THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE DIRECTOR
IN XIQUE INNOVATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the evolving role of the director in Xiqu (Chinese opera) innovation. Arguing that the status and function of the director within the Xiqu creative process is still developing, the author establishes a working understanding of the current situation by addressing it from several vantage points.

First, observing that Western concepts of "postmodern" theatre, like Xiqu, often give more weight to the performance text than to the literary/dramatic text, the author employs concepts from semiotic performance theory to provide a basic understanding of the directorial function. In chapter 2 the author addresses historical, political, social, and economic forces shaping the development of the Xiqu director's role.

To provide a baseline understanding of contemporary Xiqu directors' circumstances, in chapter 3 the author compares traditional Xiqu performance with the way such performances are occurring in the contemporary urban setting of Beijing. To deepen this understanding, in chapter 4 the author compares film versions of two Xiqu plays: one film created just before the Cultural Revolution that preserved traditional Xiqu aesthetic goals; and one film created soon after China's opening to the West that privileged cinematic technique over Xiqu aesthetic goals. Applying concepts developed in chapters 3 and 4, the author then analyzes a regional Xiqu form (Hebei Bangzi) adaptation of Medea, directed by a Huaju (spoken drama) trained director, in chapter 5; and a Jingju (Beijing
opera) adaptation of Lao She's famous novel *Camel Xiangzi* (or *The Rickshaw Boy*), directed by a Xiqu trained director, in chapter 6.

Shifting to a broader perspective, in chapter 7 the author analyzes results of a survey on working conditions and artistic goals of 32 Xiqu directors. In chapter 8, the curriculum at the only established training program for Xiqu directors is discussed. In conclusion, the author identifies five potential approaches to the director-performer creative process represented by previously discussed material and asserts that the situation of Xiqu directors and Xiqu generally is significantly improved over the situation at the end of the 1980s as evidenced by the high level of artistry and stylistic consistency exhibited at a recent National Jingju Festival.
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LIST OF FREQUENTLY USED CHINESE TERMS


Jingju (京剧): Nationally prominent, highly stylized Xiqu form originating in Beijing.

Hebei Bangzi (河北梆子): A highly stylized regional Xiqu form centered in Hebei Province.

Huaju (话剧): Realistic, Western-style theatre initially imported to China in the early 1900s.

Role Types

sheng (生): Male characters, usually having a high level of intrinsic dignity. Subcategories include: older, younger, martial, civil.

dan (旦): Female characters. Subcategories include: old, young, martial, civil. Further divisions of young dan role type:
- qingyi (青衣, “blue cloth”) for refined characters, often uses watersleeves, emphasizes civil performance skills of song and speech.
- huadan (花旦, “flower dan”) for lively, flirtatious characters; often uses colloquial speech; emphasizes civil performance skills of speech and dance acting.
- daomadan (刀马旦, “sword and horse dan”) for warrior characters, emphasizes martial skills of combat and dance-acting.
- huashan (花衫, “flower shirt”) combines skills of above three.
- wudan (武旦, “martial dan”) warrior characters, emphasizes acrobatic skills.

hualian (花脸, “flower face”): Male characters, larger-than-life. Also called jing (净). Subcategories include civil and martial.

chou (丑, “ugly”): Usually comic, usually male. Usually lower level of intrinsic dignity. Subcategories include: martial, civil, and chou dan (female chou).

Performance Terms

liangxiang (亮相, “show the appearance”): a heightened pose, often used to punctuate a moment of high emotion.

paoyuanchang (跑圆场, “run the round field”): fast, small running steps with torso lifted and still. Used for running, or to indicate flying or floating.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The rise of someone called a "director" is essentially a twentieth century phenomenon. This is true for Xiqu (戏曲, Chinese indigenous theatre) in China, as well as in Europe and the United States. It is now a commonly held belief in the Xiqu world that a traditional staging of a traditional play\(^1\) might not need a director, while the staging of new plays or even the substantial reworking of older ones do require a director. In this dissertation, I will examine the situation of the Xiqu director from several perspectives: historical development of a generally perceived need for a specially trained Xiqu director; how the directorial function operates within the matrix of a highly collaborative, yet highly codified form; working conditions of contemporary Xiqu directors; and how the next generation of Xiqu directors is being trained for the future.

Through analysis of information taken from these various perspectives I argue that the role of "Xiqu director" is still very much in flux and that the concept of a director has not yet been fully integrated into the Xiqu creative process. Nonetheless, there is a strong focus currently on the importance of the director's remedial function. Because of a prevailing concern that the technical and creative skills of Xiqu performers are on the decline, many believe that a Xiqu director must be so fluent in Xiqu technique that he or she can step in to create when the performer is not up to the task. This perception marks a profound shift

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\(^1\) The term "traditional" is discussed more fully later in this introduction. I am using it here and throughout the dissertation consistently with common practice in China to refer to the staging practices and repertoire of late 19\(^{th}\) and early 20\(^{th}\) century Xiqu performance.
from the traditional Xiqu creative process in which the performer was decidedly the center.

Xiqu, usually given the absurdly incomplete translation “Chinese opera,” is an umbrella term encompassing more than 300 regional indigenous Chinese theatre forms. The translation is incomplete since, although singing is the most esteemed of its performative elements, Xiqu is a highly complex synthesis of movement, music, percussion, acrobatics, and literary content. It is often said that Xiqu’s hundreds of regional forms appear essentially the same visually, and are primarily to be distinguished by regional influences of folk music and dialects. But this description is somewhat inaccurate because there exists a subset of much more highly stylized forms—sometimes labeled “classical” (古典, gudian) or “large form” (大型, daxing) by Chinese scholars—such as Kunqu (昆曲, a Ming Dynasty Kunshan Xiqu form), Jingju (京剧, a Beijing Xiqu form), and Hebei Bangzi (河北梆子, a Xiqu form centered in Hebei province). There is a second subset of less stylized Xiqu forms, many of which were more recently developed, that are more rooted in folk music and dance, such as Huangmeixi (黄梅戏). These forms are sometimes labeled “folk” (民间, minjian) or “folk small plays” (民间小戏, minjian xiaoxi) by Chinese scholars. The forms in this second subset are generally recognized as being much less complex in terms of movement stylization, musical structure, and plot content—though extensive borrowing from the classical forms and various centrally motivated reform movements have made these distinctions much less clear (Dolby 1976, 220-230). And though
these folk forms are less revered artistically, they are nonetheless acknowledged to be quite popular in the local communities out of which they arose (Bao 1994, 123). In this study I will focus primarily on the first, more highly stylized subset. Special but not exclusive emphasis will be placed on Jingju, the only one of the 300 plus Xiqu forms currently performed throughout China and the form most well known outside its borders.

Jingju as a form is a synthesis of elements of many different regional forms. It was born in the flurry of artistic activity occasioned by Qing Emperor Qianlong’s (r. 1735-1796) 70th birthday in 1780. Performers from throughout China came to Beijing to participate in the celebrations. Many performers stayed, and a cross-pollination of regional forms began. When the emperor turned 80, another influx of performers arrived—of particular importance was a troupe from Anhui province where the local opera used the musical modes of xipi (西皮) and erhuang (二黄), which are still the two major modes of Jingju’s musical structure (Mackerras 1983a, 103-106). Jingju continued to evolve and borrow from other forms, eventually replacing Ming Dynasty Kunqu as the national Xiqu form (see generally, Mackerras 1994). Jingju experienced a golden age in the early part of the 20th century during a period in which extraordinary performers including Mei Lanfang (梅兰芳) rose to prominence. These performers are credited with extremely successful innovations, including expanding the repertoire and raising the level of synthesis of vocal and physical elements. Another point of radical innovation occurred during the Cultural
Revolution (1966-1976) when traditional plays were banned and new "model" works were created. These plays were widely acknowledged for major musical innovations if lacking in other areas such as movement and character development. Thus Jingju has a "tradition" of innovation and integration of diverse influences. But it currently sits at the center of intense conflicting pressures: the need to innovate to attract contemporary audiences and the need to preserve, engendered by its current status as endangered yet nationally representative performing art. As a result, Jingju has become a difficult form within which to innovate successfully. Similar though less intense forces constrain other Xiqu forms. Beginning in the 20th century, the director has become an increasingly important impetus in the search for innovation within Xiqu.

Previous research

Chinese language sources on the role of Xiqu director are prevalent in the form of articles written by individual directors about specific projects. Few more comprehensive studies exist. A 1995 three-volume publication aimed at giving younger audiences a general introduction to Jingju does not address directors (Tianjin Jiaoyu Chubanshe). A 1993 work by Shaanxi opera performers Wang Yan (王炎) and Wang Xiaomin (王小民), titled The Art of Qinqiang Performance and Direction (秦腔表导演艺术, Qinqiang Biao-Daoyan Yishu), gives practical hints for successful staging of traditional plays and descriptions of innovations in selected productions but does not address broader issues of directorial creative
authority. A 1994 work by Huang Zaimin (黄在敏), titled *Introduction to Xiqu Directing* (戏曲导演概论, *Xiqu Daoyan Gailun*), gives a more detailed but still mostly technical discussion. The author gives specific examples and offers quotes from a few working directors, but does not attempt to make a survey of broader practices. Gao Yu (高宇) published an exhaustive historical survey in 1985, identifying evidence of directorial functions served by playwrights and other Xiqu artists titled *Collected Studies of Classical Xiqu Directing* (古典戏曲导演学论集, *Gudian Xiqu Daoyan Xuelunji*). Li Zigui's (李紫贵) 1992 *Collected Theoretical Writings on the Art of Xiqu Performance and Directing* (戏曲表演艺术论集, *Xiqu Biao-Daoyan Yishu Lunji*) offers detailed insight into the historical development of the directorial function in Xiqu and is discussed in chapter 2.

The most authoritative statement on the role of the Xiqu director was written by A Jia, an important director and theorist also discussed in chapter 2, for the Xiqu volume of an officially endorsed encyclopedia (A Jia 1983, 443-449). A Jia lists helping the actor in character development and ensuring that the actors serve the play ahead of their own fame as among the Xiqu director's most important responsibilities. More tangentially related Chinese language sources are discussed in chapter 2.

Most English language sources do not address the role of the director in Xiqu. Faye Chunfang Fei's collection, *Chinese Theories of Theater and Performance* (1999), contains an essay by a Huaju director but nothing on Xiqu directing. Similarly, neither Jo Riley's *Chinese Theatre and the Actor in*
Performance (1997), Elizabeth Wichmann’s Listening to Theatre (1991), Colin Mackerras’s Chinese Theatre (1983), nor Tao-Ching Hsu’s The Chinese Conception of Theatre (1985) mention Xiqu directors. Elizabeth Wichmann-Walczak has addressed the issue of creative authority in several articles. The most recent of these is titled “Reform at the Shanghai Jingju Company and Its Impact on Creative Authority and Repertory” (2000) in which she discusses the adoption by that company of a cooperative creative process in which all participants have a say. Chapter 7 of this dissertation addresses how issues of creative authority are being resolved in other companies.

Finally, it is important here to note that much of what is known even about traditional Xiqu, let alone more recent experimentation, has not been written down. Therefore, as famous director and theorist A Jia admonishes, “when researching the art of the Xiqu director, you cannot be limited to written sources, you must also conscientiously research and summarize living people’s actual experiences” (1983, 448).

Methodology

1. Prior preparation and fieldwork

Prior to the year of research that is the focus of this dissertation, I spent a year in Beijing (1995-96) studying performance techniques at the National Xiqu Academy and attending an average of several Xiqu performances a week. I have also performed leading roles in three English language Jingju productions at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa. Master performers from the Jiangsu Province Jingju Company trained us for these performances through group
movement and voice classes and individual coaching sessions for a period of seven months for each production. This practical experience has greatly increased my understanding of Jingju conventions as well as heightened my perceptive abilities in viewing Xiqu performances. I have also pursued my own avid interest in directing for the stage. I have directed 14 productions, taken numerous directing classes, and taught a number of undergraduate directing courses.

During the year of my fieldwork (1998-99), I continued my study at the Xiqu Academy and took courses in Xiqu History at the Central Drama Academy (Zhongyang Xiju Xueyuan), which primarily trains Huaju artists. In addition, I conducted interviews with directing teachers; observed Xiqu directing classes, rehearsals, and student performances; conducted a mailed survey of working Xiqu directors; and attended scores of professional Xiqu performances.

2. Theoretical context

In order to consider the role of the director in Xiqu innovation, it is useful to begin with a brief discussion of the semiotic process at work in a theatrical performance. Jon Whitmore, drawing on the work of numerous theorists discussing the semiotics of performance, offers a useful model of this process. According to this model, the SOURCE material (imagination of the playwright, director, designers, composers, performers, and technicians) is expressed through the TRANSMITTER (the performers’ vocal and physical expression, the mise-en-scène, and secondarily any audible or visual responses of spectators).
using **SIGNIFIERS** (spoken or sung words, music, color, light, odor, movement, gesture, etc.). The producers of the source material “encode” it by their specific choices of signifiers. The **CODE** is the set of rules or guidelines that are understood at both the source and the receiving ends of the equation. During the performance, the signifiers are taken in by the **RECEIVER** (the spectator’s eyes, ears, nose, taste buds, skin), and through a process of understanding (or misunderstanding) of the code, the spectator decodes the signifiers, thereby creating the **SIGNIFIED**, and then concocts **MEANINGS** (cognition, emotions, spiritual awareness, aesthetic osmosis) out of the signified (Whitmore 1994, 24-25). Directorial decision making results in a shaping of the set of signifiers for a particular performance, foregrounding some systems of communication and de-emphasizing others, usually in the hope that a majority of members of the audience will concoct a similar set of **CORE** meanings.

Of key interest to the discussion of Xiqu performance is the concept of the code. In Xiqu, the set of rules that is traditionally understood by those at both the source/transmitter end and receiver/spectator end of the equation is an extraordinarily complex web of communication systems, where for initiated spectators (i.e. those familiar with the complex code) the relationship between signifier and signified is very tightly controlled. In other words, a particular gesture or percussion pattern or costume piece has a very specific set of potential meanings that is readily understood by the initiated spectator.

This semiotic approach to analysis of Western performances has been particularly useful to an understanding of the distinction between the “dramatic
text" (meaning the literary creation of the playwright) and the "performance text," (primary credit for the creation of which is generally given to the director). But as anyone who has participated in a theatrical production can surely attest, this concept of director is a fiction. The mise-en-scène of almost every production, even one headed by a director as autocratic as Robert Wilson, is still the result of a complex interaction between numerous artists. John Rouse suggests that we:

"legitimize" [the performance] text’s authority by attributing it to the director. And the authority we usually legitimize in this way is not that over the internal constitution of the systems within the performance text but, instead, the relationship between the performance text and the dramatic text, defined as interpretation. /Director/ has become that sign we use to inscribe that connotational consistency and interpretational purpose we propose to glimpse within and behind a "weaving together" of the strands of the dramatic with those of the performance text. (1992, 147)

I assert that the performance text of a traditional Xiqu production comes pre-legitimized. As discussed more fully below, the performance text carries much more weight than the dramatic text in a Xiqu performance. What must be legitimized in a newly created Xiqu play are any deviations from the traditional Xiqu performance language, or code. On the other hand, the dramatic text is increasingly important in providing the motivation for innovations in Xiqu performance, so it must also be considered.

The "connotational consistency and interpretational purpose" identified by Rouse can be loosely divided into two categories. First, the interpretation may seek to deepen, heighten, expand but nonetheless flow in the same direction as the meaning/river of the dramatic text. The other category of interpretation challenges, questions, seeks to recontextualize, or even completely deconstruct
the fictional world of the dramatic text in some “postmodern” fashion. Though by far the vast majority of theatrical productions in the United States are of the former kind, when speaking of “innovative” theatre directors, we are very often referring to this second, “question the dramatic text” kind of director. While there are an increasing number of productions in China that readily fit the second, postmodern model, they are to my knowledge exclusively of the Huaju (话剧) style² of performance. Of the hundreds of Xiqu performances I have seen, all have been of a chronologically linear plot structure presented via a performance text clearly designed primarily to “tell” rather than “question” the story as it is contextualized in the fictional world of the drama.

In an article about the relationship between playwright and director for the Hunan Province Xiqu Directors Academic Journal (湖南省戏曲导演学报, Hunan Sheng Xiqu Daoyan Xuebao), Jiang Run acknowledges the necessity for the director to draw extensively on his own independent artistic views and imagination to create the visual and aural dimension of the production. Jiang nonetheless asserts that the goal of the Xiqu director is for “content and form [to] achieve an artistic state of perfect union,” explaining further:

Of course, no matter what additions, deletions, revisions to the script the director makes, they all must be faithful to the intent of the original work

²Theatre in China is divided fairly rigidly into two categories: Xiqu (戏曲, “theatre [of] song”) and Huaju (话剧, “spoken drama”). There is some cross over between the two worlds, but it is limited. Realistic plays about the Xiqu world are not infrequent, and require expert assistance from Xiqu practitioners. Many of the faculty at the National Xiqu Academy teaching in the areas of theory and playwriting were trained at the Central Drama Academy. And two former professional Xiqu performers had returned to study at the Central Drama Academy when I was there in 1998-1999. But the divide nonetheless remains quite deep, with much prejudice on either side about the value of the talents and skills of those in the “other” camp.
and must genuinely and thoroughly be founded on the playwright’s artistic plan in the work (this includes the script’s theme and ideas, form, style, historical background and the writer’s special characteristics). In other words, the director who leaves the original work has exceeded his authority as a director. (Jiang Run 1990,125)

Such views of the director’s role are consistent with those expressed in all of the interviews I conducted with Directing Department faculty at the National Xiqu Academy. Huang Zaimin is the current head of the Performance and Directing Research Program of the Xiqu Research Institute at the Chinese National Arts Research Academy (中国艺术研究院戏曲研究所表导演研究室, Zhongguo Yishu Yanjiuyuan Xiqu Yanjiusuo Biao-Daoyan Yanjiushi). He devotes a substantial portion of the introductory chapter of his book, Introduction to Xiqu Directing, mentioned above, to a discussion of directing as “an art of secondary creation” (“再创造的艺术,” “zai chuangzao de yishu”) (1994, 1-16).

