanness is erected.”<sup>11</sup> This identifies precisely the paradox that marked the failure of Matt Trusch’s goals of presenting a “real” foreigner in portraying Bob in *Swing*.

And yet, Shimakawa and Chaudhuri are at least responding to a practice in Asian American theatre that has existed for three decades, producing dozens of alternative stereotypes, while in China, even an attempt at contesting Occidental images is embryonic. Is it premature to join Una Chaudhuri in calling for alternatives to the “see me as I really am” model when there is still a lack of quantity of plural, multiple representations available for spectator engagement, and when so many embodiments of the Other are created from imagined (rather than actual) experience? How can we find another model that can encompass both this important first step of greater quantity, complexity, and variety of images together with more sophisticated modes of analysis that can transcend the role-model paradigm?

Furthermore, the various repercussions of stage representations of Americans in China clearly go far beyond reception by foreigners, though the latter plays of this study, *Student Wife*, *Dignity*, *Che Guevara*, and *Swing*, bring this important development into focus. Attempts to articulate new models for reception and new paradigms for consideration of the persistently ambivalent stereotypes that characterize the presence of the American in contemporary Chinese spoken dramas must likewise wrestle with the confining structures of traditional conventions in spectator relationships with Western theatre,

particularly in terms of realism. Stepping outside these habitual practices is not as easy as proliferation of postmodern theatre experiments in the West would have us believe: our brief investigation of discussions concerning recent Asian American work is evidence of this challenge.

Such efforts are at least as difficult in China, where mainstream audiences associate the imported Western form of spoken drama with its most recognizable manifestation—realism—and take their seats in today's theatres with a taste for the melodramatic and decades of "socialist realism" in the arts as their internal ideological guide. Asking audiences in China to discover complexity and multiplicity in the limited range of images of the American they see onstage is inviting them to engage in an intellectual activity that is destabilizing and unconventional, but such new strategies are crucial to ensure Chinese spoken drama's continued growth in a global artistic arena. The intercultural experimentation and binary-blurring of *China Dream*, the playful absurdism and profound articulations of disorientation in *Going Abroad*, the intracultural performance juxtaposition and multiple embodiments of Otherness in *Bird Men*, the retro-Maoist communal creative and performative approach of *Che Guevara*, and the transnational casting and rehearsal collaboration in *Student Wife*, *Dignity*, and *Swing* all signify participation in this kind of development.

Finally, how can articulation and application of the discursive practice identified here as Occidentalism contribute to this effort? Hopefully, the discussions of plays chosen for analysis have helped to illuminate Zhang Longxi's vision of Self and Other:

We may finally realize that self and Other are all psychological and social constructs, albeit useful and perhaps necessary constructs, and that the voice of the Other is not a single, unitary voice, but a multiplicity of voices, a diversity of actual utterances . . . The conceptualization of the Other as one unified entity speaking in one voice—for example, the claim that all Chinese think and speak in a certain way—often serves as a prelude to the construction of an East-West dichotomy. But it is a false dichotomy, based on a false conceptualization, because there is no such thing as *the* Other.<sup>12</sup>

I have endeavored to show in this study that the construction and dissemination of images of the foreign Other in China—particularly of the American Other in contemporary theatre practice—is a varied and complex process utilized for multiple purposes. It is a process that opens up questions of identity and representation rather than advocating a single model or formula.

Occidentalism, as both a performative and discursive process, must be

recognized as containing this variety and fluidity, which marks one of its distinct differences from its adjacent practice Orientalism. Stuart Hall describes the necessary open-endedness of discourse that I see as central to the discursive process I have identified here as Occidentalism:

Potentially, discourse is endless: the infinite semiosis of meaning. But to say anything at all in particular, you do have to stop talking. Of course, every full stop is provisional. The next sentence will take it all back. So what is this “ending”? It’s a kind of stake, a kind of wager. It says, “I need to say something, something . . . just now.” It is not forever, not totally universally true. It is not underpinned by any definite guarantees. But just now, this is what I mean; this is who I am. At a certain point, in a certain discourse, we call these unfinished closures.<sup>13</sup>

Likewise, the persistent and shifting discursive practice of Occidentalism in China “ends” and begins again each time a spoken drama containing an image of the American (be it a character, location, or other representation) closes or opens on the Chinese stage. With each such production, the invitation to reassess China’s complex political and cultural relationship with the United States is reextended, and the resulting unfinished closure forms yet another phase in the newly emergent articulation and analysis of Occidentalism by scholars both Chinese and foreign. This book, then, is one “stop”—one pause for reflection—in an ongoing and infinitely changing discourse, a discourse that has been so long neglected that this pause for reflection necessitated a gathering of previous “stops” from the past fifteen years.

Though rooted in xenophobic impulses originating in China’s imperial history, reacting to oppressions of colonialism and neo-imperialism throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and early-twenty-first centuries, and concurrent with Sino-American political and social relations both prescribed by the CCP establishment and circulating in popular culture, Occidentalism in the form of representing the American onstage in China is also employed as a means of contesting state ideology, suggesting alternative versions of official policy and popular sentiment toward the United States, contributing to construction of national identity, articulating the complex subjectivity and experience of the overseas Chinese immigrant or exile, and fostering artistic innovation and experimentation in the development of Chinese spoken drama.

Acknowledging that representation is inherently an illusory practice, this study maintains that its discursive and performative strategies, as well as the active and shifting contexts of circumstances and participants in those strate-

gies, demand our attention and analysis. The emergence of Occidentalism as a representational strategy is both linked to and distinct from its more familiar cousin Orientalism and thus should be considered a parallel, yet not identical, practice. In my discussion of Occidentalism and of its application onstage by contemporary theatre artists in China, I have illustrated both its relatively consistent qualities (reflection of embedded cultural attitudes about foreigners, articulation of prevailing social and political discourses) and its more variable elements (the range of experiences and subjectivities of its simultaneous users, the spectrum of artistic innovations for which it is employed, the diverse receptions to which it is subject), emphasizing that all of these factors are fluid and dynamic, changing over time and in relation not only to shifting circumstances but also to past performances.

I urge readers to thus consider Occidentalism as a self-defining oppositional strategy that is as global as it is domestic and as hegemonic as it is retaliatory. Granted, as explained in the prologue, the experience of being “othered” as a foreigner in China differs tremendously from the denigration of colonized Third World populations by Western colonizers or from the discrimination experienced by Asian Americans and other people of color in the United States. Foreigners in China are most often voluntary sojourners or privileged tourists. Nevertheless, as evidenced in this study, the foreigner—particularly the Westerner, and specifically the American—has long been an object of representation in Chinese elite and popular culture that defines both this Occidental Other and the Chinese Self in relation to it. As such, the foreigner dwelling in China is determined (and overdetermined) by these representations, and in the realm of spoken drama, this practice, though not nearly as prevalent as in film and television, has become increasingly common in recent years. Occidentalism is manifested onstage in representations by playwrights, actors, designers, directors, and producers that change according to prevailing cultural notions and both real and imagined experiences, and is also influenced by casting choices of directors, interventions of foreign actors, and reactions of both Chinese and expatriate audiences. Engagement with Occidentalism as a discursive practice and representational strategy in the theatre is therefore extremely complex and requires examination not only of dramatic texts but also of collaborative processes such as artistic preparations, rehearsal procedures, publicity efforts, and production contexts. My inclusion of all these elements throughout this study is intended to provide a richer, fuller, more complex exploration of Occidentalism, particularly as it applies to the representation of the American in contemporary Chinese spoken drama.



The closing of a discussion such as this one is necessarily unfinished but finally necessary. I leave it to readers and to observers of future Chinese theatre practice to lead this discussion of American representation and Occidentalism to its next level—the next in an endless series of unfinished closures.



## Notes

### Prologue

The epigraph to the prologue is drawn from Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, trans. Anita Barrows (New York: Marion Boyars, 1977), 12. Cited in Rey Chow, “Where Have All the Natives Gone?” in *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question*, ed. Angelika Bammer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1994. (Chow’s essay also appears in her *Writing Diaspora*.)

1. One of the most common comments I hear in China is that I am “*pang*,” which is translated directly as “fat,” although in Chinese it carries connotations of health and well-being.

2. In her intricate discussion of *waishi* and the management of foreigners in China, Anne-Marie Brady notes that the *China Daily* reported approximately 180,000 foreigners residing in China for employment purposes in 1996 and that in 1997 there were 40,000 foreign students at 332 Chinese universities and 7,248 million foreign tourists. She confirms that some changes since the mid-1990s improved convenience for foreigners, including disposing of the dual currency system in 1994 and ceasing to charge foreigners higher prices for long-distance travel in 1996 (which led to the disappearance of special service-counters for foreign travelers in 2001). Brady also details several restrictions and surveillance methods for managing foreigners that endured during the 1990s and persist in the early twenty-first century. These include banning of all foreign-funded theatrical troupes and other foreign elements of the entertainment industry in 1997 (and shows whose content could threaten social stability, political security, or were excessively violent, pornographic, or ethnically divisive); requiring foreigners to live in designated “foreigners quarters” throughout the 1990s until ten key cities lifted the restriction in 2001 (a policy change Brady asserts was “cosmetic compared to the number of areas that continued to be closed or restricted”); monitoring of foreigners’ travel and expulsion of those who enter restricted areas; frequent opening and delayed delivery of foreigners’ mail; and continued efforts throughout the 1990s to control personal associations between foreigners and Chinese citizens, including visits of foreigners to homes of Chinese friends and the requirement to register any overnight stays with the local Public Security Bureau. See Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China; Managing Foreigners in the People’s Republic* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 228–237.

3. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove, 1967), 112. (Also quoted by Fuss in "Interior Colonies," 21; and by Bhabha in *Location of Culture*, 76.)

4. Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 75–76.

5. *Ibid.*, 76.

6. *Ibid.*, 76.

7. See Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 112; for further discussion of this chain reaction, see Diana Fuss, "Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification" in *Diacritics* 24, nos. 2–3:21–23.

8. For an insightful analysis of the April 1, 2001, incident involving an American E-P3 surveillance plane and a Chinese F-8 jet fighter over the South China Sea near Hainan Island, as well as a discussion of the role of cultural difference in the ensuing "apology diplomacy," see Peter Gries and Kaiping Peng, "Culture Clash? Apologies East and West," *Journal of Contemporary China* 11, no. 30 (2002): 173–178.

9. In his unpublished essay "Dangerous Epistemologies: Orientalism, Occidentalism and the Essentialization of 'China/U.S.' Difference," Peter Gries discusses the contrast between the Goddess of Democracy constructed in Tiananmen Square by students from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1989 and the image they created for the demonstrations at the American embassy in 1999 (which Gries calls the Demon of Liberty). He also provides further details on the demonstrations, their high level of hostility, and the contrasting readings by Chinese and American media of the protests. In a published article, Gries provides a summary of the shift in Chinese popular sentiment from pro- to anti-American during the 1990s and further maintains that "tales of the 'Century of Humiliation,' which began with the First Opium War and the ceding of Hong Kong to the British in 1842, powerfully shaped the way that Chinese both interpreted and reacted to the Belgrade bombing"; see "Tears of Rage: Chinese Nationalist Reactions to the Belgrade Embassy Bombing," *China Journal*, no. 46 (July 2001): 26. See also Tong Lam, "Identity and Diversity: The Complexities and Contradictions of Chinese Nationalism," in *China Beyond the Headlines*, ed. Timothy B. Weston and Lionel M. Jensen (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 147–148.

10. The London *Observer*, along with the Danish newspaper *Politiken*, broke the story in October 1999. According to their sources, Yugoslav Army signals were sent from the Chinese embassy to Milosevic's forces, after his own transmitters were destroyed. As the article evidences, the U.S. government's questionable explanation that the bombing was a "tragic mistake" due to "old maps" is widely considered a lie, as it has been consistently regarded by both China's officials and general populace since its occurrence on May 7, 1999. For more on the embassy bombing, see Steven Lee Myers, "Crisis in the Balkans: The Overview; NATO

Raid Hits China Embassy; Beijing Cites 'Barbarian Act'; Allies Admit Striking Hospital," *New York Times*, May 8, 1999, late edition, 1.

11. For evidence of the Chinese government's orchestration of anti-American demonstrations, see Erik Eckholm, "Crisis in the Balkans," *New York Times*, May 11, 1999, 1. For a more complex discussion of the Chinese official and popular response to the Belgrade embassy bombing, taking into account vast Western media coverage in addition to 281 items submitted by Chinese citizens posted on the *Guangming Daily* Web site, see Gries, "Tears of Rage."

12. Peter Hays Gries offers extensive discussion of this progression and both its official and popular aspects in several of his articles: see, for instance, "A 'China Threat'? Power and Passion in Chinese 'Face Nationalism,'" *World Affairs* 162, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 63–75; also "Tears of Rage" and "Culture Clash?" cited in notes 9 and 8 respectively. Just as China's view of the United States, as reflected in its official propaganda, news organs, and popular culture, has shifted from positive to negative according to political and economic developments (most recently resulting in the demonizing of the United States amid a resurgence of Chinese nationalism), America's view of China, as exhibited in Washington and in the U.S. press, has likewise undergone enormous shifts, displaying a bipolar vacillation between demonizing (a perceived China threat) and romanticizing (a fantasy of China becoming Americanized and thus tamed) to the exclusion of a more complex view that considers the actual circumstances and inherent contradictions in China's contemporary transformation. For more on this dichotomy of American attitudes toward China characterized by oversimplified binary oppositions, China-bashing, and fantasies of "Americanization" (attitudes that are reacted against in plays such as *Dignity* and *Che Guevara*) see Jeffrey Wasserstrom, "Big Bad China and the Good Chinese: An American Fairy Tale," in *China Beyond the Headlines*, ed. Timothy B. Weston and Lionel M. Jensen (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 13–35. Tong Lam, in his essay "Identity and Diversity: The Complexities and Contradictions of Chinese Nationalism" in the same volume, points out the paradox that "the very notion of human rights that has often been used to reproach the Chinese authoritarian regime by the West is now being deployed by educated Chinese to criticize the United States. Likewise, expressions like 'parochial' and 'xenophobic,' which are usually used to characterize China's new ultra-nationalism, are being used to portray the anti-China ideological bias of the U.S. media," (153).

13. From Su Xiaokang's response to my question during a question-and-answer period following the screening of a segment of *Heshang* at Wellesley College in 1992. Su was a visiting scholar at Princeton University at the time.

14. For my critique of Chen's concept of Occidentalism, see chapter 2. For Chen's analysis of *Heshang*, see chapter 1 of her *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 27–48. For more on *Heshang*, see the sources indicated in Chen, *Occidentalism*, 176n. 4; also see Zhang Longxi's excellent summary and analysis in *Mighty Oppo-*

sites: *From Dichotomies to Differences in the Comparative Study of China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 196–201; and Richard Madsen, *China and the American Dream: A Moral Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 192–208, and sources cited by Madsen 250n. 1.

15. Chen, *Occidentalism*, 30–31.

16. Zhang Longxi, *Mighty Opposites*, 197–198.

17. For more on Daly, particularly his role in the 1995 stage production of *Peidu furen* (Student wife), which followed his success in *Beijingren zai Niuyue*, see chapter 6. For more on DeWoskin, see chapter 5.

18. For a discussion of *Beijingren zai Niuyue* in the context of postsocialism and transnationalism, see Lydia H. Liu, “Beijing Sojourners in New York: Post-socialism and the Question of Ideology in Global Media Culture,” *Positions: east asia cultures critique* 7, no. 3 (Winter 1999): 763–798.

19. David Prochaska, “At Home in Illinois: Presence of Chief Illiniwek, Absence of Native Americans,” in *Team Spirits: The Native American Mascots Controversy*, ed. C. Richard King and Charles Fruehling Springwood, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 166.

20. Rey Chow uses the term “preferred Other” to describe the focus on the United States in China’s resistant aggression toward the West in “contemporary Chinese centrism [that] relies for its own anchoring precisely on a perpetuated active relation to the West.” Chow points out that this “preoccupation with responding to the West . . . has also served as a convenient means of postponing the much needed examination of China’s own hegemony—its cultural centrism,” particularly in terms of its relation to Tibet, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. My project is aligned with Chow’s concerns in that I identify the United States as China’s significant Other and attempt to reposition China as a subject with active agency, and with goals and strategies far more complex than the prevailing model of reactive nationalism in the face of Western imperialism purports (though this is certainly a significant element). I agree wholeheartedly with Chow that in scholarship about China and the West there is “a tendency to attribute to the West the a priori status of Subject-supposed-to-know, who, behind the stage of global affairs, is pulling all the strings”; my text calls into question this paradigm that has “placed China and Chinese intellectuals in a position not of action but of *reaction*—with the understanding that what they must react to is an Other whose power is nonnegotiable.” See Rey Chow, “Can One Say No to China?” *New Literary History* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 147–151.

## Chapter 1: Setting the Sino-American Stage

The epigraph to this chapter is drawn from John King Fairbank, *The United States and China*, 4th ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 99.

1. Zhang Xudong, “On Some Motifs in the Chinese ‘Cultural Fever’ of the Late 1980’s,” *Social Text*, no. 39 (Summer 1994): 145.

2. Zhang, "On Some Motifs," 146–147.
3. Edward Said, "Politics of Knowledge," in *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer (New York: Longman, 1998), 309.
4. Maria Hsia Chang, *Return of the Dragon: China's Wounded Nationalism* (Boulder, CO: 2001), 206–208.
5. For more on uses of spoken drama during these periods, see Colin Mackerras, *Chinese Drama: A Historical Survey* (Beijing: New World Press, 1990). It is important to note here that Chinese intellectuals *chose* to import *huaju* (spoken drama) and did so via Japan. This marks a crucial difference between the dissemination of Western theatre in China vis-à-vis nations in which Western theatre forms are customarily forced by European colonizers upon colonized populations, often leading to the obliteration of indigenous performance traditions; see Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996), 7–8. In China, by contrast, Western theatre *was* performed by Europeans in the foreign concessions of Shanghai but did not exclude particularly strong influence beyond those borders into the Chinese community; rather, it was young Chinese intellectuals studying overseas in the early 1900s who first witnessed the spoken form of drama in Tokyo and formed troupes to perform in Chinese their own spoken plays. When the form was brought back to native soil by these artist-scholars, it did not supersede indigenous *xiqu* (more commonly known as classical opera, of which there are hundreds of local forms) but, rather, coexisted as a new and separate tradition; the two forms also began to affect each other in terms of artistic innovation, and they continue to cross-pollinate today.
6. For an overview of plays that reflect Sino-American relations from 1949 to 1976, see Faye C. Fei, "Dramatizing the West in Chinese Spoken Drama," *Asian Theatre Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 102–116. As Fei points out regarding the years from Liberation (establishment of the Chinese Communist Party as the ruling government in 1949) to the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), "During that period the entire outside world . . . was China's perceived enemy," 103.
7. Even a recovery of China's own imperialism might be implied; Xiao-mei Chen reminds us that "China has a history of imperialist longings and practices far older than its counterparts in the West . . . [I]t would be mistaken to assume that 'Oriental' cultures have never been imperialistic, or that they have only learned their 'imperialism' from the West," in *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 7, 12.
8. Ta Jen Liu, *U.S.-China Relations, 1784–1992* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997), 1. Liu's description is substantiated by many other historians, anthropologists, and cultural theorists, including Fairbank, Louisa Schein ("Chinese history was characterized by a sense of central Chineseness

surrounded in all directions by the barbarism of the periphery”), and Zhang Longxi (“In the minds of Chinese rulers and officials, China was the sole center of civilization whereas all foreigners were barbarians”). See Schein, “The Other Goes to Market: The State, the Nation and Unruliness in Contemporary China,” *Identities* 2, no. 3 (January 1996): 207; Zhang Longxi, *Mighty Opposites: From Dichotomies to Differences in the Comparative Study of China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 40–41.

9. Fairbank, *United States and China*, 100.

10. Louisa Schein, “Gender and Internal Orientalism in China,” *Modern China* 23, no. 1 (January 1997): 69–98.

11. Fairbank, *United States and China*, 169–170.

12. Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, exp. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 131.

13. Examples include British envoy George Macartney in the late eighteenth century (see Zhang, *Mighty Opposites*, 41–42) and American envoy John F. Ward in the mid-nineteenth century (see Liu, *U.S.-China Relations*, 9).

14. Liu, *U.S.-China Relations*, 2.

15. Fairbank, *United States and China*, 158.

16. James Hevia, *Cherishing Men From Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 20.

17. *Ibid.*, 21. Here he is drawing on the scholarship of Catherine Bell; see Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

18. Hevia, *Cherishing Men From Afar*, 116–117.

19. The Han dynasty takes its name from the racial classification to which today the majority of Chinese still belong. Louisa Schein’s pithy summary of China’s contemporary ethnic composition bears quotation here:

The vast majority of the mainland Chinese population (approximately 92 percent) is reckoned in government statistics in terms of the purportedly unitary ethnic category “Han.” The remaining population (8 percent) comprise fifty-five officially recognized “minority nationalities” (*shaoshu minzu*). Totaling over 91 million people, these groups include Tibetans; Mongolians; Manchu; Islamic groups such as Uighurs; highland and lowland groups across the south and southwest (including the Miao) . . . and smaller groups with transnational identifications, such as Russians and the “Jing,” cousins of the Vietnamese.

See Schein, “The Consumption of Color and the Politics of White Skin in Post-Mao China,” *Social Text*, no. 41 (Winter 1994): 159.

20. Zhu Weiju, “Derogatory Epithets for Foreigners in Chinese,” *Verbatim: The Language Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (Summer 1993): 12. Zhu compares this latter construction to the etymology of the English word “barbarian,” derived from the Greeks referring to the speech of all non-Greeks as “baa-baa,” or nonhuman bleating. For a more elaborate discussion of “*yi*/barbarian” as a “supersign,” see Lydia H. Liu’s *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World*

*Making* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) in which she argues that the shift in (mis)-interpretation of the ideograph for “*yi*” triggered armed conflict between Britain and China in September 1834, and that the subsequent ban of the term “*yi*” in article 51 of the 1858 Anglo-Chinese Treaty of Tianjin cemented the corollary of *yi* to “barbarian” which has been invoked by historians ever since as evidence of Sinocentrism. Her discussion of the circulation and consequences of the *yi*/barbarian supersign is compelling but seems to privilege *intent* of linguistic representation of the Other over *interpretation* of such recurring images by that Other, rather than lending equal legitimacy to both (which I argue for in this project). A contemporary corollary to Liu’s *yi* might be today’s “*laowai*,” the term used most frequently to refer to foreigners in both official and popular discourse: it is increasingly perceived as offensive by foreigners, but consistently defended as “friendly” by Chinese users of the term.

21. “Foreign Devils,” *Beijing Scene*, April 6–19, 1995, 3.

22. Fairbank, *United States and China*, 163. The Ming dynasty, 1368–1644, was a Han-ruled dynasty that both followed and preceded the foreign-ruled dynasties of the Mongols (Yuan dynasty, 1271–1368) and the Manchus (Qing dynasty, 1644–1911). I have adapted romanization of epithets to the pinyin system (from the Wade-Giles used in Fairbank’s original) in order to maintain consistency within this text as a whole.

23. For further detailed accounts of Chinese descriptions of foreigners from antiquity until 1949, see Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

24. The term was also used in the body of the article. See Qiao Qiao, “Hospital Locale Draws ‘Big Nose,’” *Beijing Weekend*, no. 210, December 8–10, 1995.

25. From *Beijing Qingnianbao* (Beijing Youth News), July 19, 1995; reprinted in *Beijing Times* (Beijing: American Chamber of Commerce), August 1995, 5.

26. From *Youth Daily*, October 26, 1996; reprinted in *Beijing Times* (Beijing: American Chamber of Commerce), November 1996, 5.

27. From *Shandong Post & Telecom News*, January 30, 1996; reprinted in *Beijing Times* (Beijing: American Chamber of Commerce), March 1996, 5.

28. Hongshan Li and Zhaohui Hong, eds., *Image, Perception, and the Making of U.S.-China Relations* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998), 241; Kam Louie and Chiu-ye Cheung, “Three Kingdoms: The Chinese Cultural Scene Today,” in *China Review 1998*, ed. Joseph Y. S. Cheng, 545 (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1998).

29. Significant to our study, the effect of American neo-imperialism on post-colonial dramaturgy is so pervasive, traumatic, and global that Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins devote an entire chapter to it, asserting: “American neo-imperialism has been so widespread that it has spawned a body of post-colonial drama which itself could be the focus of an independent study,” in *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 277.

30. Louie and Cheung, “Three Kingdoms,” 544.



31. Li and Hong, *Image, Perception, and U.S.-China Relations*, 234.

32. *Ibid.*, 244–245.

33. The production, created by a team of writers, was directed by a young, idealistic Huang Zuolin and featured a cast of 180, including (briefly) a live cow onstage (Huang, personal interview, Shanghai, 1991). Huang is one of the five directors whose work is a major focus of this project (specifically his staging of *China Dream*; see chap. 3). For more on his “great living newspaper play,” *KangMei yuanChao da huobao* (Resist the U.S. and Assist Korea: A Great Living Newspaper), see Fei, “Dramatizing the West,” 103–104 (see n. 6). A “living newspaper” (*huobao*) or “living newspaper play” (*huobao ju*) is a style of play that was imported to China for political purposes; it originated overseas, popular in the USSR, Germany, and USA during the early twentieth century. In China these plays were hastily written by small teams of writers to instantly promote the latest political directives among the peasants and workers. The theatrical aesthetic was street theatre, often parading pageantlike through the streets; for plays that featured “American devils” (*meiguo guizi*) such as priests or politicians, children were given sticks and encouraged to “beat the devil” and would follow the actor, striking him repeatedly. Living newspapers were heavily used as propaganda tools during the War of Resistance with Japan. None of the scripts are extant, as they were disposed of after production. Huang’s production, although called a living newspaper and containing the usual propagandistic political content, does *not* belong to the category in terms of structure and production process and aesthetic (though it certainly did serve an educational purpose): it was produced on a proscenium stage for a ticket-buying audience, and the script was published.

34. Statistics come from “Educational Exchange and the Open Door,” special issue, *Chinese Education and Society* 21, no. 1 (Spring 1988); “Overseas Studies,” special issue, *Chinese Education and Society* 31, no. 2 (March/April 1998); “Political Education II,” special issue, *Chinese Education and Society* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1990).

35. Lilly quoted from the June 23, 1995 *Wall Street Journal* in Li and Hong, *Image, Perception, and U.S.-China Relations*, 234 (see no. 28). On current anti-Americanism and its role in Chinese nationalism and Sino-American foreign policy, see various articles by Peter Gries, and books such as Yong Deng and Feiling Wang, eds., *In the Eyes of the Dragon: China Views the World and Sino-American Relations* (Boulder, CO: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), and Chang, *Return of the Dragon* (see n. 4).

36. Tong Lam, “Identity and Diversity: The Complexities and Contradictions of Chinese Nationalism,” in *China Beyond the Headlines*, ed. Timothy B. Weston and Lionel M. Jensen (Boulder, CO: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 148.

37. Tong Lam, “Identity and Diversity,” 164.

38. Chang, *Return of the Dragon*, 182.

39. See Barmé “To Screw Foreigners is Patriotic,” *China Journal*, no. 34 (July 1995): 209–234, which also appears in his book *In the Red* (New York: Columbia

University Press, 1999); also Liu's "Beijing Sojourners in New York: Postsocialism and the Question of Ideology in Global Media Culture" *positions: east asia cultures critique* 7, no. 3 (Winter 1999): 763–798.

40. James Cox, "American 'Temptress' Finds Stardom," *USA Today*, June 12, 1996, international edition, 7A; Tara Suilen Duffy, "Touring Chinese Censorship with 'Foreign Gals in Beijing,'" *Los Angeles Times*, June 20, 1995, 6.