Judging by the emphasis placed on script analysis in English language directing textbooks, many in the West would agree with this basic tenet that a director’s art is often a secondary creation based on the primary creation of the playwright’s work (see e.g., Hodge 2000, 15-58; Dean 1990, 22-32). Contemporary American playwrights and their lawyers would assert that Jiang Run’s above description of the director’s authority, allowing for “additions, deletions, revisions,” is entirely too liberal. The current amateur rights contract from Dramatists Play Service, Inc. states as its first condition:

The play must be presented only as published in the Dramatists Play Service acting edition, without any changes, alterations or deletions to the text, title or gender of the characters. These restrictions shall include,
without limitation, not altering, updating or amending the time, locales or settings of the play in any way. (2003)

Chinese playwrights do not yet have similar commercial or legal clout to protect their work in this way.

On the other hand, just because a director (or playwright) is "telling" rather than "confronting" a story does not prevent him or her from engaging in profound social critique. Many Xiqu plays from the Yuan dynasty are prime examples. During the Yuan, Mongolian invasion turned the Confucian order upside down and left Han Chinese scholar/would-be officials unemployed. These scholars turned to writing dramas and often veiled their discontent in stories of faithful women as a metaphor for their own loyalty to the Han (Liang 1985, 122; Dolby 1983, 42). More recently, the Shanghai Jingju Company's production of Cao Cao and Yang Xiu (曹操与杨修, Cao Cao yu Yang Xiu) was declared best new Jingju play since the Cultural Revolution by the Chinese Ministry of Culture. The premiere production in 1988 was seen as an artistic examination through historical parallel of the relationship between Mao and Peng Dehuai just before the Cultural Revolution. Later revisions of the play were received as paralleling the relationship between Deng Xiaoping and Zhao Ziyang just before the 1989 government crackdown on protesters in Tian'anmen Square (Wichmann-Walczak 2000, 105). Drawing on characters and events depicted in the classic historical novel Romance of the Three Kingdoms (三国演义, San Guo Yanyi), the
Shanghai troupe's production continues a long tradition of using stories set in the historical past to critique current social and political conditions.³

Another factor of profound importance to the Xiqu director is the existence of potentially total control by government censors. Political winds shift often in China, and Ministry of Culture officials must view and approve new productions before they are presented to the public. *Cao Cao and Yang Xiu*’s strong political critique is a fortunate aberration. On the other hand, the 1998 cancellation of the Shanghai Kunqu Company’s New York-bound *Peony Pavilion* by Chinese authorities attests to the continued power of Chinese governmental censorship over both form and content (Pomfret 1998).

My assertion that Xiqu performance texts “tell” rather than “question” the story of the dramatic text is not meant to imply that Xiqu is a primarily plot-oriented performance form. Traditionally, the primary aesthetic pleasure from attending a Xiqu play was derived from the display of extraordinary performance skills within the fictional context of the situation of the character being portrayed. Display of skill without character context is dismissed as the equivalent of acrobatics; in the same way that one might perceive an Olympic gymnast’s floor routine as amazing but not of any artistically great significance (Wichmann 1991, 2; A Jia 1983, 448). In addition, most traditional Xiqu plays drew their plots and characters from pre-existing sources that were generally familiar to the audience.

³ An obvious Western equivalent would be Anouilh’s 1940s reworking of *Antigone*, which, despite his protests that his intent was not political, was received by audiences as a metaphoric exploration of French citizens resisting collaboration during the German occupation (Styan 1981, 2: 117-118).
The initiated spectator knew what would happen next and how the characters would eventually end up (Wichmann 1991, 12). In this context, involving the production of a traditional play for initiated spectators, primary focus is on the performance text, rather than the dramatic text. Thus in Xiqu, the tradition itself serves as the code that enables the initiated spectator to receive and decode the signifiers of the performance text. Western audiences expect this function to be served by the director through implementation of a unified directorial concept.

During the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), traditional plays were banned. A set of eight “model revolutionary works” was created under close scrutiny of Communist party officials, particularly Mao’s wife Jiang Qing (江青). These works depicted heroic acts of Communist soldiers and common peasants in defeating various sources of oppression such as bandits, Japanese invaders, and their Nationalist Party collaborators. Furthering the goals established in Mao Zedong’s “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and the Arts” in 1942, the plays served as unapologetic propaganda for the Communist Party and were designed to appeal to the masses. (Mackerras 1983b, 156-60; Liang 1985, 157-58; Mao Zedong 1967). During this period many of the conventions of traditional Xiqu were declared counter-revolutionary remnants of China’s feudal past and banned from the stage. As a result, there was a

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4 A devastating example included the banning of the traditional costume pieces that served as the foundation of much of traditional Xiqu’s movement repertoire. Pre-1949 experiments with modern dress plays had failed successfully to resolve this issue. And while these model plays achieved many successful artistic innovations, they are generally perceived as being rather simplistic and repetitive in terms of movement when compared to the richness of the traditional movement vocabulary (Chen Zengkun, 1995).
decade-long break in the training of both actors and spectators in the technique and understanding of many of Xiqu's performance conventions.

In addition, changes in focus in the public education system have meant that many young people are not only unfamiliar with Xiqu's performance language but also with the traditional source material. For example, a professor at the National Xiqu Academy explained that his daughter, an advertising executive, had never read the classical novel The Western Chamber (西厢记, Xi Xiang Ji), from which many Xiqu plays have been adapted. She was familiar with the novel's matchmaker and favorite Xiqu character, Hong Niang, only from the character's contemporary incarnation as host of a television dating game (Chen Zengkun, 1999). Meanwhile, both the popularizing goals of the Cultural Revolution model plays and post-Cultural Revolution pressures from the increasing flood of imported Western-style entertainments have resulted in more plot-oriented Xiqu plays, by which I mean the plot is not presumed to be familiar to the spectators and finding out what happens next is a much more substantial part of the spectator's aesthetic experience.

As a result of these forces, the traditional Xiqu semiotic equation has been disrupted. Indeed, Xiqu, and particularly Jingju, is perceived as being in a state of crisis. Due to the factors discussed above, audiences, at least in Beijing, are declining precipitously. At the same time, companies must rely increasingly on box office revenues to support their work (Wichmann-Walczak 2000, 96-98).

5 The situation in Shanghai at the end of the 20th century was reportedly much more encouraging. See Wichmann-Walczak 2000.
Thus there is a general call for innovation in all aspects of performance to lure audiences back to the theatre.

As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, a common tactic employed to facilitate innovation was to bring in directors trained in Western-style realistic Huaju. By the early 1990s, this experiment was generally thought to have been a failure, since most Huaju directors are simply not fluent in the complex performance language of Xiqu, usually marginalizing it from its traditional centrality in the aesthetic event to mere decorative addition to the dramatic text (Wichmann 1990, 158-60). On the other hand, the practice has not completely disappeared. In the recent commercial production, *Prime Minister Hunchback* (掌柜刘罗锅, Zaixiang Liu Luoguo), award winning Jingju director Shi Yukun (石玉昆), discussed in chapter 6, was assisted by two spoken-drama directors to stage this extravagant experiment in updating Jingju for modern audiences (“Peking Opera with Modern Form” 2000, 1-2).

Nonetheless, in recognition of the general failure of the use of Huaju directors for Xiqu productions, a call was raised for the establishment of a specifically Xiqu director (A Jia 1983, 449; Gao Yu 1985, 2). The basic functions of director as script interpreter and organizer of stage activity is thought to be the same for both Xiqu and Huaju directors (Gao Yu 1985, 3). I assert that with regard to the question of innovation, however, an additional and hugely important discourse of a Xiqu director is between the performance text developed for a particular production and the complex systems of the traditional
performance language as these relate to the ideas of the dramatic text.

Perhaps, more accurately, with a performance language as rich in both aural and visual systems of communication as Xiqu, there is little doubt that almost any story could be told through Xiqu performance conventions. The question—and the standard by which a Xiqu director will be awarded the title "successfully innovative"—is whether he or she is able to present a production that creatively adapts that particular Xiqu form’s traditional performative systems of communication in a way that serves the dramatic text but does not overstep traditional boundaries to the point that the performance is no longer recognized as Xiqu. Innovation in Xiqu is desirable, especially if the innovation might attract new audiences. This means that part of a Xiqu director’s function is to stage traditional elements in a way that is accessible to uninitiated spectators. On the other hand, the production must not be too innovative. It must still be readily recognizable by the Xiqu world as Xiqu.

I am aware that I am here engaging in a suspect essentializing of the Xiqu “tradition” as a pre-supposed constant. Nonetheless, that is how my teachers, the artists I interviewed, and the critics responding to performances all articulated this circumstance. As Phillip Zarrilli helpfully asserts:

Although twentieth-century identities no longer necessarily presuppose continuous cultures or traditions, there are nevertheless many contexts within which either “the world” or at least some more framed and circumscribed arenas of experience are imagined as continuous, and where tradition is cast in the role of maintaining and authorizing a particular form of continuity within that particular experiential arena. (Zarrilli 1992, 17)
Xiqu is just such a context. As Elizabeth Wichmann-Walczak notes, “[A] production is [J]ingju only and precisely because the experts say so, and the job of the experts is to keep [J]ingju [J]ingju, even as it grows and develops” (2000, 105).

Constraints on innovation are certainly not limited to traditional performance forms. John Rouse asserts that the relationship between Western text and performance is a question “both of the possible and the allowable.” If the boundary of allowability is crossed, the production will be marginalized using such labels as “nondramatic theatre” (Rouse 1992, 146).

In Xiqu, within the universe of possible choices, the boundaries of the subset of the allowable are defined by an intricate web of minutely detailed performance conventions that have been refined over centuries. As a result, many of the traditional solutions are extraordinarily “right.” If a particular dramatic moment has a parallel in the traditional repertoire, finding something that serves the dramatic situation “better” will be a difficult task. Conversely, if the particular dramatic moment does not have a traditional parallel, finding something that serves the moment but that is still recognized by the experts as Xiqu will likewise be very difficult (cf. A Jia 1983, 448). The contemporary Xiqu director must negotiate this treacherous territory between the possible and the allowable. If he or she fails, the result will be marginalized using such labels as “Huaju with song added,” and will be rejected by Xiqu experts. I use Whitmore’s analytical model, discussed more fully in chapter 3, to aid my analysis of directorial choices resulting from this negotiation process.
Approach of this study

In chapter 2, I discuss the historical development of directors working in Xiqu as it relates to the framing system of the traditional performance language. In chapter 3, I examine the elements of Whitmore's semiotic framework as they operate in the context of contemporary, urban Xiqu performances. My goal is to familiarize the reader with basic Xiqu performance elements as they are evolving under contemporary pressures. In chapter 4, I examine more deeply the specific processes by which Xiqu performances communicate meaning through the integration of these various sign systems. I place special emphasis on the potential for directorial choices to either heighten or frustrate traditional Xiqu aesthetic goals. To do this, I employ concepts from semiotic film theory to analyze two films of Xiqu plays: one from before the Cultural Revolution that successfully furthered traditional Xiqu aesthetic goals, and one from the post-Cultural Revolution period in which the aesthetic goals pursued were much different. In chapters 5 and 6, I apply the models and concepts outlined in chapters 3 and 4 in a case study approach. In chapter 5, I analyze a Hebei Bangzi (河北梆子, one of the more highly stylized regional Xiqu forms) production of Medea using a Huaju director. In chapter 6, I analyze a production with a Xiqu-trained director that was based on Lao She's famous novel, Camel Xiangzi (骆驼祥子, Luotuo Xiangzi, sometimes translated as The Rickshaw Boy).

In the last two chapters, I shift to a broader perspective. In chapter 7, I examine the current situation, including employment circumstances and scope of
creative authority, of thirty-two Xiqu directors based on responses to a mailed survey I conducted in 1999. And finally in chapter 8, I focus on how various contemporary social and economic pressures are being accommodated in the development of a program for training Xiqu directors at the National Xiqu Academy. By analyzing the issue from these various perspectives, I hope to produce a useful picture of the evolving role of the director in contemporary Xiqu.
CHAPTER 2
HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE XIQU DIRECTOR

The goal of this chapter is to trace major historical forces leading to current understandings of the role of the Xiqu director. Important staging practices and productions are discussed. In addition, special emphasis is placed on three artists. First is Li Zigui (李紫贵) (1915 - ), who began studying and performing Xiqu as a child and became a famous martial sheng. Because of his 30 years performance experience and over 50 years of experience directing Xiqu, Chinese Theatre Publishers asked to publish his collected writings on the art of Xiqu performance and directing. The first hand experiences and other information recounted in these respected writings offer a wealth of information about the rise of the director in the first half of the 20th century (Li Zigui 1992, “afterward” 595-597). Second is performer, director, playwright, and theorist Ouyang Yuqian (欧阳予倩) (1889-1961). Working in both Huaju and Xiqu, he became China’s most prominent director in this early period. Third is A Jia (阿甲) (1907-1994), also a respected Xiqu scholar, playwright, and performer, who became the most important of the post 1949 Xiqu directors.

Early Development

There has been a significant amount of research into evidence of the directorial function in the performance of pre-modern China. Much of this work has been with the apparent goal of refuting general perceptions that directing is a thoroughly Western import. Gao Yu (高宇) in particular has done a painstaking
search for evidence of an understanding of the directorial function, even though not so named, in scripts and performance records from the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD) to the present (Gao 1985). Li Zigui finds evidence of the director's work in Yuan Dynasty playwright Guan Hanqing's (c.1230-1300) plays, asserting that his extensive practical experience, including performing in his own plays, was a key factor contributing to the success of those plays (1992, 5; see also Zhongguo Dabaike 1983, 95). Li also finds famous Ming Dynasty playwright Tang Xianzu's (1550-1616) critical writings about his own plays and those of his contemporaries to be good examples of the kind of script analysis required of the director; Tang discussed not only the gist but also the structure of playscripts, identifying their strengths and weaknesses in a way that Li asserted would inspire a director to do good work with them in rehearsal. Like Guan Hanqing, Tang had his own performance troupe. In addition to performing, Tang also guided rehearsals and crafted the musical structure of his plays (Li Zigui 1992, 5-6).

Despite this evidence of "directorial function" in pre-modern China, there is fairly general acceptance of the notion that the current concept of the director, with its emphasis on a unified vision supporting the core ideas of a script, is a modern development in China based substantially on Western influences. In the officially sanctioned encyclopedia Zhongguo Dabaike Quanshu (中国大百科全书) volume on Xiqu, the entry for "xiqu director" (戏曲导演, Xiqu daoyan) is one of the more substantial entries in the volume. Written by A Jia, the entry covers
six double-columned pages and states that the director as a specialized function was not systematically adopted until after the Communist victory in 1949 (A Jia 1983, 443).

Li Zigui also agrees that the current conception of the Xiqu directorial function is of modern origin, but he offers interesting details about pre-1949 staging practices that bear on the development of the Xiqu director. He notes that by the time Jingju was becoming established as a nationally prominent form (during the second half of the 19th century), every performance had someone backstage organizing it. In the north this person was called the “cuan xi de” (攒戏的, lit. “one who collects or assembles the play”). In southern China at this time, companies had literary managers (文管事的, wen guan shi de) who handled the “cuan” function. For martial plays, there was also someone in charge of martial activities (武行头, wu xing tou) to organize the combat sequences (Li Zigui 1992, 11). Thus there were various people in charge of different aspects of organization and staging of traditional Xiqu plays, but no one person yet filling the overall function we designate for the director today.

According to Li, another major step on the road to the modern concept of the Xiqu director was the practice in Jingju of performing benxi (本戏) where major performers individually developed their own new plays. These were very much star vehicles highlighting the performer's particular skills, but even these required someone to “cuan” the production. This person was called the bao ben
zi de (抱本子的, lit. “one who holds¹ the script”) or bao zong jiang de (抱总讲的, lit. “one who holds the overall telling”)² or pai xi ren (排戏人, lit. “the person who rehearses the play”). Li offers Mei Lanfang’s famous play Farewell, My Concubine (霸王别姬, Bawang Bie Ji) as a representative example of plays developed in this way. Li notes that over time, rules developed for the rehearsal of these new plays: the “cuan xi de” first got familiar with the script, next prepared an outline, then got all the actors together, and, according to the requirements of the script, told everyone when they entered, to what point on the stage, when to speak a particular line or do a particular movement. There were also some leading actors who were able to use these rules and take control themselves and oversee rehearsal. Unfortunately, Li notes that as of the early 1990s (copyright date of his book) there were very few Xiqu artists left able to rehearse a whole play according to these rules (Li Zigui 1992, 11).

The main advantage of this process was that a play could be ready for performance very quickly. But Zhu Wenxiang (朱文相), former head of the National Xiqu Academy and architect of its current four-year curriculum for Xiqu directors, notes two important artistic limitations of this “cuan” process. First, it allowed for little innovation by performers to express a character’s individuality

¹ The character 抱 (bao) means to hold or carry in the arms or embrace, as one would with a small child—a interesting metaphor for a director’s work with a script.
² These first two designations probably relate to a common practice of the time: to protect the secrecy of scripts from competing Xiqu troupes each actor was given only his own lines. The “bao benzi de” would quite literally be the holder of the only complete copy of the script. (Zhu Wenxiang 1998).
beyond established conventions for that role type. Second, there was little opportunity to develop interaction between performers (Zhu Wenxiang 1998).