41. "Neo-Nationalist China, Suspect of Western Ways, Embraces 'Foreign Babes,'" *Washington Post*, July 21, 1996, A1, A27; Keith B. Richburg, "Not a Pretty Picture: 'Foreign Babes in Beijing,'" *International Herald Tribune*, June 25, 1996; R. S. Young, "Hottest TV Star in China Is an All-American Girl," *National Enquirer*, June 4, 1996, 35; "Beijing 90210," *Good Housekeeping*, June 1996, 30; Jianying Zha, "Cutthroat," *New York Times Magazine*, June 8, 1997, sec. 6, p. 78; Michael Sheridan, "Chinese feed their fear of foreigners," *Sunday Times* (London) August 11, 1996.

42. Duffy, "Touring Chinese Censorship," 6.

43. Young, "Hottest TV Star in China," 35.

44. Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 139 (see n. 12).

45. Li and Hong, *Image, Perception, and U.S.-China Relations*, 241.

46. Li Xiguang, Liu Kang, *Yaomohua Zhongguo de beihou* [Behind the demonization of China] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1996); Li and Hong, *Image, Perception, and U.S.-China Relations*, 245. Li and Hong summarize several of the anti-American works of literature and art produced by returned students, such as the novel *Manhadun de Zhongguo Nuren* (Chinese woman in Manhattan), by Zhou Li, the TV serial *Beijingren zai Niuyue* (A Beijinger in New York), and the play *Peidu furen* (Student wife), subject of chapter 6. Xi-aomei Chen devotes the postscript of her *Occidentalism* to Zhou Li's novel. See chapter 7 for more specifics on the "Say No" series of books from 1996.

47. On neo-nationalism, see Li and Hong, *Image, Perception, and U.S.-China Relations*, chap. 10; on neo-authoritarianism, see Zhang Longxi, *Mighty Opposites*, chap. 6 (see n. 8); on neo-Confucianism and its influence on the debates about "the spirit of humanism," see Louie and Cheung, "Three Kingdoms," 559 (see n. 28).

48. Zhang Xudong's article "On Some Motifs in the Chinese 'Cultural Fever' of the Late 1980s" (see n. 1) is a fascinating critique of the overwhelming influx of Western discourses to China in the 1980s; Zhang's own saturation with and deployment of Western theory in the essay lend an interesting irony to his discussion. The subsequent backlash—the "return to classical studies" of the 1990s—is included in Louie and Cheung's description of China's current cultural scene.

49. Fairbank, *United States and China*, 82.

50. Fei, "Dramatizing the West," 113–114.

51. James Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming; citation is

from pp. 5–6 of chap. 1 as presented in a circulating paper to the Center for Chinese Studies Research Seminar Series in November 2002 at University of Michigan); for a similar discussion, see Hevia's introduction, *Cherishing Men From Afar* (see n. 16).

52. Others who have written about Chinese “othering” of Occidentals (and other “Others”) have employed a similar methodology; both Xiaomei Chen and James Carrier's *Occidentalism* volumes (discussed in chapter 2) adopt a case-study approach, as does Louisa Schein in much of her writing on the topic. Schein considers her “ethnographic approach” to be a “modification of classical Saidian analysis” and explains its advantages (which I feel are echoed in my present study of “othering” in theatre practice) as the following:

Rather than being limited to discourse and images, an anthropological method can also offer firsthand accounts of what happens at the actual site of othering encounters—sites where difference is actively manufactured through interpersonal engagement. These instances not only result in discursive products that achieve wide circulation but also have palpable effects for the persons involved.

Schein, “Gender and Internal Orientalism in China,” *Modern China* 23, no. 1 (January 1997).

53. Leigh Dale and Helen Gilbert, “Looking the Same: A Preliminary (Post-colonial) Discussion of Orientalism and Occidentalism in Australia and Japan,” *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature Studies* 41 (1993): 35–50.

54. One example is William Sun (Sun Huizhu), coauthor of plays *China Dream* and *Swing* (the subjects of chapters 3 and 8). Although he employed cross-ethnic (color-blind) casting and character approach in his own experimental plays, he bemoans the use of it in Chinese productions of plays in the realist mode. His essay “Power and Problems of Mimesis Across Ethnic Lines: An Alternative Approach to Nontraditional Casting” (*The Drama Review*, Winter 2000) links practices of performance with race-specific (i.e., “realistic”) makeup to Victor Turner's concept of “performing ethnography” and divides the debate regarding acting across/within ethnic lines into three categories: educational/anthropological; aesthetic/professional; and political. One of his most striking assertions is that a 1996 production of *Fences* at the Beijing People's Art Theatre, directed by American Margaret Booker, failed precisely because blackface was not utilized: “*Fences*' recent failure in Beijing . . . was a failure of a universalist approach that is hypothetically based on a color-blind mind-set which does not yet exist either in the actors or in the audiences” (92). Sun concludes that if playwright August Wilson had directed the play himself, “I suppose he would have had his Chinese actors put on meticulously lifelike black makeup—a lot more authentic than the Chinese could have ever done without him, thus presenting a far more gripping picture of African American life” and that Wilson, as the playwright and an African American himself, “would have had far less political risk in making this decision” (94).

55. An interesting manifestation of this practice in the actual lives of Chinese citizens, rather than as theatrical verisimilitude, is reported by Orville Schell. According to Schell, in the decade (1980s) of fascination with the West during opening and reform, more than ten thousand people at just *one* Shanghai clinic underwent cosmetic surgery to look more Western (eyelid doubling, nose jobs, etc). Louisa Schein's reflection on this medical phenomenon—"the Westerner was resituated, with fleshly reality, within the Chinese body"—can be likened to the practice of actors becoming foreign through use of *xianshi huazhuang* (realistic makeup) in conventional Chinese theatre practice, though Schein's phrase "fleshly reality" would be more appropriately adjusted to "fleshly mimicry." (See Schell, *Discos and Democracy*, 84; Schein, "The Consumption of Color," 148.)

56. Technically, the first foreign actor to play a foreigner in a spoken drama was James Andreassi in the Shanghai People's Art Theatre's production of *The Joy Luck Club*. The production was a "collaboration" between the Chinese theatre and the Long Wharf Theatre of New Haven, CT. The official director was American Arvin Brown, but Yu Luosheng regarded himself as codirector. He is to be credited for facilitating the first appearance of an American actor playing an American role, and he also created the next two projects to apply this method, both *Student Wife* and *Dignity* (*Zunyan*, 1998). I do not categorize Andreassi's performance as having the significance of Yu's subsequent projects, based on two criteria: first, Andreassi does not speak Chinese but merely learned a few phrases for occasional use in his scenes, otherwise speaking English throughout his role as Lena's husband; second, *Joy Luck Club* is not a Chinese play with American characters but rather an American novel adapted for the stage for a Chinese production. Polish exchange student Basia Wajs performed publicly in several student productions at the Shanghai Theatre Academy while receiving training there, but none of these can be considered professional productions. It is for these reasons that I regard *Student Wife* as the first professional employment of Western actors playing Western roles using Chinese language in a native play. For a detailed narrative and analysis of the problematic collaboration of *The Joy Luck Club* project, see Conceison, "Translating Collaboration: *The Joy Luck Club* and Intercultural Theatre," *The Drama Review* 39, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 151–166.

57. Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), xii, 81.

58. The use of these techniques and the aesthetic created for the production are explained in detail in chapter 3, along with Huang Zuolin's concept of *xieyi*, from which the production style emanated.

59. Chaudhuri, *Staging Place*, 213.

60. *Ibid.*, 17, 64.

61. *Ibid.*, 8.

62. *Ibid.*, 204.

63. Charles Wilbanks, "Fear and Bondage in America," *Asiaweek*, June 19, 1998, 48.

64. Statistics come from following sources: "China's Phantom Brain Drain," *New York Times*, May 5, 1988, A31; Zhang Minjie, "Liumei xueren de 'bianji xintai'" [The 'marginal psychological state' of Chinese students in the United States], *Qingnian yanjiu* [Youth studies], January 1997: 45 (translated in *Chinese Education and Society* 31, no. 2 [March/April 1998]: 93–101); Ross Terrill (guest lecture, St. Mark's School, Southborough, MA, January 9, 1998). An annual report published by the Institute of International Education lists the following figures for students from mainland China studying in the United States: 39,403 in 1994–1995; 42,503 in 1996–1997; 51,001 in 1998–1999; 59,939 in 2000–2001; and 64,757 in 2002–2003. (By comparison, the number of American students studying abroad in China ranged from 1,257 in 1994–1995 to 2,942 in 2000–2001 and rose another 33 percent to 3,911 in 2001–2002.) After sending no students to the United States from the 1950s until 1979, China became the leading sender by 1988–1989, remaining the leading sender or second leading sender ever since. See *Open Doors: Report on International Educational Exchange*, Institute of International Education, 2003 (more information can be accessed online at <http://www.opendoors.iienetwork.org>).

65. In 1999 Wen Ho Lee was indicted on fifty-nine counts of mishandling classified data from the Los Alamos National Laboratory, where he was employed as a nuclear weapons scientist. (*Time* magazine, December 20, 1999, 39.) The irony is that although he is a U.S. citizen born in Taiwan, the event triggered renewed suspicion of mainland Chinese espionage. Similar public outrage (fueled by the press) occurred when several Chinese Americans were cited for illegal financial contributions to President Clinton.

66. Wu Genliang, "Lun Zhongguo jindai liuxuesheng de lishi zuoyong" [The historical role of returned students in modern China], *Wenhuibao*, March 25, 1985, 4. Translated in *Chinese Education and Society* 21, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 16–19.

67. See the "Educational Exchange and the Open Door" issue, *Chinese Education and Society* 21, no. 1 (Spring 1988).

68. Yan Meihua, Jiang Bo, Gao Yunyan, and Zhang Jiawei, "Gongfei liuxue xin banfa chansheng shou pi liuxuesheng" [First batch of students for studies abroad generated under new regulations on publicly funded studies abroad], *Zhongguo jiaoyu bao* [China education daily], October 2, 1996, 1. Translated in *Chinese Education and Society* 31, no. 2 (March/April 1998): 9–11.

69. Zhang Minjie, "Liumei xueren de 'bianji xintai,'" 45.

70. Articulation of this phenomenon, a central theme in Said's *Orientalism*, precedes his use of it by a decade at least; James Carrier notes that Kenneth Burke called it "contextual or dialectical definition: 'To tell what a thing is, you place it in terms of something else,'" in *Occidentalism: Images of the West*, ed. Carrier (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 2. This dynamic has been documented in Chinese national identity formation emerging from its positioning of internal and external others (*neiyi*, "inside barbarians," and *waiyi*, "external barbarians") in sources as varied as anthropological studies of individual

ethnic minorities to assessment of transnationalism in Chinese cinema. Regarding the former, Louisa Schein points to “narratives of xenophobia that reiterated Chinese norms of propriety through contrast with an alien and immoral outside,” while, in terms of the latter, Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu has commented that “the development of nationhood . . . is based to some extent on defining itself by identifying what it is *not*—by rejecting and reacting against foreign influences or by validating its own values through the depiction of exoticized national minorities.” See Schein, “The Other Goes to Market,” 204–205 (see n. 8); Lu, *Transnational Chinese Cinemas* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1997), 25.

## Chapter 2: Occidentalism (Re)considered

1. The epigraph to this chapter is quoted from Marx (in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*) by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

2. Said, *Orientalism*, 328.

3. *Ibid.*, 24.

4. *Ibid.*, 325.

5. Eugene Eoyang, “Thinking Comparatively: Orienting the West and Occidentizing the East,” *Chinese/International Comparative Literature Bulletin* (March 1994): 30. The rapidly increasing circulation of the term is evidenced by the results of a rudimentary periodical search of sources from 1997 through 1999 using “Occidentalism” as a key-word, which generated more than fifty hits, whereas there were only half as many hits among sources from the entire preceding decade.

6. See James Clifford, “On Orientalism,” *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 264–265, 268–269.

7. See Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 2–7, 13.

8. Sadik Jalal al-‘Azm, “Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse,” *Khamsin*, no. 8 (1980): 9.

9. *Ibid.*, 19.

10. *Ibid.*, 20.

11. *Ibid.*, 22 (*italics mine*).

12. *Ibid.*, 24.

13. Instances of positive Orientalizing include mixture of Western awe and respect with the fear that was prompted by the spread of Islam, and the West’s “shivers of delight” at Oriental novelty (see *Orientalism* 58–59); see also Said’s “Orientalism Reconsidered,” in *Literature, Politics, and Theory*, ed. Barker, Hulme, Iversen, and Loxley (London: Methuen, 1986), regarding Orientalism as a gendered praxis: “the Orient was routinely described as feminine, its riches as fertile, its main symbols the sensual woman, the harem, and the despotic—but curiously attractive—ruler,” (225).

14. J. Timothy Wixted, "Reverse Orientalism" in *Sino-Japanese Studies* 2, no. 1 (December 1989): 18 (italics mine).
15. Wixted, "Reverse Orientalism," 21.
16. *Ibid.*, 23.
17. *Ibid.*, 17.
18. *Ibid.*, 18.
19. Dikötter, *Discourse of Race*, 127–128 (see n. 7). This paradoxical view of the West, specifically the United States, will be commented upon further.
20. Xiaomei Chen, *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 5.
21. *Ibid.*, 8, 25.
22. *Ibid.*, 5.
23. See, for instance, Wei-ming Tu, "Chinese Perceptions of America," in *Dragon and Eagle*, ed. Oxnam and Oksenberg (New York: BasicBooks, 1978); and David Shambaugh, *Beautiful Imperialist: China Perceives America, 1972–1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).
24. Here I ascribe to al-'Azm's division of Said's theory into the following categories: *Institutional Orientalism* indicates the whole range of institutions, theory and practices, ideological superstructure, apparatus of images, literary productions, etc. that supports and produces images of the Other; *Cultural-Academic Orientalism* refers to a "developing tradition of disciplined learning" (to which David Shambaugh testifies in his detailed study of "America Watchers" in *Beautiful Imperialist*); and *Ontological Orientalism* is the proliferation of essentialized images of the Other, which assumes unchanging fundamental traits, racial essence, and makes genuine revelations about its speaking subject. See al-'Azm, "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse," 18–19.
25. Chen, *Occidentalism*, 26.
26. See Dikötter, *Discourse of Race*, 15 (see n. 7).
27. Clifford, "On Orientalism," 256 (see n. 6). Clifford supports Michel Leiris' idea that the non-West did not study or speak on behalf of the rest of the world when the West was engaged in such practices, which is, of course, debatable: some would argue that the West just didn't acknowledge such studies or hear such voices until postcolonial societies started "writing back" during the past century.
28. Eoyang, "Thinking Comparatively," 25 (see n. 5).
29. *Ibid.*, 26.
30. The Chinese term for Catholicism is "Tianzhu jiao" 天主教, which in the slide was turned to the pun "tianshu jiao" 天猪叫 (heavenly pig screaming).
31. Zhang Kuan, "Oumei ren yanzhong de 'feiwo zulei,'" *Dushu* (September 1993): 8–9.
32. David Arkush, review of *Occidentalism: Images of the West*, by James Carrier, and *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China*, by Xiaomei Chen, *Journal of Asian Studies* 56, no. 1 (February 1997): 144.