Other details of the “cuan” process are contained in a fascinating article written in 1938 as a doctoral graduation essay by a man who would later become one of China’s leading spoken drama directors, Jiao Juyin (焦菊隐). In “Today’s Chinese Theatre” (“今日之中国戏剧,” “Jinri zhi Zhongguo Xiju”), Jiao reviews the basic conventions of traditional Xiqu staging, including extensive comparison to Western staging practices (Jiao Juyin 1986, 1: 131-200). He discusses Xiqu performance elements in eight subparts: acting, role types, make-up, costumes, dance and song, speech, sets and props, and lastly and most briefly, directing. He begins the discussion of directing by observing that after reading the previous sections, “one can understand the reason that the director has no place in Xiqu” because performance elements are all “made absolutely uniform” (绝对划一, juedui hua yi) by traditional convention (1: 199). Xiqu is a living, breathing, evolving art form, so Jiao’s assessment of the impact of conventions is plainly overstated. Nonetheless, this is strong evidence that in 1938, a director was considered unnecessary for the staging of traditional Xiqu performances.

Jiao argues that because a performer began studying a single role type from an early age, one could say the performer’s teachers served as his director while he was in training. Since any performer knew over 100 plays “in his belly,” once he became familiar with the performance conventions, he no longer needed a director. Jiao concludes, “The success of a performance is due completely to
the performer's personal effort and skill. As a result, credit goes to the actor's industrious diligence during his period of artistic study and his own accumulated experience" (Jiao Juyin 1986, 1: 199-200). Jiao gives the following description of the rehearsal process in the 1930s:

*In Shanghai, when a traditional program has no new plays, the leading performer takes the responsibility of giving all the performers their lines. As soon as they have memorized their lines, the lead performer calls everyone together at his home for general rehearsals. If they encounter a particularly difficult dance or other movement sequence, they might hold individual or small group rehearsal. The actors just need to become somewhat familiar with their characters, and they will rarely make a mistake in performance. Because of the training they have undergone, they can all "raise hand toss foot" (举手投足, ju shou tou zu) with high proficiency, and precisely coordinate the performance in tacit understanding with each other. As a result, when rehearsing, from the beginning they don't sing because they have already memorized all the melodies thoroughly, just like an average person memorizing written characters. All that is required is the leading performer to tell them the main theme and overall plot, then based on their own understanding and experience they can perform the character. In this way, the leading performer under some types of circumstances temporarily becomes the equivalent of a director. (1: 200)*

Jiao goes on to describe the responsibilities of the backstage manager, who necessarily supplemented the lead actor's "director" responsibilities while he was onstage performing. Jiao asserts that the manager was required to be familiar with the plot and with the sequence of all characters' entrances and exits, and he often posted a schedule backstage listing the characters in every scene both for his own backup information and for actors to consult during performance. The manager was also often responsible for assigning the secondary performers, so he needed to have a thorough understanding of Xiqu as well as a familiarity with the talents of available performers (Jiao Juyin 1986, 200). Jiao's
description is helpful in that it emphasizes how the focus was on training first, then on performance, with little attention given to rehearsal.

This emphasis on performance was taken to a further extreme in the form of another interesting staging practice of the period. Called “curtain outline plays” (幕表戏, mu biao xi), these performances did not have a set script. Often these productions were organized by the equivalent of a writer/director who gave the performers an outline of the plot, character description, timing of entrances and exits, and onstage action, but otherwise gave them free rein. The practice became very popular in both Huaju and Xiqu and even the famous performers Mei Lanfang and Zhou Xinfang created plays of this type (Li Zigui 1992, 12-13). Li Zigui performed in them as a teenager and gives this description of the process:

At this time we usually rehearsed in the morning, the “paixiren” [lit. “one who rehearsed the play”] told you the play’s plot, about the character you would play, the content of each scene, how you were to enter and exit; that night this play would be performed. During the performance you wrote your own lines, as the percussion sounded, you created the movement, with the sound of the huqin [leading stringed instrument of the Jingju orchestra] you created the melody for your song. Performing this type of play, one can temper one’s ability to adapt on the spot and before an audience give an impromptu performance. Most of these “curtain outline plays" were modern dress, and were modern plays set in contemporary time, reflecting that time’s real society. (12)

Some of these plays became so successful they were written down afterward, and even performed by different companies; others had no life beyond the initial performance (12-13).

Many of the Huaju plays of this type were highly political, usually calling for “democratic revolution of the old type” (旧民主主义革命, jiu minzhu zhuyi
though some later plays also advocated socialist policies. And some Xiqu productions were also presented in this vein. It is clear that the content of these modern “curtain outline plays” differed substantially from the traditional Xiqu repertoire, which was based primarily on classical novels and other plots familiar to the audience. Being more plot-driven and set in contemporary times, this improvised staging practice seems an excellent exercise for both performers and directors hoping to innovate within the traditional Xiqu form. Through such pressured work, writer/directors would be doing the equivalent of quick sketching exercises in a life drawing class, forced to make on-the-spot decisions and cut to the heart of the matter. Similarly, performers could hone their technique, apply that technique to contemporary situations, and perhaps also develop confidence in their own creative abilities—as discussed in later chapters, young performers today are often criticized for deficiencies in all of these areas.

A related staging practice of this period involved a wildly successful and widely practiced serial performance structure, similar to a television soap opera, in which the narrative was stretched over many nights. Each night would end with a “cliff-hanger” to ensure return audiences. Called liantai benxi (连台本戏, lit. “joined stage same play”), the practice began in Beijing and Tianjin and was popular in the Qing dynasty court. Beijing and Tianjin performers brought the practice to Shanghai in the 1860s (Zhongguo Dabaike 1983, 207). Some of these plays, especially in the early period, were of high artistic quality. Shanghai Jingju Company revived a condensed version of one of the best of these, The Foxcat Substituted for the Crown Prince (狸猫换太子, Limao Huan
Taizi), presenting the second part at the 1998-99 Jingju Festival, where it won a second tier prize (below the gold prize) with eight other entries as an "outstanding production" (Fang Yu 1999, 8). Li Zigui notes that the original version of this play, first staged in 1911, as well as several similarly structured plays performed by Zhou Xinfang (周信芳), had many artistically excellent sections (1992, 6).

As with the "curtain outline plays," this serial play structure placed much more emphasis on plot than did plays in the traditional repertoire since the audience was presumed not to know what would happen next. Some of the plays incorporated political messages, but many were primarily aimed at entertainment. The bid for audiences led to increasingly fantastical and absurd plots and wild stage effects. Li attributes what he perceived of as a decline in popular tastes at least in part to the fact that by this time China had already declined to a "quasi-colony." Nonetheless, Li concludes that even such artistically questionable works needed someone to bring all the elements together. He therefore views these serial plays as another important step in the development of the modern conception of the Xiqu director (Li Zigui 1992, 12, see also Zhongguo Dabaike 1983, 207).

The First Acknowledged Xiqu Director

Western theatrical concepts have played a crucial role in the development of the Xiqu director. In this early period, this influence was brought particularly through the input of Ouyang Yuqian (欧阳予倩, 1889-1961), an important Huaju
and Xiqu artist of this period. Born in Hunan Province, he was a theatre educator, theorist, playwright, performer, and became the first person actually listed as a "director" in a Xiqu performance program (Li Zigui 1992, 15). In 1902, he had gone to Japan to study and was a member of the influential Spring Willow Society (春柳社, Chunliushe), a group of Chinese students who performed several realistic style productions in Tokyo (including an adaptation of Uncle Tom's Cabin) that were so successful they inspired similar experiments in Shanghai. The Society is credited with making the first major inroads of Western-style realism into the Chinese theatre world. In 1910, Ouyang founded the New Drama Society (新剧同志会, Xinju Tongzhihui) in Shanghai which performed Huaju plays and he is considered one of Huaju's most important founders. In 1916, he began creating and performing Jingju works as well, becoming such a famous performer of female roles that he was even compared to Mei Lanfang in the common saying "the south has Ouyang, the north has Mei" (南欧北梅, nan ou bei mei). In the course of his career, he created and adapted over sixty scripts for live performance and film, including over 30 for Xiqu, of which 13 are extant. In the production of most of these scripts he both composed the singing and served as director (Zhongguo Dabaike 1983, 268).

In 1921, he founded the Nantong Society for the Study of Acting (南通伶工学社, Nantong Linggong Xueshe), the goal of which was to establish a new type of Xiqu school to train performers with a broader cultural understanding in the hope that after they graduated they would be able to work to reform the
traditional repertoire (*Zhongguo Dabaike* 1983, 264-65). Due to what the *Dabaike* describes as "conservative forces," Ouyang left the society in 1922. The school did operate for seven years before closing due to financial difficulties, training 90 students, 60 of whom finished the program.³

During the Anti-Japanese War (1937-45), Ouyang participated in the resistance movement, especially through the Shanghai Theatre Association to Save the Nation (上海戏剧界救亡协会歌剧院, *Shanghai Xijujie Jiuwang Xiehui Gejubu*), which formed 13 performance troupes to spread anti-Japanese and patriotic propaganda in Shanghai and the surrounding countryside.⁴ According to Li Zigui, Jingju performers were frustrated by the limits of their traditional repertoire in addressing the critical issues of the day. They sought out Ouyang to help them create plays in support of the war effort. Ouyang wrote new Jingju plays, adapted others, and brought new directorial methods to Jingju. Li describes Ouyang's impact on Jingju:

> In directing, he took every aspect—acting, singing, music, set design, etc.—under consideration, in order that the performance achieved a main theme. When he directed, he often composed the arias himself. The scene design was different than the painted backdrops of the Curtain

³The impact of the impulse behind establishment of this school—that Xiqu performers were somehow "culturally inadequate"—is quite complex. Certainly, many Xiqu performers in pre-communist China received no formal liberal education, and many were illiterate. Ouyang's goal to ban corporal punishment and provide a basic liberal education to performers was criticized by his contemporaries for wasting students' time on "non-essentials" (Yang 1968, 52). But the approach was vigorously adopted by the Communist government after 1949 (24-26). Today, students at Xiqu schools study math and English, and a host of other subjects, making it virtually impossible for young performers to graduate with even 20 plays "in their bellies," let alone the 100 plays observed by Jiao Juyin as the norm in 1938 (Wichmann 1990, 163). As will be discussed in later chapters, this limited knowledge of the repertoire by today's young performers is often cited as a major factor both increasing the need for directors and increasing the scope of a Xiqu director's responsibilities to include many elements formerly handled by performers.

⁴For an excellent discussion of the growth of propaganda theatre for the masses during this period, see Mackerras 1983b, 151-156.
Outline and Installment plays, there was great innovation. This type of play, produced through the work of a director—in every aspect working as we think of the director today—there was nothing like it in Jingju before, and I’m afraid it hasn’t been surpassed since. (Li Zigui 1992, 13)

Ouyang also contributed to China’s political development, joining the Communist Party in 1955 and serving in numerous political and educational posts. He continued his artistic and scholarly contributions until his death in 1961, having a profound and lasting impact on the development of Xiqu performance and directing (Zhongguo Dabaike 1983, 268).

The Xiqu Director in New China

One person who might claim equal status to Ouyang, but in the later development of Xiqu directing, is A Jia (1907-1994). Born in Jiangsu Province, A Jia was a brilliant director, playwright, and theatre theorist who devoted his impressive fifty-year career to the study and practice of Xiqu. He joined Mao in Yan’an in 1938, entered the Communist Party in 1941, and served as director of the Yan’an Pingju Research Academy (延安平剧研究院, Yan’an Pingju Yanjiu Yuan), which was established in 1942. During this period, A Jia was involved in hundreds of productions and became one of the area’s most famous Xiqu performers. He also wrote and directed many new plays, and adapted traditional plays to conform to Communist ideals (Zhongguo Dabaike 1983, 1).

He was a member of the 120th Fighting Pingju Society (一二 0 师战斗平剧社, 120

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5 Pingju is another name for Jingju, coming from Beiping, which is an alternative name for Beijing.
6 This institute is consistently cited in sources from Mainland China as a major force in the development of modern Xiqu since it is where the first official attempts were made at reforming Xiqu to conform with Maoist thought (Zhongguo Dabaike 1983, 524).
which joined with another troupe after publication of Mao's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and the Arts," to become the Yan'an Pingju Company (延安评剧院, Yan'an Pingju Yuan). The new plays produced in this period were written and directed by committee, and all aspects of production underwent major scrutiny, producing many innovations, but A Jia is recognized as a major creative force from this period forward (Li Zigui 1992, 16).

Theatre in China became a highly politicized force during the Anti-Japanese War and continued as such through the subsequent civil war period. Its potential to reach the mostly illiterate masses in the countryside was exploited by both the Communists and the Nationalists. The Communists adapted the local Yangge (秧歌, "rice planting song") folk dance form to a highly successful agit-prop structure, including such plays as *Brother and Sister Reclaim the Wasteland* (兄妹开荒, Xiong Mei Kai Huang) (Mackerras 1983b, 154-155). The performers adapted these 20-minute scripts for specific audiences by first learning and then incorporating local dialects and folk music forms into the performance (Wang 1979, 36-37). The Yangge form reached its zenith with the production of the first full-length play, *The White Haired Girl* (白毛女, Baimao Nü), which was created in 1944 at the Yan'an Pingju Research Academy. Mao himself attended the official premiere and the production was so successful it played for 30 performances (43). In keeping with the practice during this period

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7 These "fighting" performance troupes really did fight alongside regular soldiers, entertaining them when a lull in combat allowed (Wang 1979, 35).
of producing plays by committee, no one was designated as “director” of the production. One of the playwrights described the rehearsal process:

During rehearsals the libretto was revised by the performers and producer, and many experts and students offered good advice. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that many of the country folk, as well as our school messengers and cooks, came eagerly to watch rehearsals and offered excellent suggestions, even on very minor points. (Ho Ching-chih 1954, ix [trans. Yang])

Ho Ching-chih himself came from a peasant family and, consistent with the political pressures of the time, emphasized the contributions of workers to the success of the production. Nonetheless, surely A Jia, in his leadership role within the Pingju Research Academy, would at least have been one of the experts offering good advice.

It seems clear that this intense focus on delivering a message, political or otherwise, was a factor contributing to the increasing importance of the directorial function in the development of Xiqu. Whether done by a committee or an individual director, the rigorous scrutiny to ensure that all aspects of a production are in fact serving the desired message or interpretation was key to the rise of the director in the West as well (see e.g., Braun 1982, 7). And Xiqu’s function as a major instrument of propaganda only intensified after the Communist victory in 1949.

In March 1949, seven months before the official Communist victory, the Bureau on Xiqu Reform was organized within the fledgling Ministry of Culture (中国文化部戏曲改进局, Zhongguo WenhuaBu Xiqu Gaijinju). One division of the Bureau was charged with revising traditional plays and creating new ones to
meet Communist ideological requirements. A Jia was appointed head of the Research Committee of the Bureau’s Artistic Division, a second division that focused on reform of staging techniques (艺术处研究室主任, Yishuchu Yanjiushi Zhuren) (Zhongguo Dabaike 1983, 1; Yang 1968, 23). In July 1950, along with Mei Lanfang, Ouyang Yuqian, Jiao Juyin, and other preeminent theatre artists, A Jia was appointed by the central government as a member of the influential Xiqu Reform Committee (戏曲改进委员会, Xiqu Gaijin Weiyuanhui). The main responsibilities of the Committee were to examine new and revised scripts produced by the Bureau and to advise the Ministry of Culture on policies and plans for Xiqu reform (Yang 1968, 27-28). A year later, based in large part on the work of the Committee, the central government issued a directive stating, “the main functions of drama are to promote patriotism among the people and encourage heroism in revolutionary struggle.” The directive included a call for revision or elimination of “harmful” performance elements and plays such as those including ghosts or “cruel, horrifying, licentious, subservient or other out-of-date elements” and for “competition and interchange” among various types of regional Xiqu forms (Wang 1979, 53 [trans. Wang]).

During October and November of 1952 a major Xiqu festival was held in Beijing at which almost 100 plays were performed. The participating productions involved over 1,600 performers and represented 23 different regional forms.

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8 The number of regional forms proliferated during the early years of Communist China such that their number expanded from approximately 100 to over 368 forms by 1959. The number of Xiqu troupes nationwide also exploded, from more than 1,000 to over 3,000 (Zhongguo Dabaike 1983, 505).
forms (Yang 1968, 36-36; Dolby 1976, 234). According to Li Zigui, all the participating productions employed directors. For example, a production in a Xiqu form from south central China was directed by Ouyang Yuqian, while Li himself directed a new Jingju version of *White Snake*. Many traditional plays were presented that had been substantially re-worked. Li quotes the representative of the south central China District, Cui Wei (崔嵬), as saying that all of their participating plays had been completely re-worked. According to Li, Representative Cui offered the following interesting observation about their rehearsals:

Reform is not only a script issue—of course the script is the play's foundation—but the performers' technique is even more important. Even with an excellent script, if the actor performs badly or strays from the original intent of the script, it will be impossible to reach a "true" result. This is especially true of Xiqu where the script is often very simple, while the actor's performance is much more complex. ...[A]nd there are some plays whose problems are not evident in the script, but become evident in performance. This time, we went through extensive rehearsals to achieve reform, which also produced some conflict because the actors were not used to rehearsal. The older generation were used to "see on stage" (台上见, *taishang jian*). Rehearsal was called "zuango" (钴锅, lit. "study the pot"); it was not seen as honorable. But with this rehearsal we were required to persevere. And everyone discovered how good a time rehearsal can be, it allows you to reach from the central idea to resolve problems. (18)

Li Zigui also notes that many "new literary workers" (i.e. educated intellectuals) had been involved in these productions both as directors and playwrights, with the festival being considered a great success. But the initial excitement

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9 Dolby notes that the sheer variety of regional forms came as a revelation to Beijing-based theatre experts, and led to the establishment of a research group focused on regional forms (Dolby 1976, 234).
declined as few successful plays were produced in the festival's wake. In fact, apparently the opposite was true since plays that had received the government's seal of approval at the 1952 festival dominated stages around the country (Yang 1968, 43-44).\(^\text{10}\)

After the festival, in December 1952, the Ministry of Culture issued a directive that all Xiqu companies would be required to establish a system for utilizing directors in order “to raise the artistic level of performance and music” (quoted in Li Zigui 1992, 20). Li concludes that in the decades since this directive, every company of every Xiqu form has adopted the systematic use of directors when producing new plays or substantially re-working traditional ones (20).