33. Louisa Schein, "Gender and Internal Orientalism in China," *Modern China* 23, no. 1 (January 1997): 72.
34. J. Robertson, "Mon Japon: The Revue Theater as a Technology of Japanese Imperialism," *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 4 (1995): 970–996. Cited in Schein, "Gender and Internal Orientalism," 72.
35. James Carrier, ed., *Occidentalism: Images of the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), viii–x, 1–13.
36. *Ibid.*, ix.
37. *Ibid.*, 6.
38. *Ibid.*, ix–x (italics mine).
39. James Carrier, "Occidentalism: The World Turned Upside Down," *American Ethnologist* 19, no. 2 (1992): 199.
40. *Ibid.*, 198.
41. Carrier, *Occidentalism: Images of the West*, 6.
42. C. J. Fuller, review of *Occidentalism: Images of the West*, by James Carrier, *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute* 2, no. 3 (September 1996): 568.
43. Millie R. Creighton, "Imaging the Other in Japanese Advertising Campaigns" in Carrier, *Occidentalism: Images of the West*, 155. Creighton explains that "gaijin" is a term that can potentially apply to all foreigners, but is almost always used in reference to white-skinned Western foreigners, while other outsiders (nonwhite, non-Western) are referred to as "gaikokujin" (158).
44. Ironically, Said himself hastily mentions the term "Occidentalism" in his book *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), but places it in the context of several other "isms" which privilege as *subject* their respective prefixes (Afrocentrism, Eurocentrism, feminism, Marxism, deconstructionism), leaving open to question what he actually intends by the term and offering no evidence that it is meant to imply a counter-hegemonic perspective on the West.
45. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972), 74.
46. Eoyang's terminology, as he himself points out, is here quite handy in positioning exiled natives, immigrants, and other diasporic peoples, as well as hyphenated Americans who, being neither "A" nor "non-A," must choose between being both or neither. Could there be a *fifth* corner: *both* both and neither? Does this lead inevitably to *neither* both nor neither? Is subjectivity ever secure in present postmodernity? No one is simply one thing anymore; as Said maintains: "all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure; all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated and unmonolithic" (*Culture and Imperialism*, xxv).
47. Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 47.
48. Michael Hays, "Representing Empire," *Theatre Journal* 47, no. 1 (March 1995): 68.
49. Mahmoud Sadri, review of *Occidentalism: Images of the West*, by James Carrier, *Contemporary Sociology* 25, no. 5 (September 1996): 612.



50. Angharad N. Valdivia, ed., *Feminism, Multiculturalism, and the Media* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 12–13.
51. Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 209.
52. Eoyang, “Thinking Comparatively,” 19 (see n. 5).
53. Shambaugh, *Beautiful Imperialist*, 298–299 (see n. 23).
54. Wei-ming Tu, “Chinese Perceptions,” 89 (see n. 23).
55. See Shambaugh, *Beautiful Imperialist*, especially 297–298; Tu, “Chinese Perceptions,” 96–100; Dikötter, *Discourse of Race*, 29 (see n. 7). For studies of similar attitudes of Americans toward China, see Harold R. Isaacs, *Scratches on Our Minds* (New York: John & Day, 1958), and Steven W. Mosher, *China Misperceived* (New York: BasicBooks, 1990), among others.
56. Eoyang, “Thinking Comparatively,” 25.
57. Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 10.
58. Wixted, “Reverse Orientalism,” 25 (see n. 14).
59. Said, “Orientalism Reconsidered,” 211 (see n. 13).
60. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 37 (see n. 1).
61. According to criteria beyond geography, Japan can be argued to belong to “the West” and indeed is often implicated in the Chinese use of the term *xifang*, particularly in discursive nationalist aggression toward the West (see, for instance, Song Qiang et al., *Zhongguo keyi shuo bu* [China can say no]).
62. Leigh Dale and Helen Gilbert, “Looking the Same: A Preliminary (Post-colonial) Discussion of Orientalism and Occidentalism in Australia and Japan,” *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature Studies* 41 (1993): 46–47.
63. Clifford, “On Orientalism,” 272–273 (see n. 6).
64. Wang Ning, “Orientalism versus Occidentalism?” *New Literary History* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 63.
65. Wang, “Orientalism versus Occidentalism?” 62.
66. Geremie Barmé, “To Screw Foreigners Is Patriotic,” *China Journal*, no. 34 (July 1995): 209–234. (Later published as chapter 10 in Barmé’s *In the Red*, Columbia University Press, 1999.)
67. See Peter Hays Gries’ published essays, including “Tears of Rage: Chinese Nationalist Reactions to the Belgrade Embassy Bombing,” *China Journal*, no. 46 (July 2001): 25–43; and Gries and Kaiping Peng, “Culture Clash? Apologies East and West,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 11, no. 30 (2002): 173–178.
68. Gries, “Dangerous Epistemologies: Orientalism, Occidentalism and the Essentialization of ‘China/U.S.’ Difference” (unpublished essay), 2.
69. *Ibid.*, 5, 8–10.
70. *Ibid.*, 5.
71. Said, *Orientalism*, 328 (see n. 1).
72. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xx (see n. 44).
73. From Bhabha’s essay “The Other Question,” cited in Lowe, *Critical Terrains*, 4. (Bhabha’s essay also appears in his *Location of Culture*.)

74. Clifford, "On Orientalism," 261.
75. David Landes, "What Women Tell Us about Success," *Sunday Times* (London), January 6, 2002.
76. Victor Hanson Davis, "Occidentalism," *National Review*, May 10, 2002.
77. Wang, "Orientalism versus Occidentalism?" 63–64.
78. Clifford, "On Orientalism," 259.
79. Eoyang, "Thinking Comparatively," 34.
80. bell hooks, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination" in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Grossberg, Nelson, Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 339.
81. Gayatri Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic* (1990), cited in hooks, 346.

### Chapter 3: Immigrant Interculturalism

The epigraph to this chapter is drawn from Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995): 174.

1. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979): 323–324.
2. Chen reflects: "Western theoreticians—especially those 'Third-World-born' critics residing in the West—who speak for the need of liberating the 'Third-World' from the West's economic and political power need to be much more cautious in their claims, lest they even unwittingly and unintentionally themselves become neo-colonizers who exploit the cultural capital of the colonized in a process in which those voices are appropriated for reinvestment in those 'banks of the West' which currently offer the highest rate of return to speculators in trendy academic markets. For one who lives in the West and speaks from the center about marginal cultures, it is extremely difficult and problematic to represent the Other . . . As a Chinese intellectual educated in the West, I cannot realistically shake off the unavoidable influence of Western culture," in *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 17–18.
3. See Xiaobing Tang's treatment of Liu's essay in "Orientalism and the Question of Universality: The Language of Contemporary Chinese Literary Theory," *positions* 1, no. 2 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).
4. The May Fourth Movement is named for its origins in the May 4, 1919, demonstration against the national government in Beijing, protesting its compliance with the Western powers in ceding Shandong to Japan at the Paris Peace Conference. This triggered a widespread movement, driven by intellectuals, to cast off the weight of Confucian tradition and absorb Western culture; it resulted in a literary and cultural outpouring in China throughout the early decades of the twentieth century. The Cultural Revolution, on the other hand, was a revolution for class struggle driven by Mao Zedong as an attempt to bridge the gap between the government and the masses; it rejected all foreign influence and invited the people to criticize the CCP (Chinese Communist Party). The results

were disastrous for the CCP, science, agriculture, industry, education, and culture. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was launched in 1966 and persisted until Mao's death, in 1976, with tens of millions of educated Chinese "sent down" into remote areas to live with peasants for "reeducation." The only plays that could be performed during that decade were a handful of "revolutionary-model works" (most in classical opera style) with pro-CCP themes.

5. She also draws primarily from dramatic literature in order to "redeem modern Chinese drama from its marginal position both in China and in the West" (Chen, *Occidentalism*, 26); indeed, Chinese spoken drama (as a subfield of both theatre studies and Asian studies) remains an academic discipline relegated to relative obscurity in the West, despite the increased access contemporary scholars have to theatre production and related published material in China.

6. Sources vary regarding whether it was Huang or Hu who actually made the artistic decisions, particularly in terms of acting technique and blocking, since both gentlemen tend to claim credit.

7. Said specifies that "for readers in the so-called Third World" his desire is to "illustrate the formidable structure of cultural domination and, specifically for formerly colonized peoples, the dangers and temptations of employing the structure upon themselves or upon others," (*Orientalism*, 25). The attack against Huang during the Cultural Revolution, which focused on his worshipping bourgeois foreigners like Brecht, would seem to support Said's concern; Huang, however, adopted Brecht's theatre aesthetic precisely because he saw parallels to the Chinese theatre and usefulness—in combination with (already overly dominant) Stanislavskian realism and Mei's stylization—for its modern development. (See Antony Tatlow and Tak-wai Wong, eds., *Brecht and East Asian Theater* [Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press: 1982].)

8. The latest of these translations is "ideographic" (see Huang Zuolin, "Fusing Revolutionary Realism with Revolutionary Realism," *Drama Review* 38, no. 2 [Summer 1994]: 19). Pronounced "shyeh-yee," this term is virtually untranslatable. Huang, who was fluent in English, had successively translated it as "intrinsicism," "essentialism," and "imagism" but was unsatisfied with any of these translations, each of which lead to certain misunderstandings about what "xièyì" means. I believe the term should remain untranslated, which hopefully will link the phrase to its origin in the aesthetics of traditional Chinese painting. The difference between realism (*xieshi*) and *xièyì* is best illustrated in the difference between Western and Chinese painting: the Western painter, according to Huang, paints what appears to the eye, where the Eastern painter paints what appears real to the eye as it is filtered through the insight of his mind. For example, to show perspective, the Western painter makes the nearest objects larger than those that are distant, whereas the Chinese painter positions objects that are near *below* those that are farther away. To indicate shading, the sun and moon (and other sources of light) cast shadows in Western paintings, where

Chinese paintings have no shadows. (It is for both of these reasons that traditional Eastern art appears to the Western observer to lack three-dimensionality.) Huang compares the difference between Chinese traditional opera (*xiqu*) and Western spoken drama (*huaaju*) to the difference between these two painting techniques. He insists: “We Chinese need to claim, reexamine, use, and learn from our *xiqu* tradition, its principles and dialectics, and not adopt the Three Unities and Fourth Wall of Western theatre.” See Huang, *Wo yu xieyi xijuguan* [My *xieyi* concept of the theatre] (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1990), 474.

9. Huang in Erika Fischer-Lichte, ed., *The Dramatic Touch of Difference: Theatre Own and Foreign* (Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, 1990), 184–185. For more on Huang’s assessment of the similarities and differences of the three systems, see his article “Mei Lanfang, Sitannisilafusiti, Bulaixite xijuguan bijiao” [A comparison of the theatre concepts of Mei Lanfang, Stanislavski, and Brecht], first published in *Renmin ribao*, September 12, 1981, and reprinted in *Wo yu xieyi xijuguan*, 302–316; in English, see William H. Sun, “Mei Lanfang, Stanislavski and Brecht on China’s Stage and Their Aesthetic Significance,” in *Drama in the People’s Republic of China*, ed. Constantine Tung et al. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 137–150.

10. See Wing Hong Chong, “Playwright Couple’s First ‘Baby,’” *The Straits Times* (Singapore), August 1988; and Sun and Fei, “China Dream: A Theoretical Dialogue Between East and West,” in *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, ed. Patrice Pavis (London: Routledge, 1996).

11. Sun and Fei, “China Dream: A Theoretical Dialogue,” 191.

12. *Ibid.*, 188.

13. *Ibid.*, 191.

14. *Ibid.*, 190.

15. *Ibid.*, 193.

16. These references are taken from the first chapter, “Discourse and Heterogeneity: Situating Orientalism,” of Lowe’s book *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 24–25; they also appear in her article “Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences,” *Diaspora* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 31.

17. Chen, *Occidentalism*, 20, 24 (italics mine).

18. *Ibid.*, 65–66.

19. Lowe, *Critical Terrains*, 8.

20. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 4.

21. Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 9.

22. Jean Sgard as translated by Una Chaudhuri and cited in Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 274. Stuart Hall also specifies the migrant as permanently detached from his/her origins: “Migration is a one-way trip. There is no ‘home’ to go back

to. There never was." See Stuart Hall, "Minimal Selves," in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, ed. Houston Baker et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 115.

23. Chaudhuri, *Staging Place*, 176.

24. Sun and Fei, "China Dream: A Theoretical Dialogue," 191.

25. For a more detailed analysis of language in *China Dream*, see my earlier version of this chapter published as "Between Orient and Occident: The Intercultural Spoken Other in *China Dream*," *Theatre InSight* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1999), in which I use speech-act theory (drawing on Austin, Searle, Petrey, and others) to navigate the play's discursive and performative terrain and to highlight issues of identity and subjectivity (esp. pp. 17–22).

26. Sun and Fei, "China Dream: A Theoretical Dialogue," 193.

27. In Chinese it reads: "Well, maybe she's not a typical Chinese girl, but she's spent most of her time in China."

28. William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 83–84.

29. Citations of passages from play scripts give in parentheses the page number in the original English version first, followed by the page number for the same segment in the Chinese version (E/C).

30. In Chinese: "Preserve what? You mean those unpredictable rivers? Those rivers that devoured the lives of we mountain people year after year, that make us forever backward! You must have come down from 'paradise,' where you've never experienced our dangers or tasted our bitter fruit. Oh, you . . . foreigner, you've come to sightsee in this exotic country (*yiguo qingdiao*), but can sight-seeing give us clothes to wear; can it keep us from starving?"

31. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 328 (see n. 1).

32. This play on the word "sinology" is, of course, absent in the Chinese version.

33. Huang in Fischer-Lichte, *Dramatic Touch of Difference*, 183. Huang concludes by saying: "I am told that when a baby is conceived in its mother's womb, the first organ that takes shape is the nose. So this gesture is biologically sound. In China, when we refer to our ancestors, we call them our 'nose ancestors.' I think there must be something more to the nose than just this myth. Perhaps anthropologists would have something to say about this."

34. Hu Xuehua, "Zai Niuyue kan *Zhongguo meng*" [Seeing *China Dream* in New York], *Shanghai wenhua yishu bao*, July 22, 1988, 3.

35. Jiang Xiaoling, "Sun Huizhu he ta de *Zhongguo meng*" [Sun Huizhu and his *China Dream*], *Jiefang ribao*, July 7, 1987.

36. Such audience reception may have been prompted by the ways in which the various productions were realized contrary to Sun and Fei's artistic goals, as discussed elsewhere in this chapter.

37. All speakers' comments at the symposium were transcribed and published in vol. 7–8, *Huaju* (Shanghai People's Art Theatre publication, 1987). The symposium is a standard practice for all plays of significance produced at profes-

sional theatres in China. Post-performance formal and informal chats with audiences are also standard practice but are not recorded or published.

38. Xi Meijuan and Zhou Yemang, “Zai Xingdao yan *Zhongguo meng*” (Performing *China Dream* on Star Island), *Shanghai wenhua yishu bao*, 1988.

39. Goh Beng Choo, “A Brilliant Blend of Acting, Dancing, and Lighting,” *The Straits Times* (Singapore), August 1988. It is important to note here that Sun and Fei were dissatisfied with the way the final moments of the play (and several other aspects of production) were handled, as discussed elsewhere in this chapter.

40. Sun and Fei, “China Dream: A Theoretical Dialogue,” 194–195.

41. Zhuang Zi passage and other citations taken from Kroll, “Us and Them,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, no. 3 (1993): 460.

42. Faye C. Fei, “Dramatizing the West in Chinese Spoken Drama,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 112.

43. Sun Huizhu, *Ganwu Meiguomeng* [Realizing the American Dream] (Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1999). In the Crazy Horse chapter, Sun offers an interesting twist on the phenomenon of “saying no” to the United States, asserting that it is in fact a long-standing *American* tradition; his example of an ongoing project since the 1940s near Mount Rushmore to erect an enormous statue of Crazy Horse suggests a double nay-saying in the sculptors’ refusal of mainstream media coverage (reflecting resistance to the American practice of cashing in on any controversial practice) along with the antiestablishment gesture of positioning the Native American icon in the face of American presidents who perpetuated oppression of his people. Sun expanded thus on his intentions in writing the Crazy Horse chapter in a conversation in May 2002 at his home in Shanghai.

#### Chapter 4: Exilic Absurdism

The epigraph to this chapter is drawn from Said, “Reflections in Exile,” in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, and Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990), 357–366. A previous version was published as “The Mind of Winter: Reflections on Life in Exile” in *Harper’s*, September 1984, 49–55.

1. In classifying *The Great Going Abroad* as an absurdist play, I am utilizing Martin Esslin’s concept of absurdist theatre, which includes characteristics such as “pure theatre” (abstract scenic effects as in a circus or revue, antiliterary in nature, and containing ritual); clowning, fooling, or mad scenes; verbal nonsense; and dream, fantasy, or allegory—all of which are present in Wang’s play, although it is somewhat more conventional in structure and character development than plays typically defined as absurdist. Absurdist elements of the play will be described in greater detail throughout the chapter; for more on Esslin’s concept and elaboration on the characteristics as found in modern drama, see his

*Theatre of the Absurd* (London: Penguin, 1980; originally published 1961), 328–362.

2. In this sense, Occidentalism as a discursive practice assumes the dual status of “official” and “anti-official” articulated by Xiaomei Chen in *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), but my assessment of these uses differs drastically from Chen’s. In her analysis, “official Occidentalism . . . uses the essentialization of the West . . . not for the purpose of dominating the West, but in order to discipline, and ultimately dominate, the Chinese self at home,” whereas “anti-official Occidentalism . . . can be understood as a powerful anti-official discourse using the Western Other as a metaphor for a political liberation against ideological oppression within a totalitarian society” (5–8). Chen’s paradigm is insufficient because it assumes that antiestablishment discourse always invokes the West as positive, and that orthodox anti-imperialism is always seen as an attempt to assert domestic control rather than express international superiority. I find both of these assumptions problematic, and they do not hold true in the body of plays considered here.

3. Lin Xi, “*Da liuyang* daigeile women shenme?” [What has *The Great Going Abroad* brought us?], *Shanghai Xiju*, January 1992, 25.

4. Wei Ming, “Kan *Da liuyang* you gan” [My feelings on seeing *The Great Going Abroad*], *Shanghai Xiju*, January 1992, 24.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Lin, “*Da liuyang* daigeile women shenme?” 25.

8. For a detailed study of the political control of theatre artists during the 1989–1991 period, see Conceison, “The Main Melody Campaign in Chinese Spoken Drama,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 11, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 190–212.

9. Lincoln Kaye, “Exit Emperor, Stage Left: ‘Theatre of the Absurd’ May Describe Today’s Reality,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 1, 1992, 32–33.

10. Zhang Longxi, *Mighty Opposites: From Dichotomies to Difference in the Comparative Study of China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 184.

11. The Beijing run of the play included both the aborted staging by the Air Force Drama Troupe and the subsequent independent production.

12. Wang Gui, interview by author, tape recording, Beijing, February 8, 1996.

13. Wang Gui supervised as executive director for the Shanghai People’s Art Theatre production of *W.M.* directed by Hu Xuehua (Huang Zuolin’s young codirector of *China Dream*). For more detailed information in English about the circumstances surrounding *W.M.* and the controversy it generated, see Tom Moran’s master’s thesis “Down from the Mountains, Back from the Villages: Wang Peigong’s *WM*” (Cornell University, 1988), or Haiping Yan’s critical introduction to the recent anthology *Theater and Society*, ed. Haiping Yan (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), which also includes Moran’s translation of the play in its entirety. For the script published in Chinese along with reprinted concurrent

critical commentary, see Li Haiquan, ed., *You zhengyi de huaju juben xuanji* [Anthology of controversial play scripts] (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1988). This anthology also includes full texts of Gao Xingjian's plays *Yeren* (Wild man) and *Chezhan* (Bus stop). Yan's anthology includes the latter play in English.

14. Wang Gui, interview.

15. The term "*jingpai*" translates loosely as "Beijing school." Beijing and Shanghai are the two major cities for training and performance in the *huaju* (spoken drama) genre. Beijing's spoken drama is generally considered more conservative, more committed to preservation of the classics, and more orthodox in terms of asserting national identity, political ideology, and cultural tradition. Its corollary is "*haipai*," referring to the contrasting theatrical aesthetic in Shanghai. As a coastal city somewhat removed from the government's seat in the capital and the location of international trade and development (including forced "colonization" that divided the city into foreign settlements for decades), Shanghai is considered more cosmopolitan than Beijing; thus, its theatre has been generally more experimental and concerned with themes of contact with the West. Though these categories are beginning to break down with the passing of some of the great theatre practitioners associated with them (including Beijing's Jiao Juyin and Shanghai's Huang Zuolin) and increased travel, contact, and collaboration between the two cities' artists, the phrases "*jingpai*" and "*haipai*" are still often invoked to describe the approach of a certain director or playwright, or the style of a specific play. One critic discussing *The Great Going Abroad* called it "*jingban haipai*," indicating that it is a fusion of the two styles, exhibiting characteristics of both trends. He notes its origins in Beijing but maintains that it has a strong "Shanghai-school flavor," listing Shanghai-school characteristics as: "disregarding tradition; rather strong innovative consciousness; ability to assimilate artistic benefits of the ancient and modern Chinese as well as the foreign for their own use; and . . . any artistic method can be used as long as the play is good to watch and fascinates the audience." (Lin, "*Da liuyang* daigeile women shenme?" 25). For more on *jingpai/haipai*, see Conceison, "International Casting in Chinese Plays: A Tale of Two Cities," *Theatre Journal* 53 (Spring 2001): 277–290.

16. Wu'er Kaixi was the most prominent and outspoken student leader of the protests and hunger strike in Tiananmen Square in the spring of 1989. He fled China after the massacre and was exiled in the United States, where he enrolled as a student at Harvard University. Highly visible in the American press, he was frequently interviewed on *Nightline* and other news programs, and later became a radio talk show host in Taiwan.

17. The yuan is the standard unit of Chinese currency in RMB (*renminbi* or "people's money"). In 1989, one U.S. dollar was equal to 3.73 yuan, so 3,000 yuan was about \$800.

18. Wang Gui, interview.

19. All citations from the play are from this unpublished script and videotape (*Da liuyang* by Yu Xin, Xian Cai, Yi Gong, and Wang Gui; song lyrics by Gu



Ding and Wang Jian [June–July 1991]) provided by Wang Gui. All translations are mine.

20. There were several other cast changes during the play's lengthy tour: Sha Jingchang eventually took over the lead when Zhang Qiuge left the show for another project; Chen Ziqiu stepped into Sha's role; Wang Zhiquan replaced Wang Deshun. For the Shanghai production I attended, Zhang Qiuge played the twin protagonists, Chen Ziqiu served as production manager and played Wen Jun, Mao Lixin played Sisi, Jiang Lili played Susan, and Wang Zhiquan played the professor. The casting of Wang Zhiquan in particular resulted in the Shanghai show differing significantly from the videotape of an earlier performance, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

21. Lin, "Da liuyang daigeile women shenme?" 25.

22. Actors Chen Xinqiu, Wang Zhiyuan, and Mao Lixin substantiated my interpretation during our conversation following their Shanghai performances (November 24–25, 1991).

23. Wang Gui, interview. In terms eerily identical to the way Wang allegorically represents it in *Going Abroad*, Vera Schwarcz describes the Cultural Revolution as "the demonology, cannibalism and violence that was China's daily fare for a decade." See Schwarcz, "The Burden of Memory: The Cultural Revolution and the Holocaust," *China Information* 11, no. 1 (Summer 1996): 5.

24. Wei, "Kan Da liuyang you gan," 24.

25. A self-employed worker or establishment; these emerged and flourished in China during the economic reform period of the early 1990s.

26. *Da liuyang* (unpublished script), scene 1, p. 1.

27. *Ibid.*, 3.

28. *Ibid.*, 11–12

29. The Talking Heads' song "Psychokiller" forms the background for Gao Yuan's initial "journey" (performed by Zhang and a group of actresses who mime rowing a boat, riding a train, and flying an airplane to the beat of the pop song), not for the scenes of murder as one might expect from the song's title and lyrics; the music for the killing scenes are dark, atonal original compositions, with heavy use of deep percussion to create an eerie beat to which the assassins (a group of actors) move like robots. The Talking Heads, including British member David Byrne, are an American band that formed in Boston and New York City during the 1970s–1980s punk-rock movement. Wang Gui's appropriation and interpretation of an imaginative "America" fits nicely with Byrne's own reflection: "Although I'm not a U.S. citizen, the beauty of this 'American' aesthetic is that it belongs to anyone who claims it . . . who grooves on it . . ." See Talking Heads, *Popular Favorites* (disc 1), Sire Records Company, 1992. Thanks to Chris Littlejohn for bringing this quotation to my attention.

30. The song "Women Yazhou" [We Asia] was written as a theme song for the Asian Games held in Beijing and became a huge pop hit (performed by Dian Getan) throughout China in 1990–1991. Gao Yuan sings this song the first time

he rides in a car in the United States, when the American anthropology professor mistakes him for his twin brother Gao Shan and offers him a ride. Audiences were thoroughly familiar with all of the lyrics: they begin with the three lines sung by Gao (*We Asia, our mountains are heads held high; we Asia, our rivers are like hot blood flowing; we Asia, trees all entwined at the roots*) and include references to jade and silk, beautiful mountains, abundant products, industrious people, and great athletes, ending with the words “the four winds of Asia rise; Asia’s great wind shakes the heavens.” (Lyrics by Zhang Li, translation mine).

31. *Da liuyang* (unpublished script), 11. Here it is worth mentioning that in analyses of postcolonial theatre, the derogated body is a locus infused with rich political and cultural meaning, often as a site of contestation to imperialism. Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins describe its semiotic power this way: “The body which has been violated, degraded, maimed . . . invariably functions within some kind of allegorical framework.” In terms of the different readings available to interpret *Going Abroad*, the decapitated body of the elder twin Gao Shan can connote the evils of foreign capitalism or the extremes of violent dismemberment (rejection/exclusion/displacement from sanctioned groups) within Chinese communities during times of political upheaval. In either case, the scene in which Gao Shan’s ghost, holding its own head, approaches Gao Yuan serves as a significant moment of simultaneously splitting and doubling of the subject, enhancing the centrality of Gao Yuan’s identity crisis as an exiled Other (see my discussion elsewhere in this chapter). For more on the mutilated body in postcolonial drama, see Gilbert and Tompkins, “Body Politics,” *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996), 203–255.

32. *Da liuyang* (unpublished script), title page.

33. Though not included in the script’s stage directions, in the video Gao Yuan gestures to Sisi’s breast when he says “round”; this increases the humor of Gao’s response, as does the fact that “salty” and “round” rhyme in Chinese (*xian* and *yuan*).

34. *Da liuyang* (unpublished script), scene 2, p. 6.