In order to help establish this system of Xiqu directing, in 1954 A Jia began two years of study at the Central Drama Academy in their “Director Cadre Training Course” (导演干部训练班, Daoyan Ganbu Xunlianban). Under the direction of Soviet experts, the participants researched Stanislavsky's system of performance through both classroom study and practical onstage experimentation. A Jia worked for a deep understanding of Stanislavsky’s principles, guarding against the temptation simply to copy or apply the concepts indiscriminately (Wang Qinghui 1998, 24). He continued his study despite being appointed general director of the National Jingju Company in 1955. During this period, Xiqu itself came under attack from those influenced by Stanislavsky's

\(^{10}\) This trend was facilitated by the official release of an anthology of approved plays from the festival, published to provide references for the revision and creation of plays (Wang 1979, 58).
work as interpreted through strict Soviet ideas of socialist realism. Soviet artists were expected to present “truthful, historically concrete representations of reality in its revolutionary development” (Brockett 1991, 193, quoting a 1934 Union of Soviet Writers’ proclamation). Works judged not to meet this standard were rejected as “empty formalism.” Being branded with this label in Stalinist Russia in 1940 had cost the great Russian director Meyerhold his life (197).

In 1957, in response to similarly anti-formalist pressures in China, A Jia published his famous article “Truth in Life and Truth in Xiqu Performance,” ("生活的真实和戏曲表演的真实," "Shenghuo de Zhenshi he Xiqu Biaoyan de Zhenshi") in which he criticized indiscriminate application of Stanislavskian principles to Xiqu and defended Xiqu’s conventions as an artistically and politically viable alternative method of truthfully representing real life on stage (Liu Yizhen 1998). Continuing his investigation of how to represent modern life through Xiqu conventions, in 1958 A Jia wrote and co-directed a Jingju adaptation of the Yangge play The White Haired Girl, mentioned above, for the National Jingju Company. Though not completely satisfied with the results, A Jia worked to integrate selective elements of his Huaju study, finding movement consistent with both modern life and Xiqu artistic principles in the staging of this production (Wang Qinghui 1998, 24-25).

The next major step in the development of the modern Xiqu director came in the years leading into and including the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). It was in this period that the full force of central governmental control of content and
form asserted itself, primarily in the person of Mao’s wife, Jiang Qing (江青). At her urging, the National Jingju Company (中国京剧院, Zhongguo Jingju Yuan) decided to rework the play *The Red Lantern* (红灯记, Hong Deng Ji) from a Shanghai regional opera form. A Jia served as head writer and director of the project. After the premiere, Jiang Qing called A Jia, company officials, and leading performers to a meeting where she accused them of ruining the play. Among her many complaints, she disapproved of not giving sufficient prominence to Li Yuho (the character she viewed as the proletarian hero); of cutting a scene from the original in which Li Yuho showed his resourcefulness; and of choosing a melody for a particular section that was not forceful enough for the revolutionary female character involved. Jiang Qing ordered revisions. Given Jiang’s position as Mao’s wife, those working on the project did not dare disregard her comments. On the other hand, they had major disagreements with several of her criticisms. They decided to incorporate some of the revisions, but ignore others. A Jia worked intensively on rewrites, then the revisions were rehearsed. Jiang Qing was invited for a second viewing. After the performance, she reprimanded the group angrily for not redressing all of her criticisms. After many more revisions, the play was eventually deemed satisfactory, was presented at the first national festival of modern Xiqu plays, held in 1964, and was put forth as a model for development of future plays. (Xu Chen 1990, 64-76; see also, Revolutionary Committee, 1968, 39-40).
Li Ruru has researched the influence of Communist officials (including Jiang Qing) on the development of another modern play, *Interrogating the Chair* (审椅子, Shen yizi, sometimes also translated as *Investigation of a Chair*) in Shanghai in 1963-64, discovering evidence of similarly intense involvement by Jiang Qing in production revisions (Li Ruru 2002, 5). Li Ruru also describes an important tactic in developing modern Xiqu plays that continues today.

Unhappy with earlier versions of the script and performance, Jiang Qing ordered that a spoken drama director be brought in to work on this Shanghai production. Following Mao’s directives in his 1942 “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and the Arts,” this director’s concept focused on the following theme: “We must never forget the class struggle, and should always be on guard against the restoration of class enemies” (Li Ruru 2002, 7 [trans. Li]). The primacy of political considerations during this period is evidenced by the director’s assertion that:

The first criterion to judge a play is to look at its ideological content and its truthfulness to real life. This means that the political criterion is the first priority. Having given this aspect all due attention, and having gripped the essential ideological issues, the Leader [Jiang Qing] pointed out the principles of how to revise the play. Following these ideas, we revised the play to a large extent. (Li Ruru 2002, 7 [trans. Li])

Li Ruru also notes the militaristic roots of Huaju in China as a favored form for

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11 These quotes were found by Li Ruru in the archives of the Shanghai Jingju Company. The first is from a manuscript authored by the director called “Director’s Interpretation.” The second quote is from a manuscript dated that same year and titled “What I learned from Directing *Interrogating the Chair*.”
the expression of radical ideas by young Chinese intellectuals, making a Huaju director well prepared to use theatre as a tool of propaganda.

The political focus and party control intensified profoundly during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) as every aspect of Xiqu artists' creative work was called into question and pressed into political service. The extent of this control is clearly shown in the following detailed description of work on another model play, Shajiabang (a place name), by the "Shachiapang [Shajiabang] Revolutionary Fighting Regiment of the No. 1 Peking Opera [Jingju] Company of Peking," written in honor of the 25th Anniversary of Mao's Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art. The unnamed authors accused "counter-revolutionary revisionist" elements of having "contrived a series of despicable double dealing tricks to resist Chairman Mao's instructions and sabotage the transformation of Peking opera [Jingju]" by giving too much prominence to the negative characters—"playing up their parts to show how cunning they were in countering the New Fourth Army"—and slighting the political instructor, Guo Jianguang's prominence—giving him arias that consisted of "loosely connected tunes that would interest no one." Under Jiang Qing's direction, new arias were created consisting of "a song cycle of stirring melodies so as to show the inner thoughts and valour of a hero." (Shachiapang [Shajiabang] Revolutionary Fighting Regiment 1968, 49-51). The authors of the essay go on to make clear the perils of promoting traditional performance techniques during this period. The authors accuse "the handful of counter-revolutionary revisionists" of advancing the view that Jingju music and movement were neutral and could be
used to portray both positive and negative characters regardless of social class.

In response:

Under Comrade Chiang Ching's [Jiang Qing's] leadership we carried out a tit-for-tat struggle against the "neutral music". To us revolutionary fighters in art and literature, workers, peasants and soldiers have nothing in common with emperors, princes, generals, ministers, scholars and beauties, and the positive and negative characters are diametrically opposed to each other in their thoughts and feelings as well as in image. How can the same "neutral music" be used to portray characters of two different classes? Such views were most absurd and were designed to smear the heroic figures of the workers, peasants and soldiers and to sabotage operas on contemporary themes and the transformation of Peking opera [Jingju]. Music has a class character and there is no music that is above classes. It serves either this or that class.

Chairman Mao teaches us:

What we demand is the unity of politics and art, the unity of content and form, the unity of revolutionary political content and the highest possible perfection of artistic form. Works of art which lack artistic quality have no force, however progressive they are politically.

It is in accordance with this teaching of Chairman Mao's that Comrade Chiang Ching [Jiang Qing] boldly carried out reforms to cater to the needs of the revolutionary political content, making it possible for Peking opera [Jingju] to depict more and more characters of different types. Thus the schemes of the handful of counter-revolutionary revisionists to use the conventional forms to destroy operas on revolutionary contemporary themes were smashed. (51-52 [no translator given])

This kind of intense governmentally instigated self-censorship continued through the Cultural Revolution. A Jia and many, many other Xiqu artists who advocated the artistic value of traditional performance techniques, like the techniques themselves, were branded counter-revolutionary and banished from the stage. Many of these artists were imprisoned, or sent to the countryside for re-education, or hauled periodically before the masses for public criticism.

With the death of Mao and the fall of the Gang of Four, there followed a period of backlash during which the model Xiqu plays were banned. Many had
believed the earlier propaganda that Jiang Qing deserved primary credit for development of the model plays. In addition, the model plays became tainted by their association with the traumatic societal upheavals of the Cultural Revolution. A Jia himself testified against Jiang Qing at her trial and was rehabilitated and returned to a leadership position at the National Jingju Company as the confusion of the Cultural Revolution was resolved. But popular suspicion against the model Xiqu plays continued. A Jia came forward as a major proponent of the overall artistic merit of many model plays, particularly those presented at the 1964 Festival. Writing in 1981, he contended that *The Red Lantern* and other model plays had been the product of long and rigorous artistic experimentation by Xiqu artists and that Jiang Qing had wrongfully usurped credit for the work of others (A Jia 1990, 298). Deeply concerned for the future of Jingju, he skillfully equated the suspect model plays with other accepted modern plays such as those developing out of the post-Cultural Revolution “literature of bruises” artistic movement. A Jia argued:

> I strongly believe Jingju must be able to represent modern life well, this can’t be determined by anyone’s [i.e., Jiang Qing’s] willpower. Rather Jingju’s ability to represent modern life will be decided by its own rules of development, by the rich performance techniques that it possesses. The difficulties are many, the situation requires people to act. We cannot let it “rise on its own, only to perish on its own” (自生自灭, zisheng zimie). . . . Following the development of history and way of life, Xiqu performing art cannot not change. . . . Through the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, Xiqu has never ceased changing. . . . Xiqu cannot separate itself from its audience, and as a result, it cannot separate itself from real life. If it departs from life, it is no longer a theatre form for audiences, instead it becomes a museum piece. (298-99)
A Jia's writings bracket this tumultuous period with carefully reasoned arguments against wildly opposite extremes. In 1957, in his “Truth in Life and Truth in Xiqu Performance,” he defended Xiqu’s performance conventions against those who would reform it out of existence. This article constituted the first “thorough, systematic analysis of the characteristics of xiqu as an artistic medium, and of the unique way in which it portrays life” (Liu 1998, 112 [trans. Hu et. al.]). In 1981, he argued passionately against throwing the baby out with the bath water. He urged those who wanted to preserve Xiqu out of existence to re-examine the important advances that had been made during work on the model plays toward an artistically viable modern Xiqu.

A Jia walked a fruitful middle ground in which tradition and innovation fertilized each other. His prominence in the area of Xiqu directing was officially recognized when he was invited to write the entry on Xiqu directing for the expansive Zhongguo Dabaike encyclopedia published in 1983. The entry gives important insight into his working process. According to A Jia, helping the actor to understand that creating a character in Xiqu is a process of “learning from experience” (体验, tiyan) is an important responsibility of the Xiqu director.

Tiyan is the Chinese term adopted to describe a key Stanislavskian principle, as it has been received in China, of putting oneself in the character’s position so as to experience that emotional life. The term is often juxtaposed against (and valorized over) the term tixian (体现), commonly used to describe Xiqu’s stylized method of expression (Wichmann 1990, 165). In his essay for the
encyclopedia, A Jia attempts to broaden and deepen the concept of *tiyan* in a way that fuses these previously oppositional concepts into a symbiotic whole. A Jia's concept of *tiyan* as it relates to the work of the Xiqu director is quite complex. It involves: the actor's own individual experience of Xiqu training as well as his or her general life experience; the experience of generations of Xiqu artists who have honed Xiqu conventions over the centuries; and, the process of experimentation with the actor in rehearsal to find the most effective portrayal for a given moment onstage. A Jia notes that a Xiqu actor is not "a blank piece of white paper on which the director can spontaneously draw at will." Rather, the actor comes with his or her own complete set of conventional technique (A Jia 1983, 444). He explains:

The Xiqu director must explore many possibilities, freely take preexisting conventional materials and revise them until they are shattered to pieces, referring to the requirements of the character and to this preexisting material, little by little carve out the character, start to turn it into a flesh and blood expression for the stage. Xiqu *tiyan* is not the same as Huaju *tiyan*; Xiqu's psychological technique and Huaju's also are not the same. Xiqu's psychological technique must work hand in hand with conventional technique. A Xiqu actor's psychological *tiyan* requires him to take rigorously trained song and stage conventional material and his own entire psychological process and join them together, before he can freely dive into *tiyan* regarding the character. This experimentation and expression cannot be separated. . . .

Xiqu's *tiyan*, although it must draw from real life, must not come directly from real life, instead it must accompany its older conventional techniques to "re-*tiyan*" (再体验) the character's life. This re-*tiyan* is critically important. Conventions that don't undergo *tiyan* can only be ossified shells; *tiyan* that does not bring convention with it, is simply neither the concept nor the technique of Xiqu. A Xiqu director has a duty to understand: one must first temper good formal technique, only then can one freely and fully use psychological technique; one must first give the performance a distinct physical form, only then can one begin to have Xiqu stage expression. . . .
To make formal movement and psychological movement become a natural, organic Xiqu performance, this is the natural result of taking life as the foundation and Xiqu-izing [戏曲化了, xiqu hua le] it. The Xiqu director has a duty to understand: a Xiqu actor must master this type of organic naturalness onstage, but his feeling simply cannot be that of “performing conventions,” instead [the feeling] must be revealed through the action. For a Xiqu actor to master this type of emotional form, the emotional logic (情感的逻辑, qinggan de luoji) simply must be used as the starting point when the characterization is being created. (445)

In directing *The Red Lantern*, A Jia had worked for this melding of form and content where Xiqu technique becomes the organic expression of the psychological and emotional world of the character. The actress playing *Red Lantern*’s revolutionary grandmother described the rehearsal process for a scene where her adopted son, Li Yuho, is about to be led off to interrogation and probable execution. At first, the actress says, she had a fairly superficial understanding of the character’s emotions as being solely tragic, and she expressed these emotions with an ineffective use of Xiqu conventions. Gradually, A Jia helped her to a deeper understanding of the character’s complex emotions, which moved through a transient sadness to an ardent revolutionary strength. The actress developed a successful portrayal that expressed these different layers of emotion. Her description of the resulting performance was an interesting synthesis of clear emotional motivation expressed through detailed physicality in precise coordination with the percussion:

As a result [of this new understanding], my performance was changed: the terrible surprise makes Li Nainai at first feel as though her entire body has no strength. Her hand braced on the table for support she takes two halting steps, on the last beat of the percussion pattern “kuang cai, kuang cai, kuang cai, kuang cai cai cai ... ...,” Li Nainai uses both hands on the table to lift her body upright. Her gaze encouraging Li Yuho: go, go and battle the
enemy, I too will continue the fight! This kind of feeling for the character was exactly right. (Gao Yuqian 1992, 290-91)

This actress also describes how A Jia did not limit actor freedom. She noted that while his own choices of technique were excellent, he also gave actors free reign fully to explore and design movement on their own (292). Through his process of Xiqu "tiyan," A Jia’s work on The Red Lantern remains a high point in the history of Xiqu directing.

He continued to write and direct and in 1991, he was named a “Chinese Cultural System Advanced Worker” (中国文化系统先进工作者, Zhongguo Wenhua Xitong Xianjin Gongzuozhe). After his death in 1994, the Ministry of Culture, the National Arts Research Institute, the National Jingju Company and others joined together to establish the A Jia Arts Research Group (阿甲艺术研究会, A Jia Yishu Yanjiuhui) to ensure the continuation of his work (Wang Qinghui 1998, 25).

Even now, over a quarter century after the Cultural Revolution and Jiang Qing's fall from power, the complex balancing of art and politics endured by A Jia continues. With the end of the Cultural Revolution and the entry into the period of “reform and opening up” (改革开放, gaige kaifang) led by Deng Xiaoping, political pressures on the arts began to ease and at this point have lessened considerably. However, both scripts and production elements are subject to scrutiny of varying intensity and direction depending on the shifting of political winds. Government control continues to exert itself through both overt censorship of scripts and the more subtle, but highly effective incentive of the
elaborate system of prizes that dominate (some would say stifle) the national artistic scene. But irrespective of governmental constraints, the question of how to develop popular and artistically successful innovations that preserve the essence of the traditional form and are attractive to contemporary audiences remains one of the biggest challenges facing Xiqu artists today.

Conclusion

The three artists that have been the focus of this chapter trace the historical development of Xiqu directing. They also represent three important paths by which artists still become Xiqu directors today. Li Zigui had extensive Xiqu performance experience before turning to Xiqu directing. Ouyang Yuqian was an established Huaju artist before beginning work in Xiqu. Finally, A Jia had substantial Xiqu performance training and experience supplemented by formal study of both Xiqu and Huaju directing. In the next two chapters, I examine in more detail the medium in which a Xiqu director works. I then return to assess the impact of the different paths to becoming a Xiqu director, analyzing one production directed by a Huaju-trained director in chapter 5, and one directed by a Xiqu-trained director in chapter 6.
CHAPTER 3
COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

My primary purposes in this chapter are to familiarize the reader with basic elements of Xiqu performance as well as to discuss how these elements are evolving in the contemporary urban context, based on my observations of productions during the Beijing 1998-99 performance season. To systematize my investigation of this evolutionary process, I will rely on Jon Whitmore's practical handbook for the director of Western postmodern theatre, discussed in chapter 1. Whitmore offers a useful taxonomy of the various communication systems potentially available to the director in the creation of the performance text.\(^1\) The major elements of Whitmore's model are set forth briefly below. In order to make this model more applicable to the complex sign systems that make up the Xiqu performance language, I have added a few categories in accordance with traditional Xiqu organizing systems. These modifications are noted in italics and explained further below. In the remainder of the chapter, I discuss each of the elements in detail, considering both traditional and innovative aspects. I draw specific examples primarily from Jingju performances, but also discuss other Xiqu forms or categorizations when pertinent to later arguments.