35. A third possibility is that Sisi’s ethnicity is something other than Chinese or American. In Sha Yexin’s 1998 play *Dignity* (see chapter 7) the housekeeper is Mexican; the trope of the immigrant domestic in American homes is well-known in China. Sisi’s costume of bright purple, including a turban worn throughout the play, and large beaded jewelry would seem to support this possibility. However, since many of the costumes in the play (including Susan’s birthday party dress) are brightly colored and exaggerated, Sisi’s does not necessarily indicate a non-American ethnic Other; furthermore, if she were something other than Chinese or American (the binary implied in *Going Abroad*), this would most likely be specified in the *dramatis personae*, as it is in the script for *Dignity*. Sisi’s ambiguity can be read as both emblematic of the conflation of foreigners into a nonspecific cultural Other and reflective of the perception of the United States as a multicultural nation.

36. *Da liuyang* (unpublished script), p. 10.
37. *Ibid.*, scene 2, p. 5.
38. *Qigong*, literally “breath work,” is considered the foundation for Chinese martial arts and is said to have been introduced to Shaolin Temple monks by Bodhi Dharma sometime around AD 500. There are many versions of *qigong*, ranging from subtle to intense breath work, with varying degrees of integrated physical movement. Effects of *qigong* can range from toning and strengthening to healing to (some say) immortality. *Qigong* can be employed to move objects or, in combat, to protect its practitioner from physical blows of opponents: the boxers of the 1900 Boxer Rebellion, for example, believed that *qigong* would make them impervious to foreign bullets. In *Going Abroad*, Gao Yuan uses *qi-gong* in the latter guise to keep his assailants away merely by stretching out his arms; then, with similar gestures but no physical contact, he uses breath and energy to toss them across the stage in various acrobatic formations. The effect is humorous and entertaining, while also signifying a reinscription of the (here, successful) use of native traditional techniques to combat modern foreign aggression. See Ron Sieh, *Martial Arts for Beginners* (New York: Writers and Readers Publishing, 1995), 40–43.
39. *Da liuyang* (unpublished script), scene 1, p. 3. Specified slide projections are indicated throughout the script and were incorporated in the Shanghai performances but were not used in the performance that was videotaped in Hebei.
40. “*Laowai*” is frequently used in China to address foreigners directly as well as to refer to them in the third person. Its uses range from humorous to pejorative, and while sometimes expressing familiarity, the term can also imply (as in this case) polite distance from the designated foreigner—or impolite distance—depending on its context. As indicated earlier, Chinese sometimes defend it as a friendly term, but foreigners usually feel offended by it. For further discussion of monikers for foreigners, their origins and connotations, see chapter 1.
41. A slogan of the Chinese workers’ and peasants’ Red Army (1928–1937).
42. *Da liuyang* (unpublished script), scene 2, p. 5.
43. The language of the play in imagined reality is English—or perhaps a hybrid of Chinese and English. Since Gao Yuan immediately reveals a language barrier upon his arrival, we can assume that his interactions with Wen Jun would be in their shared native tongue; furthermore, his direct addresses to the audience throughout the play would also be in Chinese.
44. Wang Gui, interview.
45. *Da liuyang* (unpublished script), scene 6, p. 13.
46. “Old stinking ninth” (*cao lao jiu*) was an epithet used during the Cultural Revolution, labeling intellectuals as the ninth category of class enemy after the eight officially designated types (such as landowners).
47. *Da liuyang* (unpublished script), scene 6, p. 14.
48. The script calls for Gao Yuan (as the priest) to give Wen Jun a “physical exam” and make asides to the audience, but this was not executed in performance.

49. *Da liuyang* (unpublished script), scene 8, p. 19.
50. See chapter 1 for detailed information about “*chuguo re*” (“going-abroad fever”) in China during the 1980s and 1990s, including statistics, social and political implications, and the “marginal psychological state” of its participants. See also chapter 6 for discussion of the novel and play *Student Wife* (*Peidu furen*).
51. For further discussions of exile in contemporary literature, see María-Inés Lagos-Pope, ed., *Exile in Literature* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1988); Angelika Bammer, ed., *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Michael Seidel, *Exile and the Narrative Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986); and Andrew Gurr, *Writers in Exile: The Identity of Home in Modern Literature* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1981).
52. Regarding perspectives of Chinese American women writers in the context of experiences of emigration to the United States, see Amy Ling, *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1990), particularly chapter 4, “Focus on America: Seeking a Self and a Place.”
53. Hsin-sheng C. Kao, “Yu Lihua’s Blueprint for the Development of a New Poetics: Chinese Literature Overseas,” in Hsin-sheng C. Kao, ed., *Nativism Overseas: Contemporary Chinese Women Writers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 84, 103.
54. Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 75.
55. *Ibid.*, 204.
56. *Ibid.*, 3–5.
57. Kao, *Nativism Overseas*, 83, 103–104.
58. Chaudhuri, *Staging Place*, xii, 4.
59. *Da liuyang* (unpublished script), scene 2, p. 6.
60. *Ibid.*, scene 3, p. 7.
61. Chaudhuri, *Staging Place*, 173–174.
62. *Ibid.*, xii.
63. Kao, *Nativism Overseas*, 83, 104.
64. Lin, “*Da liuyang* daigeile women shenme?” 25 (see n. 3).
65. See Kao, *Nativism Overseas*, 6–7 and 209, for further explanation.
66. Rosmarie T. Morewedge, “Exile in Heinrich Boell’s Novel: *Billiards at Half Past Nine*,” in María-Inés Lagos-Pope, ed., *Exile in Literature* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1988), 106.
67. Lagos-Pope, *Exile in Literature*, 9–10.
68. It is impossible to ascertain whether Lin Xi grasped the underlying political meaning Wang intended in the play, because if he had, he would not have been able to publish such an interpretation in an official journal. The fact that he summarily dismisses a thematic reading of the piece and privileges its aesthetic composition indicates that he at least saw beyond the overt “politically correct” message and considered it inconsequential.

69. Lin, “*Da liuyang* daigeile women shenme?” 25.
70. Wang Gui, interview.
71. Wang Gui, “Xiju: xiang qian kan” [Theatre: look forward], in *Xijuguan zhengmingji* [Anthology on controversial theatre] (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1988).
72. Lin, “*Da liuyang* daigeile women shenme?” 25.
73. Wang Gui, “Xiju: xian qian kan,” 449.
74. *Ibid.*, 453.
75. *Ibid.*, 453.
76. Wang Gui, interview. *Zhu xuanlü* (“main melody”) is a prescriptive term referring to the political formula desired by the government in all forms of socialist cultural output, including art, literature, film, and theatre. For more on the 1989–1991 campaign that circulated the formula—which resurfaces at times when state ideology requires reinforcement—see Conceison, “The Main Melody Campaign,” 190–212 (see n. 8).
77. A boxed set of videos of Wang Gui’s best-known productions was released in 2003, “sanctioning” his status as one of China’s most influential directors. The set includes *Women* (W.M., 1985), *Zhoulang baishi* (Minister Zhou pays respect to his master, 1983), *Huangyuan yu ren* (Man and wilderness, 1988), and *Haishan jia qingji* (Passion sacrifice between mountains and seas, 1989).

## Chapter 5: Cultural Cross-Examination

The epigraph to this chapter is drawn from Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 12.

1. *Bird Men* was previewed on March 17, 1993 and opened at the Beijing People’s Art Theatre on March 31. On December 14, 1994 it tallied its hundredth performance, having reached over 120,000 spectators (houses were filled to an average of 93 percent capacity overall). The play continued to run throughout 1995, touring to Taiwan in late April and to Shanghai from September 26–October 4. See Sun Antang, “Beijing renyi huaju *Niaoren* yanman baichang” [Beijing People’s Art Theatre play *Bird Men* reaches 100 performances], *Beijing ribao*, December 15, 1994; Sun Antang, “Huangpu jiangpan huaju re” [Spoken drama fever on the banks of the Huangpu River], *Beijing ribao*, October 5, 1995; Wu Jiazhen, “*Niaoren* Taibei shou huanying” [*Bird Men* welcomed in Taibei], *Beijing ribao*, May 12, 1995; Mao Jingbo, “Radical Schemes Help Theatres Sell Out Plays,” *China Daily*, May 4, 1993, 5.
2. Guo Shixing, interview by author, tape recording, Beijing, March 11, 1996. Pu Cunxin’s statement is from a taped interview with the author on February 6, 1996, in Beijing.
3. Chow, *Primitive Passions*, 13.
4. *Ibid.*, 23.

5. This pen name means roughly “person of the world” or “world traveler”: “*ke*” means “guest,” “visitor,” “traveler,” or “person”; “*shan*” and “*hai*” are taken from the idiom “*shannan haibei*” meaning literally “south of the mountains and north of the seas” (in general usage “far and wide” or “all over the land”). See Liu Zhangchun, “Jinri Shan Haike: ji *Niaoren* bianju Guo Shixing” [Today’s Shan Haike: on *Bird Men* playwright Guo Shixing] in *Xiju dianyingbao*, no. 636 (1993); also Yang Shengsheng, “*Niaoren*: yige xinde tansuo xi” [*Bird Men*: a new experimental play], *Zhongguo wenhuabao*, April 28, 1993.

6. Guo Shixing, interview.

7. Program notes from *Niaoren* playbill, Beijing People’s Art Theatre, 1994.

8. Dai Yirong and Zhou Hong, “Culture in China” (exposé on *Bird Men* including an interview with playwright Guo Shixing, actors Lin Liankun and Pu Cunxin, and various patrons), China Radio International, March 1994 (italics mine).

9. Guo Shixing, “*Niaoren*,” *Xin Juben* [New scripts], no. 3 (1993): 13 (p. 42 in the Beijing People’s Art Theatre production script). Unless otherwise noted, citations here refer to the version published in *Xin Juben*, and translations are mine.

10. Guo Shixing, “*Niaoren*,” 6–7.

11. *China Daily*, May 4, 1993, 5.

12. Guo Shixing, “*Niaoren*,” 8.

13. Guo Shixing, interview.

14. He Xilai, “*Renniao zhijian*” [Between man and bird], *Renyi zhi youbao*, May 1993, 2.

15. Chow, *Primitive Passions*, 37. Kim and Dittmer in their conclusion to *China’s Quest for National Identity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993) articulate this paradox in terms of foreign affairs: “China’s dual status in the international pecking order—a poor developing country in per capita terms and a giant in aggregate terms—makes it possible for Chinese leaders to claim respect as a great nation and membership in the backward world” (283). Haiping Yan also alludes to paradoxical Chinese national self-identity in regard to its relationship to a West that both colonized China and elicited its admiration and emulation, suggesting the West as simultaneous source of and answer to China’s national “identity crisis,” in her discussion of spoken dramas of the 1920s, “Modern Chinese Drama and its Western Models,” *Modern Drama* 35 (1992): 58.

16. For more on China’s Othering of its own ethnic cultures and communities, see Louisa Schein’s essay “Gender and Internal Orientalism in China,” *Modern China* 23, no. 1 (January 1997): 69–98.

17. Liu Zhangchun, “‘*Niaoren*’ yan *Niaoren*” [Birdmen perform *Bird Men*], *Renyi de youbao*, March 1993, 3.

18. Tong Daoming, “*Niaoren* qiguan” [*Bird Men* is marvelous spectacle], *Wenhuibao*, September 29, 1995, 10.

19. Jiang Xin, “*Niaoren* huo jingcheng daoyan guo zuyin” [*Bird Men* enflames the capital; director satisfies a craving], *Zhongguo wenhuabao*, April 9, 1993, 4.

20. Liu Zhangchun, “Jinri Shan Haike” (see n. 5).

21. Fellow contemporary Chinese spoken-drama scholars Fei Chunfang and Haiping Yan also categorize *Bird Men* as a realist play in their passing references to it: Fei says “*Bird Men* . . . is a realistic play”; Yan locates the play in the trend marking “the return of critical realism in the first half of the 1990s” (versus a period of “experimental modernism” in the 1980s) with these words: “Sharing the dramatic dynamics of critical realism but with more allegorical significance, *Bird Men* is also among the noteworthy plays of the 1990s.” See Faye C. Fei, “Dramatizing the West in Chinese Spoken Drama” in *Asian Theatre Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 112; Haiping Yan, ed. *Theater and Society: An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Drama* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1998): xxxviii.

22. Chen Zhu, “‘Niaoren’ kan *Niaoren* gongming heqi duo” [Birdmen seeing *Bird Men* have such a sympathetic response], *Xinmin wanbao*, September 30, 1995.

23. Ru Bingyang, “Shanghai ren qinglai Beijing huaju” [Shanghaians favor Beijing plays], *Beijing qingnianbao*, September 26, 1995, 3.

24. For more on the significance of beards as a signifier of Western alien masculinity, see chapter 6.

25. The metaphor of Chinese intellectuals to caged birds is not a new one, and the image persists in modern times, making it all the more recognizable to a contemporary urban audience. For instance, Ross Terrill recounts his correspondence and friendship with a young Beijing intellectual, who studied abroad in Australia in the late 1970s and describes the situation of himself and his peers in Deng’s China this way: “We are like birds in a cage. We can fly, but there are limits on all sides. It’s not the same as being trussed up and unable to fly. Nor is it like being outside the cage.” See Ross Terrill, *China in Our Time: The Epic Saga of the People’s Republic from the Communist Victory to Tiananmen Square and Beyond*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 173.

26. Indeed, several other scholars support and illustrate this claim. The afterword to Arkush and Lee’s *Land Without Ghosts*, for example, reminds us: “Changes in the perception of another nation sometimes reflect only shifts in the perceiver’s own needs and aspirations . . . Chinese intellectuals looking at America frequently had China on their minds. In that sense, Chinese views of America have mirrored the process of China’s own self-definition . . . In their writings about America, generations of Chinese have voiced concerns about their own country,” see David R. Arkush and Leo O. Lee, trans., eds., *Land Without Ghosts: Chinese Impressions of America from the Mid-Nineteenth Century to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 299–300.

27. Chow, *Primitive Passions*, 180.

28. *Ibid.*, 181.

29. Guo Shixing, “Niaoren,” 20–21.

30. The specific opera alluded to in *Bird Men* is *Zha Mei an* (literally translated as “the case of the chopping of Mei”), in which scholar Chen Shimei earns

the highest level (*zhuangyuan*) on the Imperial examination and is invited to wed the daughter of the emperor, who is unaware that Chen Shimei is already married. When he does not return home, Chen's wife Qing Xianglian takes their children to the capital to look for him and discovers he has remarried. She appeals to Judge Bao, who puts Chen Shimei on trial; when Chen denies being married to Qing, Judge Bao convicts him and sentences him to execution (being chopped in half). Chen Shimei is a well-known figure in Chinese folklore, symbolizing betrayal of one's wife; his conflation with Paul Ding in *Bird Men* extends this metaphor to betrayal of one's "motherland."

31. See his chapter in Harumi Befu, ed., *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia: Representation and Identity* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Research Papers and Policy Studies, no. 39, 1993); also Ann Anagnost, "Cultural Nationalism and Chinese Modernity" in the same volume.

32. Dai, "Culture in China" (see n. 8).

33. Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei explores anti-American images in Japanese avant-garde theater, particularly in the plays of Shuji Terayama, noting Jun Eto's contention that in "longing for something indispensable, that has been somehow absent, but which must be restored at any cost" Japanese intellectuals and artists look outward toward the West as well as inward toward their own past (see "Showdown at Culture Gap," *Modern Drama* 35 [1992]: 117); Ann Anagnost discusses artistic modes in contemporary China (including fine art, folk art, and film) that are being revitalized through this quest, which she interprets as focused on traditional minority cultures (see Anagnost in Befu, *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia*).

34. See Befu, *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia*, 1, 173. Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (Verso, 1983) adheres to the generally accepted view that the word "nationalism" did not circulate until the end of the nineteenth century. Also see "On Nationalism" in Maria Hsia Chang, *Return of the Dragon: China's Wounded Nationalism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001).

35. Lowell Dittmer and Samuel Kim, eds., *China's Quest for National Identity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 251–252. The editors also remind us that the term "identity" is borrowed from post-Freudian (particularly Eriksonian) psychology (3–4).

36. Dittmer, *China's Quest*, 13, 238–240, 245; Befu, *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia*, 5.

37. Michael Robinson, "Enduring Anxieties: Cultural Nationalism and Modern East Asia," in Befu, *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia*, 168.

38. Guo Shixing, "Niaoren," 19.

39. Befu, *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia*, 4.

40. Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Why a Fish Pond?" in *Framer Framed* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 163.

41. The following is an illustrative statistical example from the two-week Shanghai engagement (September 26–October 4, 1995): as of the day of its pre-



mier, five thousand tickets had been sold and three hundred of these (6 percent) alone were sold to foreign students from East China Normal University (*Huadong shifan daxue*). These students came to see the play for “a good opportunity to understand China,” according to Ru Bingyang, “Shanghai ren qinglai Beijing huaju,” 3.

## Chapter 6: American Self-Representation

The epigraph to this chapter is drawn from Homi Bhabha, “The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism,” *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 67, 75. The essay first appeared as “The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism,” in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, and Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990), 71–88. The earlier version says “identification” rather than “ready recognition” but is otherwise identical.

1. Literally, this Chinese title refers to the spouse of a foreign student, who accompanies the student overseas to study: this idea in its entirety is difficult to translate into concise English as a catchy title. (The original title of the novel on which the play is based was *Bandu furen*; but the managing editor wrote “*Peidu furen*” by mistake during publication. Since the meanings of the two phrases are approximate, the change was left uncorrected. See Wang Zhousheng, “*Peidu furen chujia le*” [*Student Wife gets married*], *Xinmin wanbao*, February 21, 1995.)

2. Although Hongshan Li and Zhaohui Hong grossly exaggerate the audience statistics for the run of the show as being in the “hundreds of thousands,” the play did reach a considerable audience. With approximately sixty performances in the small theatre, the total number of spectators can be estimated at three thousand to five thousand. For Li and Hong’s assessment, see their edited volume *Image, Perception, and the Making of U.S.-China Relations* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998), 243.

3. Louisa Schein, “The Other Goes to Market: The State, the Nation and Unruliness in Contemporary China,” *Identities* 2, no. 3 (January 1996): 204–205.

4. All quotations from Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 68–69.

5. Daly left his post teaching Chinese language at Cornell University in late 1992 to participate in the filming in New York City of the twenty-one-part mini-series. The serial aired several times in China and was the biggest hit on Chinese television to date, due both to the fame of lead actor Jiang Wen and the timely content of the plot: the experiences of an overseas Chinese living in the United States. In July 1994, Yu Luosheng was at a frustrating point in his search for a qualified foreign actor for *Student Wife*: he had found a German student in Beijing he hoped to employ, but it did not seem likely the arrangement would work out. He was ecstatic when I offered to put him in touch with Daly, a former

United States Information Service diplomat fluent in Mandarin, with a flexible schedule as a freelance interpreter for the State Department and other agencies.

6. Robert Daly, interview by author, tape recording, Ithaca, New York, June 27, 1995. With the twelve-hour time-zone difference, it was nearing the end of a regular workday for Yu, the ideal time to place the call; this illustrates the dilemma, which surfaced during Yu's involvement in *The Joy Luck Club*, of the power play regarding whose standards are adopted in Sino-American artistic collaborations.

7. For an extensive analysis of the intercultural dynamics and shifting hegemonomies involved in the Long Wharf Theatre/Shanghai People's Art Theatre "collaboration" on *The Joy Luck Club*, see Conceison, "Translating Collaboration: *The Joy Luck Club* and Intercultural Theatre," *The Drama Review* 39, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 151–166.

8. My assessment of Yu's directorial approach and process is based on conversations with *Student Wife* cast members Xu Zheng, Geng Ge, Robert Daly, and Basia Wajs, as well as my own experience as Yu's interpreter during rehearsals for *The Joy Luck Club*, in which I found that he *did* listen intently when it was requested of him, and when opinions were aired in an environment he did not perceive as threatening.

9. Basia Wajs, e-mail correspondence, November 29, 1999.

10. Daly, interview.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. Yu Luosheng, *Peidu furen* (adapted from Wang Zhousheng's novel of same name), original draft of production script (unpublished), December 12, 1994, 67. All translations of Chinese interviews and materials are my own.

14. Yu Luosheng, interview by author, tape recording, Shanghai, November 24, 1995.

15. It was not until my discussion with Yu in November 1995 that he altered his view on this point: at the end of the interview, and just after extensive discussion about the character Lucia, I asked him, "Finally, if you were to rehearse this play again, what might you do differently?" He first indicated that he would preserve the deliberate choice he made to emphasize mutual understanding over cultural friction overall, then added: "Regarding Lucia's character, I would not just make adjustments, I would rewrite her whole character from scratch; but I am not yet qualified to do this, because my understanding of Americans is still fairly rudimentary; if I could go live in the States for one or two years, I could probably do it." One must consider here the likelihood that my subjectivity as an American woman having just engaged him in two hours of discussion about the production may have prompted this altered perspective, since he had stated earlier that the changes to her character did not greatly affect the play.

16. Wajs, e-mail, 2.

17. Wang Zhousheng, "Zhe shi yige xiao shijie" [It's a small world], in *Peidu furen* [Student wife] (Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1993), 246.

18. Wang, *Peidu furen*, 247.
19. Ibid. Wang neglects to explain why she published several essays of dishonest representations of her impressions of America before recording the “truthful” version in her novel.
20. Wang Zhousheng, “*Peidu furen chujia le*” (*Student Wife gets married*). *Xinmin wanbao*, February 21, 1995.
21. Wang, “*Peidu furen chujia le*.”
22. Yu, interview, 1995.
23. Yu Luosheng, *Peidu furen* [Student wife], Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center and Shanghai People’s Art Theatre, March 1995 (official production script): 1–2. Verbatim from Wang Zhousheng, *Peidu furen* (Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1993), 1–2. Significantly, there is an inversion of this very scene (the opening sequence of the novel) in Wang’s postscript. She tells of a friend of hers who has recently returned from America with her newborn daughter and reports that the practice of resting babies on their stomachs has been changed; American pediatricians currently advocate the benefits of infants sleeping on their backs and criticize the dangers of sleeping prone. Thus, ultimately (and in *reality*, as opposed to in the “fictional” novel), the Chinese method is proven superior and Jiang Zhuojun’s Chinese wisdom prevails.
24. Yu Luosheng, *Peidu furen*, 2.
25. The “*jun*” in Jiang Zhuojun means “gentleman” or “monarch,” a reminder of the Confucian tradition of the reviled feudal “Four Olds.”
26. Lucia’s regard of Chinese culinary customs as unrefined and offensive is an interesting reversal of the typical Chinese visitor’s perspective on inferior American culinary practices: according to David Arkush and Leo O. Lee, food is the one area in which Chinese assert cultural superiority even when Chinese attitudes toward the United States are otherwise without contempt. See Arkush and Lee, eds., *Land Without Ghosts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 301.
27. Yu Luosheng, *Peidu furen*, 47 (original draft, 66).
28. Daly, interview. Curiously, Wang herself apparently is oblivious to her own act of radical stereotyping. She states in her postscript: “I gave my sympathy to every character in the novel, whether Chinese or American, man or woman, despite the differences in their personalities, no matter what contradictions and emotional entanglements they had between them—the reasons for all of it could be found in their individual cultural traditions” (*Peidu furen*, 247).
29. Yu, interview, 1995.
30. Daly, interview.
31. Ibid.
32. Xu Zheng, interview by author, tape recording, Shanghai, November 25, 1995.
33. Yu, interview, 1995.
34. Daly, interview.

35. Yu, *Peidu furen*.
36. Lily Tung, "Cultural Stages: Shanghai People's Art Theatre," *Shanghai Talk* 2, no. 3 (April 1995), 7.
37. Hongshan Li and Zhaohui Hong, *Image, Perception, and the Making of U.S.-China Relations* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998), 243.
38. Daly, interview.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Xu, interview.
41. Daly, interview.
42. Yu, interview, 1995. Daly's previous description of Basia Wajs also helps to explain why audiences might have perceived Lucia as being "ke'ai." Knowing both the script and Wajs quite thoroughly, my own estimation is that the character as written does not have many lovable traits, but Basia Wajs does, and her personality comes through very strongly in every role I have seen her play.
43. Tung, "Cultural Stages," 7.
44. She discussed her feelings with me at length. Daly also reflected: "Women in particular—Lily Tung, and the *Far East Economic Review* correspondent—most American women who came were very, very offended by the portrayal of Lucia" (Daly, interview).
45. Tung, "Cultural Stages," 7.
46. Daly, interview.
47. Xu, interview.
48. Daly, interview.
49. Xu, interview.
50. Many of the disappointments Xu expressed about the novel and play are echoed in a critique by another author, in *Wenhui bao*. The entire article is a rather somber analysis of Yu's handling of the production, written in the form of a fan letter; such honest and insightful dramatic criticism is quite rare in Chinese newspapers, and curiously contextualized in this particular article. (See Li Ling, "Peidu furen quele xie shenme?" *Wenhui bao*, April 21, 1995, 10.)
51. In one scene that takes place in Japan, a warm spotlight glows on a dining table as the voices of Japanese students "perform" the dinner scene over a microphone; the students remain invisible. This was a unique and powerful choice on Yu's part; here again, artistic innovation resulted from the dilemma of how to represent the foreign Other in a realistic and intimate setting within a contemporary cultural ethic/aesthetic.
52. Both plays were performed in the same third-floor "black box," formerly a rehearsal space, that was renovated specifically for the 1991 production of *The Woman Left Behind*.
53. Yu, interview, 1995.
54. *Ibid.*
55. Daly, interview.
56. *Ibid.*

57. Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 80.

58. Josephine Lee, *Performing Asian America: Race and Ethnicity on the Contemporary Stage* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 34.

59. Yu, interview, 1995.

60. Ibid.

61. See Vera Schwarcz, "The Burden of Memory: The Cultural Revolution and the Holocaust," *China Information* 11, no. 1 (Summer 1996): 1–13. See also Andrew Gurr's preface to his *Writers in Exile: The Identity of Home in Modern Literature* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1981), 7–12. This Freudian "working-through" process is of course invoked literally in *Bird Men*, but for different purposes.

62. Chaudhuri, *Staging Place*, 58.

63. In a subsequent Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center production, *The Romance of Stocks* (*Gupiao de yuanfen*, directed by Su Leci in 1999), Mark Kitto (a British magazine editor living in Shanghai) was cast in the role of Willis, an American businessman living in Shanghai in romantic pursuit of a Chinese woman he had met when they were business school classmates in the United States. Kitto, in contrast to Daly, did not attempt to alter the exaggerated stereotype of his character, and in fact enhanced the negative image the play created of a "dumb foreigner" due to his limited linguistic abilities (which resulted in unintended speech errors in addition to those written into the script). In *Stocks*, anti-Americanism is played out through comedy, and the American character is stripped of the kind of power held by Americans in *Student Wife* and *Dignity*: the Chinese female protagonist is superior to Willis economically, intellectually, culturally, linguistically—and is invested with the power to choose between Willis and her former boyfriend. In the end, the American suitor loses to the Chinese boyfriend, in addition to being comically humiliated throughout the play. For more on this play, see Conceison, "International Casting in Chinese Plays: A Tale of Two Cities," *Theatre Journal* 53 (2001): 277–290.

## Chapter 7: Anti-Americanism

The epigraph to this chapter is drawn from Wang Ning, "Orientalism versus Occidentalism?" *New Literary History* 28, no. 1 (1997): 64.

1. Lee Teng-hui, "Always in my Heart" (The Spencer T. and Ann W. Olin Lecture), June 9, 1995, 2.

2. *Qingnian bao*, September 27, 1995, 5. Cited by Jia Qingguo (Professor and Associate Dean, School of International Studies, Beijing University) in his lecture "Frustration and Hopes: Chinese Perception of the Engagement Policy Debate in the U.S.," Cornell University, February 15, 2000.

3. Song Qiang, Zhang Zangzang, Qiao Bian, et al., *Zhongguo haishi neng shuo bu* [China can still say no] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chubun gongsi, Novem-

ber 1996); Song Qiang et al., *Zhongguo keyi shuo bu* [China can say no] (Beijing: Zhonghua gongshang lianhe chubanshe, May 1996).