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1 This otherwise useful book contains a number of unfortunate typographical errors in the graphic presentations of his models. First, in figure 1 on page 13, the subcategories under the titles "Frames" and "Audiences" are mistakenly transposed. Next, labels for figures 4 and 5 on pages 28 and 29 are likewise transposed. The graph, which from Whitmore's discussion is clearly describing a hypothetical traditional production of Lear, is mistakenly labeled "postmodern," while the postmodern graph is labeled "traditional."
Figure 1
Whitmore’s Taxonomy of Theatre Communication Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FRAMES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual, Historical, and Social Framing Systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Tradition</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Competition</td>
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<td>Publicity</td>
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<td>Director’s Notes</td>
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<td>Physical Environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>AUDIENCE SIGN SYSTEMS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spectator (individual)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Audience (group)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PERFORMER SIGN SYSTEMS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role Type</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liupai (流派, performance school or style)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Song</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heightened Speech</td>
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<td>Colloquial Speech</td>
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<td>Facial Expression</td>
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<td>Gesture</td>
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<td>Movement</td>
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<td>Make-up</td>
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<tr>
<td>VISUAL SIGN SYSTEMS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Space</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
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<td>Costumes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Properties</td>
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<tr>
<td>Color and Texture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lighting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Side Titles</td>
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<tr>
<td>AURAL SIGN SYSTEMS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Melody</td>
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<td>Percussion</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Whitmore 1994,12 [modifications by author in italics]).
To help illustrate how his various categories work, Whitmore offers a graphing of two hypothetical productions of *King Lear*, one he calls postmodern, and one he calls traditional. For Whitmore, the traditional production is one in which the dramatic text is given primacy. Each category in his model is conceived of as a spectrum with one end representing no use of that particular sign system and the other representing its maximum use. Perhaps not surprisingly, the graph for his hypothetical postmodern Lear, with its heavy emphasis on performer-centered sign systems, looks much more like a description of a traditional Xiqu performance. In Whitmore's traditional Lear, the voice (spoken word, i.e., primary conveyor of the dramatic text) is the most fully used sign system. In the postmodern Lear, the spoken word is one of the least used while gesture and movement are two of the most used.

First and most importantly for the Xiqu director, I have added “The Tradition” as a subset of the Intellectual, Historical, and Social Framing sign systems since how a particular production measures up against “The Tradition,” as determined by the experts, is a primary factor in assessing whether a particular innovation will be deemed “successful.” As other subsets in this category, I have added “The Competition,” to address the pressures of modernization and globalization at work in post-Cultural Revolution China, and “Director's Notes.” I have added “Role Type” as a level of performer sign systems and “Liupai” (performance style or school) as an
additional subset of Whitmore's Personality sign system. In accordance with
traditional Xiqu's systemization, I have further subdivided voice into: "Song,"
"Heightened Speech," and "Colloquial Speech." I have added as visual sign
systems "Texture" and the use of "Side Titles" (Xiqu's equivalent of Western
opera's super titles). I have replaced Whitmore's Aural sign systems of
"music" and "sound" with Xiqu's traditional division into melodic and
percussive instrumentation. Whitmore is primarily concerned with conscious
directorial use of olfactory and tactile sign systems such as use of incense or
physical contact between performer and spectator (Whitmore 1994, 191-202).
Since I have never experienced a Xiqu production that utilized such elements in
this way, they have been eliminated. Secondary (i.e., unconscious, ambient)
influences of these factors are considered under the heading of physical
frames.

In a traditional Xiqu performance, the performer-related sign systems
(personality, voice, facial expression, gesture, movement, makeup and
hairstyle) are used to maximum effect, as are the systems of costume and
music, which directly support the performer's expression. Communication
systems further removed from the performer's expression, such as space,
setting, properties, and lighting are used only minimally. As Xiqu develops to
meet the demands of an audience that is increasingly inundated with myriad
entertainment options, directors are utilizing these other systems of communication to greater extent.

Framing Systems

1. Intellectual, Historical, and Social Framing Systems
   a. The Tradition

As discussed in chapter 1, the single most important intellectual framing system of a Xiqu performance is the tradition itself. “Certainly prior to the Cultural Revolution and in fact to a great extent even today, each performance of any form of Xiqu is first and foremost an example of that form...and secondarily a specific play in that form” (Wichmann-Walczak 2000, 105). A production’s general artistic merit will be discussed by “the experts.” Special emphasis will be given to any departures from the tradition, which will be identified and discussed by “the experts” and accepted or rejected as still sufficiently Xiqu to “represent” that form. These discussions are carried out through critical analysis in the press as well as at formal discussion sessions involving Ministry of Culture officials, scholars, leading performers, and the company administrators and creative artists involved in the production being discussed. During a 1998-99 Jingju Festival in Beijing, such a session was held each morning to discuss the previous day’s performances. The particular standards the experts apply will vary significantly depending on whether the production is categorized as traditional (traditional, chuantong, i.e., part of the
repertoire by the early 20th century), newly-written historical (新编历史, xinbian lishi, i.e., set in the mythological or historical past using traditional costume pieces and movement vocabulary), or modern (现代, xiandai, i.e., set after 1911 and using period-specific costumes).

b. The Competition

After “reform and opening up” (改革开放, gaige kaifang) at the end of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese audiences have been inundated with an increasingly diverse array of entertainment options. In Beijing, Xiqu must now compete with Hollywood blockbusters and scores of cable television stations; with discos and enormous shopping malls; with Chinese adaptations of Dario Fo’s Accidental Death of An Anarchist and famous film director Zhang Yimou’s spectacular live production of Puccini’s opera, Turandot, at the Forbidden City.

A live performance of a Xiqu production frequently must even compete with television broadcast versions of itself that give viewers much more intimate access to the subtleties of a performer’s artistic expression than is possible in Beijing’s large proscenium theatres. Potential Xiqu audiences are increasingly sophisticated consumers in the global entertainment marketplace. Consequently, Xiqu artists are also looking to this vast array of entertainment

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2 The performing company receives no monetary compensation for the broadcast, currently viewing the increased exposure as positive compensation rather than as negative competition that might reduce box office revenues (Pei Fulin 1999, Yan Jun 1999).
forms for artistic inspiration. The key to success is to find a balance between satisfying the traditional experts and exciting new audience through innovation.

c. Publicity

Audience members' expectations and previous knowledge are important elements in reception of a particular production. Because the general pattern of performances is quite different in Xiqu than in the West or for Huaju in China, these expectations are likewise created somewhat differently. Huaju plays, like their Western counterparts, tend to have a comparatively extended run of at least several weeks. In Beijing, a new Xiqu play, even if it is being presented by a visiting troupe, will usually play for only two or three nights. The longest run of a Xiqu play during my two years in Beijing lasted two weekends. For these somewhat longer runs publicity, word of mouth, and performance reviews will have time to work to draw the audience and influence their expectations. And even if the review does not make it to press before a shorter run is over, if the production is at all successful, it will be revived perhaps even in the same season.

As for traditional plays, these rarely receive more than a single performance. A common pattern both for companies based in Beijing and for those visiting was to present several days to a week of performances, with different plays and excerpts showing every evening. Companies often mixed showings of full-length plays with evenings of highlights (折子戏 zhezixi), and
newer works with traditional plays. For example, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the People’s Republic of China, the National Jingju Company staged a twelve-night run, including ten full-length plays (one model revolutionary play, two newly-written historical plays, three revisions of traditional plays, and four traditional plays) in addition to two nights of highlighted scenes from traditional plays. In these kinds of mixed runs, the reputation of the company, the spectator’s knowledge of the particular play, as well as the popularity of individual performers would be the main draws for a particular evening.

The name of the Xiqu form involved will tell anyone generally familiar with Xiqu a substantial amount about what to expect. If the performance is of a Jingju play, audiences will expect a high level of stylization, music primarily in the pihuang (皮黄) style discussed below, and a wide range of possible content. If the performance is of a Yueju (越剧) play from Zhejiang Province, audiences will know to expect all female performers using a less highly-stylized (than Jingju) performance language, melodies drawn from Zhejiang area folk music, and a plot much more likely to involve civil than martial events. Publicity also almost invariably labels a particular play as either traditional, newly-written historical, or modern—telling audiences to expect no innovation, some innovation but use of traditional-style costumes and stylized movement, or more innovation with more realistic-style costuming and setting, respectively.
d. Director's Notes

An element of the intellectual framing available to most Western audiences as well as to Chinese audiences of Huaju is rarely found in Xiqu: the director's program notes. For every one of the twenty productions presented at the 1998 National Jingju Festival held in Beijing, the companies sold elaborate, multi-page programs. Only two of these contained words from the director. On the other hand, for every Xiqu performance I have seen, the program contained a brief plot synopsis in addition to performer names. This was true of traditional plays as well as newly-written plays. I take these two facts as evidence of several general audience-related expectations. First, the director's thinking about the production is not considered to be of significant importance to audience reception. Second, the stylized performance language will likely hinder spectators' comprehension of plot details, and so they are provided with a synopsis. And third, suspense in the outcome of the plot is presumed not to be a major factor of audience enjoyment. These three expectations will be discussed at length in the case studies presented in chapters 5 and 6.

2. Physical Environment

At the level of physical environment, a traditional Xiqu performance, whether in a tea house or at a festival, took place on a raised, thrust stage, with audiences on three sides. Today in Beijing, there are three major styles of
theatre buildings for Xiqu performances: the renovated or replicated teahouse style; the large, functional (i.e. cold, concrete) proscenium style; and newer, more plush but still large and proscenium style. The last two categories offer an interesting example of the challenges facing Xiqu in modern China. In several theatres of the second type, the lower lobby contains the usual photos of performers, a tiny bookstall, and a counter selling refreshments, while the upper lobby has been converted to a pool hall. To reach seats in the balcony, patrons must skirt this area, through a haze of cigarette smoke and often literally having to avoid the back swing of a pool cue. One of the major venues for Jingju performances of the third style is the Chang'an Grand Theatre (长安大戏院, Chang'an Da Xiyuan), in a high rise office building and hotel on one of Beijing's busiest boulevards. Entry to the orchestra level seats is through a tasteful gift shop, catering to both foreign tourists and Chinese Xiqu fans. To reach the balcony, patrons must ride escalators that are open to the impressively high-ceilinged lobby. In addition to its many other functions, this high rise also houses a disco, the bass beat from which is often perfectly audible inside the theatre during performances. At first glance, these situations might appear as bizarre juxtapositions. Viewed in historical context, however, they actually parallel the situation existing at the birth of Xiqu, when the "100 Entertainments" available in the pleasure precincts of burgeoning urban areas forced performers to compete for audience attention, a situation
which is credited with being a major factor in Xiqu's status as a synthesis of many performance skills (Scott 1983, 133; Idema 1982, 56-81).

**Audience Systems**

Much has been written about the function of the audience as author, that each individual spectator, in the process of decoding the performance, creates his or her own meaning. In this process, each individual's background, previous theatrical experience, and expectations will have major impact. But audiences also have a more active input in that their laughter, rapt attention, or persistent coughing can influence both other spectators as well as the performers.

*In my experience, Xiqu audiences are quite unrestrained. Xiqu fans at a traditional play will often hum or sing along. This is encouraged by the side titles, which sometimes even introduce the mode and metrical type in which the aria will be sung. Refreshments are allowed in most theatres. People come and go quite frequently since traditional plays usually last around three hours and rarely have an intermission. The audience is much more mobile during the performance of a traditional/familiar play than for a newly written play, one important reason being many newer plays are staged with an intermission. And of course, cell phones and beepers are adding to the background hum created by the audience.*
In Western theatre, organization of the audience in relation to the performance space is a major tool by which a director can contextualize the performance. In a thrust or arena arrangement, spectators can easily see each other and the reactions of fellow spectators become an added layer of the performance text. The traditional thrust Xiqu stage would likewise place spectators in equally easy view of each other. Most Xiqu performances in contemporary Beijing happen in large proscenium style theatres where other spectators’ faces are not as readily visible. But Xiqu spectators also have a very direct and important role they are expected to play to complete the aural performance text. Similar to Japanese Kabuki and Western opera, ballet, and jazz, spectators are expected audibly to assert their approval of a performer executing particularly demanding sections by calling “hao!” (literally “good!”) and/or applauding. One of the common criticisms of Xiqu today is that some performers care more about this aspect than the character they are portraying, holding the high note or repeating the difficult movement until they get the desired audience response. In my experience, however, audiences are usually quite generous and ready to participate in this exchange. There is often an apparently genuine exchange of energies—the “extra” repetitions usually happening after the applause has begun. The audience says it likes something, the performer gives them more of it, even though doing so is quite difficult.
The makeup of the audience will impact how this dynamic operates. During my time in Beijing, I experienced four basic categories of audiences. First, and by far the most fun, were those full houses of excited Xiqu fans brought to the theatre by a star performer, or a play that had not been performed for a long while, or a critically acclaimed new play. These performances were almost always preceded by a steady stream of fancy cars arriving at the theatre. The full house might contain a substantial portion of people unfamiliar with their expected duties, but there were also plenty of initiated spectators confidently leading the appropriate audible audience responses.

A second category included the smaller audiences of dedicated Xiqu fans, mostly older folks, who attended even the un-noteworthy performances of traditional plays. In 1998-99 the Beijing City Jingju Company and the National Jingju Company were trading Saturdays at a newer plush theatre for afternoon performances of full-length traditional plays. These audiences were often quite small, but very vocal in their appreciation.

A third category involved performances for students. In 1995, China switched from a pattern alternating between five and six school/work days per week to a standard five school/work days per week. Because of concern that students might get into trouble with this extra spare time, a plan was devised for Saturday afternoon performances where the Worker’s Entertainment Palace donated the theatre while the Beijing City and National Xiqu training schools
traded off providing performances of full-length traditional plays by young performers. Students were bussed to the theatre in large numbers and tended to be quite rowdy but appreciative. These young audiences did not necessarily recognize the sections that were particular difficulty and so would either not respond at these points or do so at other unexpected times, creating a different overall rhythm to the performance text. An especially positive aspect of these performances was that the performers were about the same age as the spectators, hopefully dispelling the widespread notion that Xiqu is for old people. These school performances were still happening when I returned in 1998, though with less frequency.

The final, and least participatory audiences were made up of foreign tourists. In 1998-99, only one theatre in Beijing provided English side titles. Housed in a large hotel across from the Workers' Entertainment Palace, the Liyuan stage catered almost exclusively to tourists, with performances by members of the Beijing City Jingju Company of brief excerpts of plays. Operating under the pervasive belief that foreigners do not like the vocal sounds of Jingju, managers of the theatre selected scenes focusing primarily on exhibition of movement rather than vocal skills. The whole performance usually lasted less than an hour, rarely was there any applause or calling out during the performance, and rarely were the performers rewarded with more than polite applause at the end of each piece. Not surprisingly under the
circumstances, these performances were much lower energy than those for the other three types of audiences.

**Performer Systems**

1. **Role Type**

   From the instant a performer steps on the stage, even if he or she is in rehearsal clothes rather than costume and makeup, an initiated spectator will be able to tell from the performer's basic posture, stance, and hand position which of the four major role types is being represented, and in many cases which of its subcategories as well. The four major role types in Jingju are *sheng* (生, male), *dan* (旦, female), *hualian* (花脸, painted face; also called *jing* [净]), and *chou* (丑, usually comic). Major subcategories exist in the *sheng* and *dan* categories for young and old characters. The age division is not gender neutral. Older *sheng* are over 30 years old or married, old *dan* are generally quite old, with gray or white hair and the need to lean on a staff as they walk. The distinguishing performance characteristic of this division is that in portrayal of older characters, performers use "real," or "natural" (真, *zhen*) or "big" (大, *da*) voice, while performers of young roles use "falsetto" (假嗓子, *jiasangzi*) or "small" (小, *xiao*) voice. Young *dan* sing and speak only in falsetto; young *sheng* sing in falsetto and speak in a mixture of large and small voice placement that stylistically represents the cracking voice of a boy in puberty.
Hualian and chou role types do not have these age subcategories and use large voice for both speech and song.

Further subcategories exist for each of the four major role categories depending on which performance skills are emphasized: civil subcategories emphasize song, speech, and dance-acting; martial subcategories emphasize combat, and almost all employ dance-acting as well. The hualian characters are always male and somewhat larger than life characters, such as generals or gods. Chou are usually male and often, but not always comic characters. They are somewhat smaller than life, in the sense of not being particularly brave or of strong moral fiber. When such a person is in a position of political power, they can be quite dangerous. This kind of chou character is more frightening than funny. There is also a subcategory of comic, older female chou that are portrayed by male performers in a way that emphasizes rather than attempts to obscure the actual gender of the performer. Role types are not the equivalent of commedia dell’arte stock characters—each role type covers a broad range of distinct, individualized characters. Since the traditional repertoire draws heavily on several expansive novels, the same characters appear in many different plays. But because that repertoire has been developed around the skills of individual star performers, it is possible, though not common, for the same character to be portrayed as a different role type in different plays (Chen Zengkun 1999).
Once the role type has been identified, the initiated spectator will understand the character's gender, general age, and have some idea of his or her moral fiber. For example, there are almost no evil older sheng or old female characters in the traditional repertoire. Hualian characters, whether good or evil, have difficulty controlling their emotions and often cause trouble through their rash behavior (Chen Zengkun 1998). In addition, as discussed in more detail below, identifying the role type will also give the initiated spectator a very clear expectation as to the movement styles and vocal qualities that will be employed by the performer. As political and social pressures have motivated attempts to modernize Xiqu, the traditional role type categories are sometimes viewed as impediments to innovation in the development of new plays (Luo Jinlin 1998a). This is particularly true of modern plays in which characters are likely not to fit as readily within their boundaries. As a result, performers from AJia in 1949 to the leading actors in Camel Xiangzi in 1998, discussed in chapter 6, have been praised for their ability to break through (突破, tupo) these boundaries to find a more effective portrayal of character than strict adherence to role type performance techniques would have allowed (Wang Qinghui 1998, 25; He Guanji 1999, 8).

2. Personality

Unlike fourth-wall realism, where the audience is often asked essentially to ignore the sign/actor and see the signified/character, a Xiqu audience is
asked to be much more aware of the performer's identity. For example, anytime a major character enters for the first time in a play, the performer stops at the point onstage known as the "mouth of the nine dragons" (九龙口, jiulong kou) for a liangxiang (亮相) heightened pose. The performer then often symbolically adjusts his or her costume—no actual adjustment of the costume occurs, only placing a hand near a cuff or a headpiece. This action is understood as a sign of respect by the performer for the audience, wanting to be sure everything is perfect before commencing with the performance. No "dropping" of character is involved. The gestures are done in exactly the same stylistic movement language as will be the remainder of the performance. This is also the moment that the performer's celebrity will be acknowledged. Before any performing has begun to earn it, spectators will applaud their favorite performers.

The personality of the performer can be one of the strongest factors in a Xiqu performance. Even in the heavily stylized makeup and physique-obscuring costumes of traditional Jingju, the performer's charisma can radiate and charm an audience. Star status is often a big draw, and this hierarchy has been institutionalized through a national governmental system ranking performers and directors as first, second, third, or fourth level (Wichmann 1990, 168).
A related way that performer personality has had strong impact, particularly in Jingju, is the process by which individual performers' innovative styles have been recognized and designated "liupai" within particular role type subcategories. For example, the four great performers of young dan roles, including Mei Lanfang, each have their own liupai, as do several sheng, hualian, and chou performers. These masters' disciples have in turn become teachers, passing down the individual performance techniques of the master. Performing styles may differ greatly between different liupai in terms of repertoire, movement, vocal placement, and melodic tendencies. Some performers have felt constrained by expectations that they replicate their masters' style such that they feel they themselves are not allowed to innovate. And it is a common criticism that the flaws of teachers as well as their successes become codified and transmitted to the next generation. An anecdote I heard from several different sources was of a master teacher who wore dentures. His students all replicated his slightly contorted mouth positions as he tried to speak and sing with ill-fitted dentures (Chen Zengkun 1998; Luo Jinlin 1998a). On the other hand, Cheng Yanqiu (程砚秋) was inspired by his limited pitch range and unacceptably dark vocal quality to develop an engaging new style, earning himself a place as the second greatest of the four great dan performers. Though no new liupai has been
acknowledged in recent years, the fame of individual performers continues to be an important element in the Xiqu performance equation.

3. Voice

There are three levels of vocal expression in Xiqu: song, heightened speech, and colloquial speech. Song is generally used for dramatic moments containing more heightened emotion, often expressing the character's internal experience in the manner of a soliloquy. Even when other characters are onstage, sung passages may contain many sections that function as asides—the other characters proceed as though they have not heard this information. The difference between heightened speech and colloquial speech has most to do with the social standing of the character, which in turn will have influenced which role type is being used to portray the character. In Jingju, the role types most often using colloquial speech are the comic chou and a subset of young dan characters that are lively and flirtatious called huadan (花旦, “flower dan”). Both of these role types are often used to portray servant characters in the traditional repertoire. Characters of higher social standing and/or intrinsic dignity speak in a more stylized way that can be almost as conventionalized as song.

A traditional Xiqu play contains many fewer words than a Huaju play, so that the use of voice in Xiqu often has less to do with conveying those words than with communicating through the use of other expressive qualities.
Nonetheless, the words are important to audience comprehension. Because Jingju was heavily influenced by several regional forms, it retains many pronunciations from those regional dialects that vary markedly from standard Mandarin Chinese (Yang 1968, 219-20). Interestingly, the stylized speech contains even more of these altered pronunciations than does song. Moreover, the heightened speech pitch patterns follow the speech-tones of a Song (960-1279) and Yuan (1271-1368) dynasty dialect from Henan province (Wichmann 1991, 204). In addition, many plays contain a mixture of classical Chinese and vernacular that modern audiences find difficult to understand. These factors combine so that the uninitiated spectator, even if fluent in Chinese, often struggles for comprehension, despite the fact that performers train intensively to achieve precise articulation.

Two additional factors in a modern Xiqu performance greatly impact audience reception of vocal expression. First is the use of projected side titles during song, and occasionally during heightened speech. Before the advent of computers and LED displays, this was done by projecting slides. But it is a modern development, not possible in a teahouse or market setting. The practice places increased importance on the meaning of the words, foregrounding the literary text at least during the moments the spectator shifts focus from the stage to the side titles.
A second factor affecting vocal work is that today, performers almost invariably use microphones. The orchestras are quite loud and the leading melodic instrument is playing the same basic melody as is being sung. As a result, it is very difficult to hear the performer clearly even in a small performance space. Audiences have become accustomed to the precisely differentiated sounds of new recording techniques, and Xiqu performers are using mics to be sure that they can be heard above the orchestra. In 1995 during my first stay in China, I found the amplification to be very distracting because it was not very good technically. Voices sounded tinny and thin, especially for those performers using falsetto; there was often static, and unintended amplification of movement as sleeves brushed the microphones. When I returned in 1998, these technical problems had been greatly diminished. 

a. Song

Song is the most highly esteemed of the four performance skills in Jingju. Issues of melody, rhythm, and tempo are determined by the mode and metrical types, which are chosen for their perceived appropriateness to the character’s situation and will be discussed further below. Role type is the major determining factor of the basic pitch range that will be used. However,

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3 I witnessed one dramatic exception to this improvement. The actress playing Medea in the production discussed in chapter 5 was having major difficulty as her cordless mic cut in and out and popped with annoying static during an important aria. She called from stage to turn off the mic, the audience applauded, and she continued to the end of the scene without amplification.
since the Jingju musical system is relative, rather than fixed-pitch, it is easily adaptable to an individual performer's range, even adjusting day to day so as to fully exploit the performer's best (i.e., highest) comfortable pitches on a particular day. Jingju singing demands extraordinary vocal agility and breath control. Melodic passages can be highly ornamented, including many grace notes and trills, and are subtly nuanced, including intricate bending and turning of pitches by use of a precisely controlled vibrato. Vocal resonance is generally quite bright and clear for the sheng and dan roles. Vocal placement for the hualian uses primarily nasal and chest resonance. Performers of the comic chou use a placement closer to the natural speaking voice of the performer.

As in Western opera, the voice has much more to do than be primarily responsible for conveying the words of the dramatic text. On the other hand, Chinese is a tonal language. The choice of a particular word includes a choice of tone that in turn radically influences the construction of the melody. Indeed, one standard by which the success of a new Xiqu play is judged is how well this relationship is negotiated. As will be discussed further below, individual Jingju melodies are constructed on the foundation of combining modes and metrical types, as well as following conventions with regard to role-type-specific melodic tendencies (Wichmann 1991, 55-59). Combining these two factors, it becomes clear that it is entirely possible to write a passage of
lyrics that is considered “un-singable” (没法儿唱, *mei fa[r] chang*). Sections of heightened speech also have the equivalent of melodic tendencies, making it equally possible to write lines that are considered “un-speakable.” Playwrights must consider these factors when writing lyrics, and this is a major factor criticized in plays written by academics who have little practical Jingju performance experience.

b. Heightened Speech

Most characters speak in a combination of classical Chinese and vernacular in intricately stylized patterns that include use of a much broader pitch range than standard spoken Chinese, though slightly narrower pitch range than is used in sung sections. In my own study of plays, I found these sections much more difficult to learn than the sung sections. My teachers confirmed that Chinese Jingju students experience similar difficulty. The reason is that the stylization is even more subtly nuanced than Jingju singing. This also means that these passages can be quite difficult to understand for the uninitiated spectator.

The model plays of the Cultural Revolution period resolved this issue by using almost exclusively vernacular speech in a style much closer to realism. This practice solved the problem of comprehension but violated Xiqu conventions designed to increase synthesis of performance elements. The stylized speech of traditional Xiqu plays is purposefully not far from song in
terms of using wide pitch variations and vocalizations that extend a single syllable. This allows for a perceived seamless flow back and forth between speech and song. Transitions into song in the model plays are often quite abrupt by traditional Xiqu standards, and therefore considered aesthetically lacking. In recent years the problem of comprehension has sometimes been addressed by expanding the practice of side titling, discussed above, to all stylized spoken sections. I saw this practice of more complete side titling also adopted by visiting troupes whose regional dialect was substantially different from Beijing’s. With sung passages, where words are extended over several notes, spectators can glance to the side, quickly read a line of lyrics, then return their focus to the stage. Expanding the use of side titles to spoken sections solves the problem of comprehension but greatly increases the extent to which spectators must split their focus between the LED monitors, where the literary text is privileged, and the stage, where the rich performance text is unfolding.

c. Colloquial Speech

Colloquial speech generally follows the pitch and rhythm of standard spoken Mandarin, often with a Beijing accent. It is used almost exclusively by characters of low social position and/or intrinsic dignity. The (usually) comic chou and the lively huadan are the role types most often using colloquial speech. Regional dialects are also adopted by chou in portrayal of characters from other regions, but the dialects are often quite exaggerated and used for
comic effect. Sometimes these characters use asides to the audience to comment on and/or interpret the stylized speech of other characters, but practically, this can serve as only a partial solution to the problem of comprehension of stylized speech discussed above.

4. Facial Expression and Make-up

Facial expressions are a key tool of communicating to the audience in Xiqu. The most basic facial expression in Xiqu is called "lift spirit" (提神, tishen). Performance of this technique requires that the performer:

[Lift the breath, with chest forward, and lifted lower back. The outer corners of the eyebrows and eyes are lifted to the fullest extent possible, the eyelids open, so that the entire spirit pierces through filling the gaze focused on a particular point. Tishen is an important basic method for an actor’s performance onstage and creating a character. It is also the actor’s most commonly used expression, used to catch the audience attention, express the play’s plot and depict the character. (Yu Handong 1994, 85)

The eyes are considered so important that the set of conventions for facial expression are called yanshen (眼神, lit. "eye spirit"). Facial expressions in Xiqu are mostly stylized, essentialized versions of natural expressions, so there is little difficulty even for the uninitiated spectator to determine their meaning.

A comprehensive encyclopedia of Xiqu performance techniques has 33 entries in this category, including: happy surprise eyes (惊喜眼, jingxi yan), loving eyes (喜爱眼, xi'aiyan), bitter laughing eyes (苦笑眼, kuxiaoyan), and fiercely
watching eyes (猛观眼, *mengguanyan*) (Yu Huandong 1994, 85-94). Perhaps in part because Xiqu facial expressions are for the most part readily accessible to the uninitiated spectator, I have encountered no attempts at or discussions of innovation in this area.

Traditional makeup emphasizes eyes and eyebrows and minimizes or even covers the performer’s mouth. For all *sheng* and for young *dan*, pink, red, or orange-red makeup is applied around the eyes and blended about halfway down the cheek. Pink and red tones denote youth. The more orange tones are used for the older *sheng* roles. Orange tones are also used for old *dan* roles but in a more natural blending. Eyes are outlined in black. A skullcap with long ties is wrapped around the performer’s head, pulling the outside of the eyebrows up, accentuating their slant. Eyebrow makeup is also black, exaggerating the natural brow and carrying the line in a straight diagonal to the edge of the headpiece. Eyes are used consistently to emphasize gesture by following the hands, and to punctuate the end of a gestural phrase by ending with a sharper, quicker shift to look out at the audience in a *liangxiang* pose.

In line with Chinese custom, in which it is indelicate for a woman to show her teeth, traditional makeup for young *dan* roles will often minimize the size of the performer’s mouth. Singing and speaking techniques are compatible, requiring that the performer achieve maximum width of the mouth,
and minimizing the extent of vertical opening. These techniques are also used for young sheng roles. Vocal work for older sheng and hualian roles requires a more vertically open mouth, but these roles usually use full beards that hook over the ears and rest on the upper lip, covering the mouth entirely. Performers playing the often comic chou roles can and do break all of these vocal rules. They often wear a beard, but it is segmented: a moustache section rests on the upper lip, a beard section hangs below the lower lip so that the mouth is visible. Performers of old dan roles use vocal techniques very similar to older sheng roles and obviously do not wear beards, but since in the traditional repertoire these characters are always portrayed as past the age of sexual interest, it does not violate traditional mores to see more of their mouths and teeth. All of these limitations serve the overall Xiqu aesthetic that everything onstage appears beautiful.

There are literally hundreds of patterns of makeup for the hualian roles. Characters in this role type are “larger-than-life” and usually act very rashly, often getting themselves and others into difficulty even if they are essentially good at heart. This lack of emotional control is portrayed through the use of elaborate designs painted on the face. The designs are abstractions of basic human features; eyes, eyebrows, and nose features are almost always identifiable (the mouth is covered by a heavy beard). Nonetheless, this system of expression is highly conventionalized. Different colors and basic
design patterns convey to the initiated spectator whether the character is crafty or honest, good or evil, mortal or spirit, etc. (Pan 1995, 88-106 and plates between pp. 128-29). These signs are not readily accessible to the uninitiated. Because of the elaborate makeup, the hualian performer must use extremely exaggerated facial expressions for these to "read" from any distance. More natural expressions are obscured by the makeup design. But this exaggeration is also in keeping with the extreme emotions exhibited by these characters, and there are several plays involving extended sections of precise facial contortions showing the character struggling to maintain then eventually losing control.

By contrast, the chou makeup is smaller than life, consistent with this role type's characteristic low social status and/or moral fiber. The basic design for a civil chou is called “piece of tofu” (豆腐块, doufu kuai[r]) because it consists of a whitish square in the middle of the performer's face. Makeup for the martial chou is even smaller, often consisting of a squiggle of white on the bridge of the nose, and around the lips and eyes.

Makeup in modern category plays is much more naturalistic, even for hualian roles. Flesh colored base is used with much less prominent rouge on the cheeks. Eyes are outlined with black and eyebrows are darkened, but the eyebrows are not tied up to heighten their slant. Even newly-written historical plays often employ this more naturalistic make up, with sheng and
hualian beards created by gluing moustache and beard pieces directly to the face.

5. Gesture

Since Xiqu performers use their whole bodies expressively, I am using gesture here to include physical movements within the performer's own kinesphere. Thus a gesture can be made with a foot as well as a hand. In the next section on movement, I will address movement of the performers across the stage.

Gestures in Jingju serve several functions. They can: 1) express the character's inner emotions; 2) express emotional and/or physical interaction between two characters onstage; 3) express the character dealing with external elements, often using mime to convey setting or acrobatics and martial skills to convey combat; 4) communicate information to the orchestra, such as warning the conductor that the performer is about to sing; or 5) be purely beautiful dance movements, usually involving unison movement by a group of supernumerary performers. Xiqu gestures can range from stylizations of still recognizably natural movement to the highly abstracted. Representative examples of the first category include the following:

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4 These categories are given by Yu Handong (1994, 197) in a discussion of watersleeve movement, but they apply more generally to the full range of Xiqu gestures. Extensive catalogues of Xiqu gestures and movements in English can be found in Scott 1957, 96-137 and Zung 1937, 77-148.
to communicate crying, the performer raises a hand or sleeve to the face as though to dab away a tear;

—pointing is recognizable, but stylized by moving the hand and face away from the object, then circling back around to point and look at it;

—the gesture that indicates opening a door is a quite literal mime, recognizable to anyone who has seen a traditional Chinese double door, which consists of two hinged panels kept closed by means of a brace that must be slid sideways for opening.

With the second, more abstracted kind of gesture, meaning is communicated primarily through how the gesture is performed. The gesture itself has no specific meaning. For example, a common gesture with watersleeves (the long pieces that extend past the performers fingers by twelve or more inches) is to circle the hand up and in toward the body, then down out and away from the body, flicking the finger tips up at the last moment, tossing the long sleeve. Done slowly and lightly, it indicates that the character is in a happy mood. Done more aggressively, it signals that the character is excited or indignant (Yu Handong 1994, 195). Gestures with fans, handkerchiefs, beards, ponytails and other props and accessories can be similarly categorized both in terms of function and level of abstraction. There is also an extensive vocabulary of foot,
arm, and leg movements (Scott 1957, 116-37). Consistent with Xiqu principles of stylization, all gestures must appear round and effortless.

As mentioned above, basic hand positions are determined by role type, so that just by seeing a hand, an initiated spectator could identify which of the four major role types is being portrayed. Brash hualian characters hold their hands to maximize size, separating the fingers significantly and extending the thumb. Young dan roles hold their hands to minimize size, a technique certainly useful to the many male performers who performed these roles. In one basic hand position, called “orchid palm” (兰花掌, lanhua zhang), the third finger is lowered and the thumb is drawn in to meet it. The second and fourth fingers are raised above the third and brought toward each other. The pinkie is raised still higher than the second and fourth fingers. The resulting shape is indeed quite reminiscent of the several layers of an orchid and minimizes the apparent width of the hand. The basic hand positions for the older and young sheng roles fall between the extremes of the hualian and young dan. Performers of older sheng roles separate their fingers slightly, less than the hualian, and extend the thumb down rather than out to the side. Young sheng role performers generally hold their fingers together or only slightly separated. Similarly, gestures such as pointing have the same basic movement structure, but are modified for each role type. For example, when pointing a young dan performer curls her third and fourth finger in to touch the thumb and uses the
index and little fingers to point. An older sheng uses the index and middle finger, curling the fourth and little fingers in to touch the thumb.

Gesture in the Cultural Revolution model plays was somewhat less stylized, often taking a more direct, less circular path in keeping with forward looking revolutionary ideas. The style has been utilized even in plays with less strident political content. Gesture sequences dependent on traditional costume pieces cannot be used in modern dress plays, though attempts are made to find modern equivalents. For example, the Communist hero in the model play Shajiabang flicked a towel in a way reminiscent of watersleeve gestures.