4. Peng Qian, Yang Mingjie, Xu Deren, *Zhongguo weishenme shuo bu?* [Why should China say no?] (Beijing: Xinshijie chubanshe, October 1996); Jia Qingguo, *Zhongguo bujinjin shuo bu* [China doesn't only say no] (Beijing: Zhonghua gongshang lianhe chubanshe, November 1996); Li Xiguang, Liu Kang, *Yaomohua Zhongguo de beihou* [Behind the demonization of China] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, December 1996).

5. Shen Jiru, *Zhongguo budang "Bu Xiansheng"* [China won't become "Mr. No"] (Beijing: Jinri Zhongguo chubanshe, February 1998).

6. Translations from the production script of *Zunyan* (Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center, August 22, 1997) are mine.

7. Zhang Minjie, "Liumei xueren de 'bianji xintai'" [The "marginal psychological state" of Chinese students in the United States], *Qingnian yanjiu* [Youth studies], January 1997, 45–48. Translated in *Chinese Education and Society* 31, no. 2 (March/April 1998), 93–101. See chap. 1 for earlier reference.

8. For a more extensive discussion of the double-casting of *Dignity* and of the emergent practice of casting amateur foreigner actors alongside professional Chinese actors (in the Shanghai plays *Dignity*, *Student Wife*, *The Romance of Stocks*, and the Beijing adaptation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*), including interviews with participating actors (both local and foreign) and reflections on audience reception, see Conceison, "International Casting in Chinese Plays: A Tale of Two Cities," *Theatre Journal* (Spring 2001): 277–290.

9. Xu Chengxian, interview by author, tape recording, Shanghai, June 7, 2000.

10. Yu Luosheng, interview by author, tape recording, Shanghai, June 17, 2000.

11. Yang Yi, interview by author, tape recording, Shanghai, June 4, 2000.

12. Patrick Kelly, interview by author, tape recording, Shanghai, June 8, 2000.

13. Xu Chunping, "Juzuo jia Sha Yexin xie *Zunyan* shuo 'zunyan'" [Playwright Sha Yexin writes *Dignity*, says "dignity"], *Wenxue bao*, December 4, 1997.

14. For discussion of his 1991 play *Sun, Snow, Man* (*Taiyang, xue, ren*) that followed this formula, allowing Sha to embed risky political material in a play during the post-June Fourth crackdown, see Conceison, "The Main Melody Campaign in Chinese Spoken Drama," *Asian Theatre Journal* 11, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 190–212.

15. Along with my interviews with Shen Lin and others in Beijing, published newspaper articles accessed from theatre archives, a book published in Beijing in fall 2001 that collected the eventual script along with articles that inspired it and critiques from before and after the production was staged, and a brief description of the production by Li Ruru in *The Drama Review*, I am most indebted to Cheng Yinghong for sharing with me his excellent essay regarding the production and its context in turn-of-the-century intellectual debates in China. Much

of the descriptive information in this chapter is drawn from his essay, with his permission.

16. Guevara was heavily influenced by Mao's writings and had the strongest pro-China sentiments among the leaders of the Cuban revolutionary movement, despite the conflict of alliances with the USSR. Guevara visited China several times and wrote admiringly of what he learned and saw there. However, his emphasis on guerilla warfare in making revolution opposed the central Leninist principle of party leadership on which the Chinese revolution was based. Although his death, in 1967, received very little attention in the Chinese media, many Red Guards admired his tactics and read his *Bolivia Diary* when it became available (in "gray-cover" editions that circulated only among high-ranking cadres) a year later. Ironically, Guevara did not receive attention as a revolutionary hero in China until the recovery of his bones, in 1997, long after the revolution had ended. His popularity and the strong response to the play that claims his namesake may indicate that China's new nationalism has an increasingly revolutionary element.

17. Shen Lin, interview by author, tape recording, Beijing, July 23, 2001.

18. Huang as quoted in Cheng Yinghong, "Che Guevara: Dramatizing China's Divided Intelligentsia at the Turn of the Century," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 15, no. 2 (Fall 2003), 13.

19. Shen, interview.

20. Liu Zhifeng, ed., *Qie Gewala: fanxiang yu zhengming* [Che Guevara: repercussions and controversy] (Beijing: The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 2001), 104.

21. Shen, interview.

22. Cheng Yinghong, "Che Guevara," 6–7.

23. Both Cheng Yinghong and Li Ruru highlight this scene in their respective essays about the play, though neither of them indicate that it is based on a true news story; Shen Lin chose to use this same scene as an example of the aesthetic of the play and did connect it to the actual incident a few years earlier.

24. As quoted in Li Ruru, "Sino the Times: Three Spoken Drama Productions on the Chinese Stage," *The Drama Review* (Summer 2001): 139.

25. Cheng Yinghong, "Che Guevara," 19.

26. Shen, interview.

27. This is Shen Lin's recollection of the section of the play that goads audience members who are not aligned with Guevara's revolutionary ideas to leave. It is not verbatim from the script, but very close. The account of the Taiwanese patron who staged a walkout in response and later returned is also Shen's recollection.

28. Dai Jinhua quoted by Xu Panwen, "Che Guevara in China" in Liu, *Qie Gewala: fanxiang yu zhengming*, 8. Xu's original article appeared in *Xinwen zhouban* [Weekly news] June 19, 2001.

29. Quoted by Cheng Yinghong's essay from Za Xiduo's reprinted article in Liu, *Qie Gewala: fanxiang yu zhengming*, 308. Za's original article appeared in the journal *Wan Xiang* [Ten thousand images], September 2000.

30. Censorship process for *Che Guevara* as reported by Xu Panwen in Liu, *Qie Gewala: fanxiang yu zhengming*, 12.

31. Meng Jinghui, interview by author, Santa Barbara, CA, November 26, 2002.

32. Quoted in Li Ruru, "Sino the Times," 140.

33. The long-term awareness of the potential for drawing audiences from Shanghai's tens of thousands of foreign residents led Zhu Dakun, a producer for the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center, to commission a production of Dario Fo's *An Ordinary Day* in July 2001, directed by David Jiang (Jiang Weiguo) and featuring separate English- and Chinese-language performances by actress Charlotte MacInnis. For more on this production, see Conceison, "No Ordinary Days," *American Theatre*, May/June 2002, 28–31, 77.

34. In fact, Lin Zhaohua's perspective on *Bird Men* is that the American identities of the Paul Ding and Charlie characters are irrelevant, or at least not to be considered in a serious light. (Lin Zhaohua, interview by author, tape recording, Beijing, July 24, 2001).

35. Deng Jianyun, "Yang guniang chuanguo Shanghai wutai" [Foreign girls burst onto the Shanghai stage], *Shanghai wenhua bao*, May 25, 1995; Chen Yu, "Bai Basia xihuan yanxi" [Basia likes to act], *Qingnian bao*, March 28, 1995.

## Chapter 8: Self-Occidentalism

The epigraph to this chapter is drawn from James G. Carrier, "Occidentalism: The World Turned Upside Down," *American Ethnologist* 19, no. 2 (1992): 197.

1. Playwrights Sun and Fei kept the title *Swing Lovers* in Chinese when they translated the play, but then later abbreviated the English title to *Swing* so as to avoid the likely (mis)interpretation by foreigners that the play's content would include spouses exchanging sexual partners, as the term "swing lovers" in American vernacular implies.

2. Lei Guohua, interview by author, tape recording, Shanghai, July 11, 2001.

3. Ibid.

4. Some articles in English refer to Huang Angang as "Big Tony," but director Lei Guohua insists this term is derogatory, so I refrain from using it. (Lei Guohua, phone interview, tape recording, November 6, 2003.)

5. Lei, interviews, July 11, 2001, and November 6, 2003.

6. Fei Chunfang, interview by author, Shanghai, May 10, 2002.

7. Matt Trusch, *Swing* journal entries, April 28, 2002.

8. Ibid.

9. Lei, interview, November 6, 2003.

10. Ibid.

11. Ironically, Fei addresses the unconventional perception of dramatic authorship in twentieth-century China influenced by collective practices in her



own published article, "Dramatizing the West in Chinese Spoken Drama," *Asian Theatre Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 102–116.

12. In the United States and Europe, changes to a script for professional productions without the author's permission are legally restricted; even a director's interpretation of a play can be effectively prevented by a playwright (control over Beckett's work is a famous example); there are also regulations regarding royalties, advertising, and prominence of the playwright's name on posters, programs, and print ads. In the United States, a playwright owns his or her work, whereas a screenwriter is more likely to sell the rights to (hence ownership of) his or her script to the studio producing it, which often brings in additional writers to rewrite the screenplay. American playwrights who venture into writing film screenplays often experience extreme discomfort and disappointment when they voluntarily forfeit legal and artistic control of their work, much like the feelings of Sun and Fei during and after the rewriting of their play by Huang, Lei, Xue, and Trusch. (U.S. practices confirmed and personal reflections conveyed by David Henry Hwang in a video conference, November 19, 2001, New York, NY, with students in the course titled "Chinese Transnationalism in Theatre and Film," Residential College, Ann Arbor, MI, fall 2001.

13. Matt Trusch, interview by author, tape recording, Shanghai, May 10, 2002.

14. "A New Crossroads," *City Weekend* 2, no. 5 (March 1–14, 2001): E9.

15. Lisa Keys, "Made in China: A Jewish Actor's Great Leap Forward," *The Forward* (a Jewish newspaper journal), vol. CV, no. 31 (July 27, 2002).

16. "A New Crossroads."

17. Michael Berry, "Rocky 'Roads,'" <http://www.offoffoff.com/film/2001/xroads.php3/>.

18. Matt Trusch, self-designed promotional brochure, 2001.

19. I asked Trusch to clarify the claims in his brochure, which he did during our interview; a listing of four previous leading roles (two as a child and two in college) appears in his April 28, 2002, journal entries, from which the quotation is drawn.

20. Trusch, journal.

21. Trusch, interview.

22. David Pandt, "On the Shanghai Game," *METROzine* (Shanghai edition), May 1, 2002, 50.

23. Trusch confirmed in our interview that he invented this phrase, but that he does not admit to it publicly.

24. Quotation is from Trusch's self-designed brochure; information about Trusch's regular participation in Latin dancing at DD's is from Ahmed Baaumer, "Do the Shanghai Salsa—'Matt Trusch Style,'" *Travel China* (Shanghai edition), vol. 11, no. 7 (February 24–March 3, 1999).

25. Trusch, interview.

26. Trusch, e-mail correspondence, March 30, 2003.

27. Trusch, interview.
28. Ibid.
29. This was confirmed by Trusch in our taped interview.
30. Trusch, interview.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. The four plays that opened the same night were a Beijing opera, a Shanghai farce, a children's theatre production of *The Emperor's New Clothes*, and the spoken drama *Swing* (under the auspices of independent sponsorship labeled the Shanghai Municipal Performers Art Troupe [*Shanghai shi yanchujia yishu tuan*]). The Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center also had other productions running before, during, and after the run of *Swing* and thus competed for adequate audiences even as they were supposed to be providing marketing and ticket sales for *Swing*. See "Four New Plays Open Tonight" ("4 tai xinxi jintian tongshi shouyan"), *Liberation Daily*, April 12, 2002.
34. Trusch, interview.
35. Ibid.
36. Sun Huizhu and Fei Chunfang, *Qiuqian qingren: duochangci huaju* [*Swing Lovers: an episodic drama*], unpublished script, September 15, 2001 (third draft), 1–3.
37. Ibid., 19–20.
38. Matt Trusch, trans., *Swing*, by William Sun and Faye Fei, April 2002.
39. Sun Huizhu and Fei Chunfang, *Qiuqian qingren* [*Swing lovers*], rehearsal/production script, April 1, 2002 (provided by Matt Trusch), 23.
40. Matt Trusch, e-mail correspondence, March 5, 2003.
41. Trusch, interview.
42. Sun and Fei, *Qiuqian qingren*, unpublished script, September 15, 2001 (third draft), 35–36.
43. Trusch, trans., *Swing*. For lines in Chinese, see Sun and Fei, *Qiuqian qingren*, rehearsal/production script (provided by Matt Trusch), 31–32.
44. Trusch, trans., *Swing*.
45. Trusch, interview.
46. Ibid.
47. Qian Chunlei, untitled interview in City People section, *Shenghuo zhouban* [*Life weekly*], April 18, 2002.
48. Trusch, e-mail, March 5, 2003.
49. In his preface to *Call to Arms (Nahan)*, Lu Xun (1881–1936, China's most revered modern writer) recounts a parable to his friend Jin Xinyi about an indestructible iron house, in which prisoners are sound asleep and about to suffocate. Lu asks Jin, "Now if you raise a shout to wake a few of the lighter sleepers, making these unfortunate few suffer the agony of irrevocable death, do you really think you are doing them a good turn?" to which Jin replies, "But if a few wake up, you can't say there is no hope of destroying the house." (Lu Xun, *Call to*

*Arms/Nahan* [bilingual edition], Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, trans., Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2000.)

50. Lei, interview, November 6, 2003.

## Epilogue

The epigraph to this chapter is drawn from Jeffrey Paul Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong, eds., *The Big Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 1.

1. James Moy, *Marginal Sights: Staging the Chinese in America* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 125.

2. Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 230–231.

3. *Ibid.*, 230.

4. *Ibid.*, 236.

5. *Ibid.*, 230.

6. Josephine Lee, *Performing Asian America: Race and Ethnicity on the Contemporary Stage* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 43.

7. *Ibid.*, 57.

8. Hwang's comment is from Gerard Raymond, "Smashing Stereotypes," *Theatre Week*, April 11, 1988, 8 (quoted in Moy, *Marginal Sights*, 122).

9. Moy, *Marginal Sights*, 122.

10. Karen Shimakawa, *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 3.

11. Shimakawa, *National Abjection*, 100.

12. Zhang Longxi, *Mighty Opposites: From Dichotomies to Differences in the Comparative Study of China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 82–83.

13. Stuart Hall, "Minimal Selves," in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, ed. Houston A. Baker Jr., Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindborg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 117.



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