6. Movement

As defined by Whitmore, "movement refers to the sign system that employs the performer's body as it moves through space as a signifier of meanings." But Whitmore also notes that it is impossible, however, to separate the perception of movement signs from gestural signs. During performance, movement and gesture provide a context for decoding each other. Yet there are certain properties of movement that can be isolated for analysis and use by directors. (Whitmore 1994, 98)

The properties Whitmore identifies are direction, speed, duration, intensity, and rhythm (99). These elements are likewise useful in analyzing Jingju movement. For example, martial plays involve much faster, more intense, sharper movement that is utilized during a much higher percentage of total
stage time than in civil plays. Civil plays, highlighting song and speech skills, employ softer movements, and longer periods of physical stillness.

Movement in Jingju follows very clear conventions. As with gesture, almost all floor patterns are curved, in keeping with the basic Xiqu aesthetic that round is beautiful. To achieve the aesthetic goal of effortlessness, the effort of the body is bifurcated through use of extreme abdominal strength and lift so that the locomotive movements of the lower body appear not to affect the upper body. Even the extreme kicks and lunges of the martial roles must not jar the upper body. The basic step for traveling quickly (跑圆场, paoyuanchang, “run the round field”) involves the performer taking rapid, tiny steps while holding the hips, upper body, and arms completely still. The step is used for any situation involving urgency, such as combat. It is also used to create the sensation of floating or flying. Such an impression would have been further heightened in the traditional performance setting where the stage was raised above the audience, obscuring view of the performer’s feet and legs.

As with gesture, there are numerous movement patterns that have variations for specific role types. Each major role category has its own basic “stage step” (台步, taibu). Young dan take small, smooth steps with knees close together. The more refined qingyi (青衣, lit. “blue cloth”) dan accompany
these steps with a subtle oppositional sway of the torso. The lively huadan exaggerates the sway of the lifted torso and moves more quickly and sharply than the qingyi. Old dan roles often walk leaning on a staff, taking somewhat halting steps forward, with feet wider apart than for young dan. Older civil sheng take larger steps, swinging their legs open to the diagonal before stepping forward. Hualian performers take even longer, wider steps. Martial sheng exaggerate this motion further, lifting their legs to or even above waist level. Civil chou performers move with both knees and torso slightly bent, taking wide steps, the speed of the movement depending on the age and situation of the character. Martial chou move the most quickly of all the roles, often on slightly bent legs but taking much narrower steps. There is also a special category of martial sheng movement that incorporates some elements of the bent-legged chou for portrayal of the Monkey King, a character from the classic novel Journey to the West (西游记, Xiyouji).

There are many set sequences combining gesture with movement across the floor that are reused in different plays with variations appropriate to the situation. A good example of such a set is called qiba (起霸, lit. "rise to hegemony"), in which one or more characters prepare for battle through a set of highly conventional movements indicating examination of the troupes and then checking the character's own armor and equipment. The basic pattern of movement is the same from play to play, but is tailored to the particular
character and situation (Chen Zengkun 1995). Other examples include combat sequences, both unarmed and utilizing numerous different weapons, which are stylized and precise. Performers rarely make physical contact, but the sequences clearly denote "fighting" even to an uninitiated spectator.

There are also set sequences of stylized movement using various props such as an oar or a horsewhip. As long as a spectator understands what the prop represents, the accompanying movements will be recognizable. For example, performers moving across the stage while making paddling motions with an oar can readily be understood to be traveling by boat. In my experience, the elaborately tasseled horsewhip was not readily recognizable. As a result, the meaning of the accompanying movement was also obscure to me. Once I learned to recognize the whip, however, the accompanying movement became clear as fairly representational mounting of the horse and urging it forward. The more elaborate scenic designs of contemporary Xiqu plays often disrupt traditional patterns of movement across the floor, as discussed below. I have seen a Xiqu actor carry a motorcycle helmet, but I have never seen an attempt to stylize movement associated with riding a motorcycle. Very successful movement innovation was achieved in Camel Xiangzi, discussed in chapter 6.
Visual Sign Systems

1. Costumes and Headpieces

To the initiated spectator, Xiqu costumes identify the gender, social status, and role-type subdivision of the character. Symbolic use of color also conveys basic information about the character's moral fiber, such as loyalty, courage, or honesty. Xiqu costumes do not tell the audience much about the location, time period, or season. This information comes from descriptive language and movement of the performers. Some folk-based forms have simpler costuming, but Jingju and most other classical forms, including Hebei Bangzi, discussed in chapter 5, have quite elaborate costumes. The following discussion focuses on costuming in traditional Jingju.

Based primarily on Ming dynasty (1368-1644) fashion, traditional Jingju costumes are made of ornately hand-embroidered, rich-colored silks. In terms of silhouette, civil sheng characters wear either casual or formal loose-fitting robes. High-ranking military characters wear a many-paneled garment symbolizing armor, with four flags attached to their shoulders and spread behind them like a fan, symbolizing their troupes. More refined dan characters wear a long, pleated skirt topped with a knee-length silk robe, or a ceremonial robe if they are of royal status. The young, lively huadan wears pants and a short fitted shirt. This role type, together with the martial sheng, dan, and chou roles featuring acrobatics who also wear pants and a fitted top, are the only
roles whose costumes reveal much of the performer's body. An extreme example of the body-obscuring quality of most Jingju costumes is the traditional jade belt worn by members of the royal court. The belt is a good foot wider in diameter than the actor's already loose-fitting robe and hangs from loops in the side seam of the garment.

Color is used to denote age (young sheng and dan roles wear pastels, older characters wear deeper hues); social status (members of the royal family and their entourage wear yellow, only those of high rank may wear red officials' robes); aspects of personality (Judge Bao's black robes denote honesty; young sheng in pink are understood to be "ladies' men," any character in blue is likely to be virtuous and kind. Societal custom is also integrated into the color system to indicate marriage (red) and mourning (white) (Bonds 1997, 15-16).

Headdresses, wigs, and hats are also quite elaborate and indicate additional information about gender, social status, sub-role types, and personality. Crowns, official's hats with wings, hanging jewels, and four-foot long pheasant feathers are examples of head pieces which, in addition to communicating information about the character's role type and status, are often in motion, drawing focus to the actors face, and/or manipulated through intricate neck and head movements.

Costumes for newly-written and modern plays are usually much more period and place specific. And even those costumes that are intended to
evoke the "traditional China" of the traditional Xiqu repertoire will often be modernized. In particular, newly designed costumes are generally much more form fitting. Even the jade belt will often fit the actor's waist snuggly.

2. Space and Setting

As discussed above, most theatres in urban China are large proscenium style theatres. Though a few venues seek to replicate the thrust formation of the traditional teahouse performance setting, with audience seated at ornately carved wooden tables set with tea and snacks, the stage space itself is not alterable. Thus Xiqu directors do not have the option of reorganizing the audience-stage relationship as might occur in a black box theatre space. Nor have I seen a Xiqu performance where the performers invade the audience's space by entering or exiting through the aisles of the auditorium.

A traditional Xiqu stage is covered with a carpet but otherwise almost bare. It is often said that any play in the traditional repertoire can be performed with only "a table and two chairs" (一桌二椅, yi zhuo er yi). On a traditional stage, there were two doors or curtained openings upstage, one stage right used for entrances, one stage left used for exits. This practice is continued today in the proscenium stages by using the furthest upstage wings on either side. An entrance by a major character from stage left is rare and usually has

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5 Beijing has several such spaces but these are used for Huaju performances.
a very specific meaning for an initiated spectator. For example, armies of the enemy of the leading character commonly enter from stage left. An interesting instance of a stage left entrance occurs in the play Ding Jun Mountain (定军山, Dingjun Shan). An old warrior arrives to offer his services in battle. Because he is quite old and considered beyond the normal age for active soldiering, he enters from stage left indicating his refusal to be bound by societal expectations (Chen Zengkun 1995). Entrances from stage left can also be used for more practical, representational effect. When characters are traveling over a series of scenes, each scene begins with a stage right entrance, giving the impression of forward progress. If there is a return journey portrayed in a series of scenes paralleling the initial journey, as in Silang Visits His Mother (四郎探母, Silang Tan Mu), these scenes will begin with entrances from stage left.

The traditional Xiqu stage is utilized symmetrically. Of the eighteen common configurations of tables and chairs given in the Dabaike encyclopedia Xiqu volume, only two do not split the center, with an even number of set pieces on each side (Zhongguo Dabaieke 1983, 539). If the scene involves a meeting in a home or palace, a table will be placed upstage center. People of high rank will sit in a chair placed directly upstage of the table. In a solo scene, a performer might sit in a chair placed directly downstage of the table. When sharing the scene with a guest of approximate equal rank, chairs will be
placed diagonally out and slightly downstage of the table. In a large meeting, more chairs will be placed along the diagonal from the table toward the downstage corners of the stage.

The "mouth of the nine dragons" (九龙口, jiu long kou) is a point about 1/4 onstage from the left wing and 1/3 downstage from the back wall. This is the point at which any major character will stop for a heightened liangxiang pose to greet the audience and receive applause, as discussed above. A parallel point exists on stage left and is called the "exiting mouth of the nine dragons" (下场九龙口, xia chang jiu long kou). Performers often pose at this point to sing a final line or two before exiting upstage left. Directly downstage, almost to the edge of the stage, of both dragon mouth points are the "entering door stage mouth" (上场门台口, shangchangmen tai kou) and the "exiting door stage mouth" (下场门台口, xiachangmen tai kou). Dividing these two points on the same downstage plane is the "center stage mouth" (中台口, zhongtai kou). As diagramed below, a common floor pattern for a longer aria in a traveling scene when the stage is empty would involve the following: entering to the "mouth of nine dragons" (#1) for a liangxiang, moving to the "center stage mouth" point (#2), then to the "entering stage mouth" point (#3), crossing to the "exiting stage mouth" point (#4), then returning to the "center stage mouth" (#5), singing several lines at each of these points. Lastly, the performer would
cross upstage to the "exiting mouth of the nine dragons" (#6) to sing the last few lines of the aria before exiting (Chen Zengkun 1999).

**Figure 2**
*Common floor pattern for a longer aria in a traveling scene*

Today, much more elaborate settings are often employed, and the traditional rules for use of the stage space no longer apply. Although the initial liangxiang for the first entrance of major characters is often preserved, the "mouth of the nine dragons" point may be unavailable because occupied or obscured by a set piece.

The use of an even number of supernumerary performers, called the "dragon set" (龙套, longtao), as "living furniture" in many scenes further
emphasizes the symmetrical stability of traditional Xiqu staging. Dragon sets must always include a number of performers that is divisible by four. Dragon set performers typically enter in pairs from upstage right. In a common entrance pattern, each pair stops at the “mouth of the nine dragons” for a liangxiang, proceeds to the “center stage mouth” for another liangxiang. From here the pair splits, with one performer headed stage right, the other stage left. They mirror each other’s movement—circling out, around and up stage to form two diagonal lines across the upstage plane. Since the number of dragon set performers is always divisible by four, the lines formed after each pair has split are also comprised of an even number (Li Wencai 1998). Unlike performers in a crowd scene of a realistic drama, members of the dragon set are required to remain emotionless, staring at a fixed point and showing no reaction to the events occurring before them. This convention is often still observed in newly-written historical plays. In modern plays, however, supernumerary performers often do react in individualistic ways to the events occurring before them.

In a traditional play, any tables or chairs used will be covered with silk, using the same color for all furniture pieces in a single location. Even furniture representing the home of a very poor character will have silk coverings, though with little or no embroidery. The colors are somewhat symbolic: yellow for both costumes and furniture coverings is reserved for emperors and other royalty, while white indicates mourning for a relative.
Furniture representing the room of a *hualian* character will usually be covered in deep purple or blue. Orange or red is used for rooms of older *sheng* characters, while pink or white is used for the rooms of young *dan* characters (Tianjin Jiaoyu Chubanshe 1995, 1: 276). Since many traditional plays involve a parallel scene structure that switches back and forth between two households, the different colors of silk are also useful for helping the audience keep track of the different locations.

Tables are used as beds or mountains or city walls, and often simply as tables. The traditional Xiqu stage space is completely flexible. Set pieces are transformed through performer interaction. For example, in the traditional *Jingju* *Silang Visits His Mother*, Silang and his wife sit in a garden pavilion. After conversing for a time, they mime stepping outside, then circle out and around to stand behind the chairs in which they were just sitting. Through the miming of stepping over the high threshold of a traditional Chinese building, the initiated spectator knows that the scene has shifted. As the performers circle out, they are walking through the garden. When they arrive behind the chairs in which they were just sitting, leaning lightly on the chair backs, they are understood to be leaning on a railing in the garden.

Today, the setting for a traditional Xiqu play will often include a large two-dimensional piece hanging upstage, to serve as a backdrop. The piece might have something to do with the play being performed, or with the occasion for
the performance. Beginning with the importation of Western realistic drama in the early 20th century, and intensifying with the Xiqu reform movement after 1949, modern Xiqu plays adopted a much more representational approach to stage design. For example, the model revolutionary Jingju *The Red Lantern* utilized nine separate realistic settings for the nine locations occurring in the play. More recently, scenic artists working in Xiqu have employed a wide range of styles, from spectacular full stage turntables (e.g., *Da Yu Prevents Floods*, 大禹治水, *Dayu Zhi Shui*) to strikingly expressionistic unit sets (e.g., *Camel Xiangzi*, 骆驼祥子, *Luotuo Xiangzi*), discussed in chapter 6, below.

One final important visual element of the Xiqu stage is the orchestra, which traditionally is in a box, downstage left. Usually at least the front two rows, comprised of the string players, are visible to the audience. The leader of the melodic section of the orchestra, the player of the *jinghu* (京胡, a two-stringed spike fiddle) sits in the front row furthest downstage. *Jinghu* players often become quite physically involved with their playing and can be very exciting to watch. They may even elicit audience applause and calls of "Hao!" for particularly virtuosic playing. Today, for many modern plays, particularly those using more elaborate settings or a larger than traditional orchestra, the musicians are placed out of audience view in a lowered orchestra pit.
3. Texture and Color

Combining information from the above discussions of costume and setting, it should be evident that the traditional Xiqu stage has a quite distinctive texture and color. Smooth, lushly colored, shiny silk covers both performers' bodies and set pieces. The plush-ness of the carpet covering the stage floor matches the richness of the ornately embroidered costumes. In contrast, the modern plays of the Xiqu reform movement adopted a much rougher texture and employed a much more muted color scheme—the textures and colors of life among the rural masses. Xiqu plays set in contemporary cities adopt the sheen of chrome and plastic. This full range of visual expression is being explored by contemporary Xiqu directors and scenic artists.

4. Lighting

Traditional plays were performed out of doors, or by lamp light in the teahouses. Even today, traditional plays are staged with very bright, usually unchanging lighting that emphasizes the detail of the costume embroidery and the nuances of performer facial expressions. In the famous traditional play, Inn at the Crossroads (三岔口, San Cha Kou), two characters fight each other in a dark room. Representing a character preparing for bed, one performer pretends to blow out the flame of a prop candle while the orchestra plays the percussion pattern denoting falling darkness. There is no change in the actual lighting level, but when the first character is attacked by another, they
proceed as though fighting in pitch-black darkness, being misled by sounds and surprising each other in a delightful and impressive display of martial skill. Complementing the use of elaborate set design, new plays, in contrast, often employ extensive lighting design, including use of fog, cyclorama, follow spots and other modern technological innovations in lighting.

**Aural Sign Systems**

Music is such an important part of Xiqu communication systems that older Xiqu fans used to speak of going to “hear” a play. They would sit in the audience, eyes closed, and listen intently to a performer’s individual rendition of the familiar music (Wichmann 1991, 1). Modern productions place a much stronger emphasis on visual systems of communication, and this saying has faded as a result, but music remains a central element in the success of a Xiqu play.

1. **Melody**

There are essentially two systems of musical structure in Xiqu. Some forms use the “joined song structure” (连曲体, lianquti), where lyrics are written for pre-existing tunes that are then arranged modularly to suit the situation. This was the system used in Ming dynasty Kunqu, and there are several regional forms that use it as well. Different tunes evoke different emotional connotations, and there are complex rules for how several tunes may be joined into a set. Jingju and the majority of other regional forms use “beat-tune
structure” (板腔体, banqiangti), where melodies are composed to fit preexisting lyrics based on a complex system of modes and metrical types, each with affective connotative meanings. Jingju music also incorporates some Kunqu-based preexisting melodies for additional variety and dramatic effect.

The musical system used in Jingju is called pihuang (皮黄) after its two principle modal systems. Xipi (西皮) is perceived as energetic, bright, forceful, and above all purposeful. It is used to express joy, delight, or vehemence. Erhuang (二黄) is more fatalistic, tragic, or passive, for characters who are old and ill, or otherwise powerless. It is perceived as heavy, profound, dark, or deep. It is considered best for expressing grief or remembrance. Inverse xipi is in effect similar to erhuang, while inverse erhuang is an intensification of the same tragic feelings evoked by erhuang. Each major modal system has a number of subsidiary related modes (Wichmann 1991, 71-130).

There are metered and unmetered metrical types which are joined with a particular mode to produce a template of general melodic tendencies. These are then specifically tailored to match the character’s personality, situation, as well as the speech tones of the lyrics. For example, primary meter (原板, yuanban) is equivalent to 4/4 time and is used for expository material of no extreme emotional content. Conversely, shaking meter (摇板 yaoban)
involves a brisk 1/1 time kept by the percussion, while the performer sings in flowing free meter. This metrical type is used to symbolize a character that is highly agitated but, due to social convention or circumstance, must present a calm outward demeanor. The highly melismatic slow meter (慢板, manban) is used to express deeply emotive contemplation of a problem (Wichmann 1991, 59-71). This is the most highly ornamented of the metrical types, and when used to excess is criticized for showing off the performer’s technical skill at the expense of interpretation of character (Wichmann-Walczak 2000, 106 and n.6). The modal and metrical systems combine to create a rich system of emotionally expressive possibilities. Several different metrical types may be joined together into a complex aria. These usually open and close with unmetered passages and contain two or more metered metrical types, often with additional unmetered transitional passages in between.

Shifts from one metrical type to another are a major means by which dramatic tension is built. Over the course of a scene, or within a complex aria, the tempo may build from slow meter (慢板, manban) through the moderate er liu (二六, “two-six” or 二流 “two-flowing”) meter, the faster liushui (流水, flowing water) meter, to fast meter (快板, kuaiban), and will probably include several intervening unmetered passages as well. An example of this dramatic build can be seen in the traditional play Qin Xianglian (琴香莲, a woman’s name).
Before the play begins, Qin's husband left her and their two children three years earlier to travel to the capital and take the Imperial examination. He placed first in the exam and was offered the emperor's sister in marriage. Because a princess would never be given in marriage as someone's second wife, the husband accepted the marriage without revealing he was already married. The play begins when Qin, after suffering numerous hardships seeks and finds her husband in the capital. First she sings in moderate "two-six" meter to remind him of their love. Later in the scene she switches to the faster "flowing water" meter, imploring him at least to recognize his children. Shifting to the unmetered "shaking meter," she urges the children to beg their father for help. Then finally, when he is still unmoved, she sings in "fast meter" that she must fight for life. She physically attacks him, but after a brief struggle he throws her out of the palace.

Shifts from one primary mode to another occur when deemed appropriate to the dramatic situation. For example, all but one section of the music in Qin Xiangtian is in the purposeful xipi mode. In the only section in which the more tragic erhuang mode is used, Qin makes one final attempt to gain her husband's recognition. With the help of a high-ranking friend of her husband, she goes in disguise as a folk singer to her husband's birthday celebration. She sings the story of his betrayal, hoping to move him to acknowledge the truth. The change to erhuang mode is appropriate for two
reasons. First, this attempt to win recognition is quite passive and indirect, offered obliquely to her husband for his acceptance or rejection. Second, a shift in mode is appropriate because this is the only section of singing intended to represent a character who is actually singing within the fictional world of the play—even in a realistic version of the play, this section would be sung. All the other singing sections in the play represent dialogue or interior monologue that would be spoken rather than sung in a realistic version. And so it is appropriate to make this distinction by changing modes.

An initiated spectator is familiar with these musical structures and understands their intended meaning. Perhaps because there are many plays that utilize only one primary modal system, to the uninitiated, whether Chinese or foreign, the subtle variations between melodies are not appreciated so that a common complaint is that "it all sounds the same." The model revolutionary plays of the Cultural Revolution period incorporated many musical innovations, including combinations of mode and metrical type not found in the traditional repertoire. Artists working on these plays also experimented with Western theories of orchestration, including utilization of Western instruments in the orchestra and a different recurring leitmotif for each major character. More recently, Xiqu composers have incorporated synthesized or recorded music as well. Another common practice expanding the melodic texture of Jingju is to incorporate melodies from Chinese folk music or balladry forms. This was
done in *Medea*, discussed in chapter 5, in *Camel Xiangzi*, discussed in chapter 6, as well as in *Othello*, discussed in chapter 8.

2. Percussion

The percussive section of the traditional Xiqu orchestra consists of a sharp-sounding solid wooden drum and a wooden clapper, both played by the leader of the orchestra, as well as gongs and cymbals in several sizes. There are scores of percussion patterns, each with its own name and range of appropriate uses. Percussion patterns serve to introduce, bridge, and conclude melodic passages, as well as to punctuate stage action that does not involve singing. Percussion plays a crucial role in the synthesis of the various performance elements, supporting most every transitional moment with precisely coordinated sound. The drummer/conductor follows the action, setting tempos and cuing the other members of the percussion section through a complex system of signals using different positions of his drumsticks.

The percussive orchestra creates a fabric of sound that runs throughout every Beijing opera (Jingju) performance, simultaneously characterizing those performances as Beijing opera (Jingju) and significantly contributing to the expression of atmosphere and emotions specific to the play. (Wichmann 1991, 252)

Perhaps as a testament to the effectiveness with which Xiqu percussion is able to contribute to the performance in this way, there seems to be little interest in innovating in this area.
Conclusion

Whitmore's taxonomy of sign systems was developed to aid contemporary Western directors seeking to bring sign systems other than the literary text forward in the overall balance of a production. These directors are moving away from sign systems focused on clear communication of the literary text, and instead are using them to confront or recontextualize that text. Conversely, many of the innovations discussed above operate to shift the balance of sign systems in contemporary Xiqu performances in the opposite direction, toward more direct support of the literary text. Because of the breakdown of the traditional Xiqu semiotic process, many spectators are not able to read its complexity of signs. The codes are being simplified so as to make them more accessible to uninitiated spectators. Sets and costumes are specifically designed for particular productions. Since they are usually much more period and place specific than was true in traditional Xiqu, they support the literary text more overtly, with signifiers that even uninitiated spectators can decode. And new signifiers are being introduced that draw on contemporary life with the hope of making the production more interesting to contemporary audiences. In the following chapter, I will discuss how a director may choose to integrate these communication systems both with each other and with innovative elements in ways that either frustrate or enhance the syntax of the Xiqu aesthetic process.
CHAPTER 4
A SYNTAX OF XIQU:
FILM SEMIOTICS AND XIQU ON FILM

Illustration 1. Women Generals of the Yang Family

Illustration 2. White Snake
In the previous chapter, I examined various individual systems of communication, discussing how each operates in traditional Xiqu and offering observations about how each is evolving. In this chapter, I focus on how transitions between these systems can be negotiated to either serve or frustrate traditional Xiqu aesthetic goals. I analyze two Xiqu films, one from the period immediately preceding the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), and one from the period immediately following it. This detour from the discussion of Xiqu on stage is motivated by two major factors. First, the work of the director can be more clearly separated from that of the performer by examining choices in the filming and editing process. Second, because the two films take such radically different approaches to a balancing of Xiqu aesthetic principles and technological innovations, they offer extremes on a continuum of possible formulations of this balancing process. Discoveries about how certain choices either frustrate or support underlying Xiqu aesthetic principles in these two films will then be used in my examination of stage productions in the following two chapters. My goal in this chapter is not to attempt to say anything new about film theory. Rather, I use some basic concepts from among a constellation of competing theories about how films create meaning in order to reveal something about how meaning is created in Xiqu—whether on film or on stage.

Literary theory was a major source of inspiration for film theory (see generally, Buckland 1991). Some theorists speak of the syntax of cinema. But they also recognize the distinctions: film is like a language, but since it works with
complex images it is possible to say many things in the same instant (Monaco 2000, 160). Such complexity of meaning is possible through language, but only with the active, imaginative participation of the reader/listener. In traditional performance forms such as Xiqu, initiated spectators have been raised to interpret the conventions and appreciate the aesthetics of the form. Traditional Xiqu, with its bare stage and highly stylized performance language often presents an essentialized “single” image. But through the active participation of an initiated spectator, a full range of complex expression/perception is achieved. The syntax of Xiqu in this respect functions similarly to that of verbal language. And so perhaps it is not surprising that Xiqu, and particularly the performance of Mei Lanfang, has had significant influence on Western film theory. This influence was felt directly in the work of the great Russian cinematographer Sergei Eisenstein (Eisenstein 1935, 760-70; 1991, 278-79; Banu 1986) and indirectly through Bertolt Brecht (Brecht 1964, 91-99) whose work on the stage in turn had great influence in the development of film theory (Bruck 1988, 58).1

This chapter will apply some fundamental concepts of film theory, particularly from the field of film semiotics,2 to two major film productions of Xiqu

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1Banu suggests that Mei’s influence on Eisenstein was primarily as a kind of camouflage for his own theoretical challenge to socialist realism’s rejection of all things “formalist,” by asserting that Xiqu, though conventionalized in form, was still “[r]ealistic in its own specific sense, capable of touching upon... social and everyday problems of life” (1986, 171-72 quoting Eisenstein 1935, 764). Interestingly, as discussed in chapter 2, A Jia found himself making similar apologies for Xiqu’s conventional performance language in the face of a Stanislavskian-inspired movement in Chinese theatre against “formalism” (Liu Yizhen 1998, 11-12). It has also been persuasively argued that Brecht’s “A-effect” was fully formed years before he saw Mei Lanfang perform (Tian 1997, 203).

2It is beyond the scope of this study to address post-structuralist criticisms of semiotics, or to debate whether the semiotic project is perhaps simply traveling in disguise under the name cultural studies (Lucy 2001, 25), or that cultural studies is a subset of semiotics (Di Leo 2000).
plays. The first is the pre-Cultural Revolution Women Generals of the Yang Family (杨门女将, Yangmen Nüjiang [1960]), which employed a style of “filmed theatre,” to some extent subverting cinematic techniques to basic aesthetic principles of Xiqu. The second is the post-Cultural Revolution film White Snake (白蛇传, Bai She Zhuan [1983]), which highlighted cinematic techniques and scenic special effects, often at the expense of Xiqu artistry. This film is representative of many films and stage productions of the period that utilized lavish visual effects in a backlash against the rigid constraints of the Cultural Revolution period.\(^3\) Comparison of these two very different approaches to Xiqu on film reveals several important factors in the operation of Xiqu as a performance language. These two films also offer interesting parallels to the tensions between the competing goals of preserving tradition and exciting contemporary audiences that must be negotiated by the contemporary Xiqu director.

In his influential textbook How to Read a Film, James Monaco asserts, “the power of language is that there is a very great difference between the signifier and the signified; the power of film is that there is not” (Monaco 2000, 158). Just as Monaco asserts that a picture of a book is closer to an actual book than is the word “book,” a picture of a Xiqu actor is much closer to a Xiqu actor conceptually than the words “Xiqu actor” are. One person can read the words “Xiqu actor” and create a mental image of Mei Lanfang portraying the enticing

\(^3\) Elizabeth Wichmann-Walczak observed pervasive use of elaborate scenery in stage productions of both traditional and newly created plays during this period. She theorizes that another influence encouraging lavish scenery was the continued existence at many Xiqu companies of large, well-equipped and staffed scene shops left over from the staging of the model plays (2003).
beauty of the favorite concubine drinking alone in a moonlit garden. Another person can read the same words and create the mental image of a hualian general standing high on his platform boots, face framed by the four flags that represent his army and surrounded by five other generals similarly clad. The cinematographer chooses from a set of infinite possibilities the specific image to place on the screen (Buckland 1991, 206). “The artist’s choice in cinema is without limit; the artist’s choice in literature is circumscribed, while the reverse is true for the observer” (Monaco 2000, 158). The cinematographer chooses the signifier that she or he believes most accurately signifies the desired meaning.

Discussing the early work of leading film theorist Christian Metz, Monaco argues:

What makes film distinctly separate from other languages is its short-circuit sign, in which signifier and signified are nearly the same. Normal languages exhibit the power of “double articulation”: that is, in order to use a language one must be able to understand its sounds and meanings, both its signifiers and its signifieds. But this is not true of film. Signifier and signified are nearly the same: what you see is what you get. (2000, 420)

In contrast, Xiqu artists have developed a syntax of performance over the centuries which maintains and heightens the distance between the signifier and the signified to varying degrees. This distance has primarily to do with the artistic desire to beautify the signifier such that audience response to the signified includes an appreciation of the artistic skill used to produce the signifier, rather than some new understanding of the content, story, or theme. In a common shorthand formulation used to distinguish Xiqu from Western realistic performance, it is asserted that the primary goal in Xiqu is to evoke an

4 Who “you” is will of course have profound impact on what “you” gets.
appreciation of performance skills from the audience. Tao-Ching Hsü explains in his comparison of Xiqu and Western realistic acting styles:

The object of the Chinese theatre is a beautiful vision, not a nervous state. If nothing else, the concentration required to appreciate the subtleties of the singer's voice makes it undesirable for audience to be emotionally excited. An audience carried away by the emotions of the play can hardly be at the same time sensitive to what is best in a singer's voice or a dancer's movements; to them the complex feelings the [Western] actors express are likely to appear simple, elusive feelings that pass them unnoticed and subtle feelings they would not understand. (Hsü 1985, 142)

Thus, according to Hsü, the goal of the syntax of Xiqu is to provoke an appreciation of the skill used in the portrayal of a particular event or emotional state rather than in the meaning of the event or state itself. Yet this formulation of desired audience response is a somewhat essentialized East-West comparison. In fact, over the centuries, Chinese theatre critics have often spoken of the importance of "moving the audience." In a recent article, Jingsong Chen argues that revelation of character emotion is at the core of the Xiqu performance equation. He cites important Chinese critic Li Yu's (李渔, 1610-1680) assertion that "a portrayal of genuine feelings will make the audience laugh, cry, become angry, or feel shocked. In scenes where genuine feelings are demonstrated, the audience will be thrilled and its applause may shake heaven and earth" (Chen, J. 1997, 42). Tang Xianzu (汤显祖, 1550-1616), the Ming Dynasty playwright of The Peony Pavilion wrote:

When a performance reaches the most exquisite point, one can hear the soundless and see the Tao as big as life. The performer/dancer does not know where his feelings come from, and the enraptured spectator does not know where his own mind has gone. The situation would be
just like the famed performance in which a puppet's flirting with the royal ladies-in-waiting was so lifelike that the enraged emperor was ready to kill the master puppeteer. (Fei 1999, 57 [trans. Fei])

In a recent article Min Tian gives further evidence that spectators might be seeking something other than intellectualized appreciation of performance skills by noting the probable element of sexual attraction involved in the popular performances of the late 1800s of female roles by boys too young to have achieved a significant skill level (Tian 2000, 82). Thus, Hsü’s formulation that the Xiqu spectator should avoid being moved in order to better appreciate the performer’s skill is an oversimplification.

On the other hand, while appreciation of skill may not be the only act of reception performed by the Xiqu spectator, it is certainly a primary element. Xiqu performers train a lifetime to master these extraordinarily difficult skills. Theatre scholar Li Ruru, daughter of famous Jingju actress Li Yuru, asserts:

The aesthetic psychology of the jingju spectators is similar to the experience of those appreciating an opera or a ballet. Jingju audiences often go to the same play again and again for the sake of appreciating the unique skills of different performers, and sometimes merely to see one particular star who often has his/her own group of fans. Audiences[5] usually know the plot and arias by heart, and often hum or even sing along with the performers....[Audiences] come to see how an actor with various unique skills pretends to be a “dragon”, and to judge whether or not the actor really looks like a “dragon”. They applaud success andboo those performers whom they do not like. Such audience reactions can be traced back to the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). (Li, Ruru 2000, 78)

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[5] Li is clearly assuming an audience of initiated spectators in this description. Later on the same page she notes the declining popularity of Jingju due to the fact that many young Chinese do not understand Jingju conventions and so find performances “opaque.”
Xiqu scholar, Liu Yizhen quotes A Jia’s more complex formulation of the process of Xiqu reception by an initiated audience member:

when an audience watches a play, there is both intellectual judgment and emotional response—and there is also appreciation of beauty. This is the method of communication between xiqu and the audience. . . .Xiqu’s nature is non-hallucinatory.

Liu then concludes that in Xiqu, both empathy and alienation is required of the audience. He asserts:

The actor maintains the interchange with the audience. Outstanding actors will frequently call attention to their acting skills, consciously and concurrently with their efforts to express the feelings of their characters. The audience appreciates the activities of the characters and the events on stage, empathizing with them and at the same time enjoying the actors’ performance skills. Throughout the performance, alienation, empathy and aesthetic appreciation are interwoven. (Liu Yizhen 1998, 128 [trans. Hu et. al.])

It is clear from the aesthetic focus of Liu’s article that the use of the concept of alienation by both Liu and A Jia is based on Brechtian performance theory but has more to do with creating distance between character and performer so as to allow for the spectator’s intellectual process of “appreciation of beauty” rather than Brechtian analysis of political and social issues. This latter type of analysis was conducted upon traditional plays and led to their banning during the Cultural Revolution, and it was a primary factor in the development of the model plays of that period. But traditionally it would likely not have been a significant force in an initiated spectator’s encounter with the performance of a familiar play from the traditional repertoire. For purposes of this chapter, I focus on these interwoven

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6 A Jia is the pre-eminent Xiqu artist and scholar discussed at length in chapter 2.
goals of Xiqu to produce empathy as well as aesthetic appreciation in my examination of the two Xiqu films.

The first feature film made in China was the 1905 “filmed theatre” version of the Xiqu play *Ding Jun Mountain* (定军山, *Ding Jun Shan*) (Yau 1987, 117). Continuing through the mid-1980s, numerous major film versions of Xiqu plays were produced, including the model works of the Cultural Revolution (Yau 1987, 123-24). These films go beyond the 1905 “filmed theatre” to employ uniquely cinematic elements. It is interesting then to apply fundamental concepts of semiotic film theory to the hybrid entity of Xiqu on film. Classical film theorists were split as to whether film should emphasize the raw material (the capacity of film to “record reality”) or the filmmaker’s ability to modify and manipulate the raw material through montage (Buckland 2000, 6-7). But with a Xiqu film the raw material is not so readily identifiable. Here, the “raw material” has already been modified or manipulated into a complex, fully integrated system of expression. These filmed Xiqu plays then present the question of how to translate the Xiqu performance language of the stage to cinematic language for the screen. I will examine two very different approaches to the task with the goal of discovering something about how the “raw material” of Xiqu works.

*Women Generals* is a traditional Xiqu play based on an episode from the classic Chinese novel, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三国演义, *Sanguo Yanyi*). The Yang family women are preparing to celebrate the birthday of the clan matriarch and are expecting news that their husbands and brothers were
victorious in battle. Instead, messengers arrive and announce that their army has been defeated and all the men have been killed. The matriarch decides to take matters into her own hands. She and a score of Yang women go to battle, defeating the enemy army and killing its general.

The style of the film is theatrical rather than realistic. It was clearly filmed on a sound stage. The settings are much more elaborate than traditional Xiqu’s table and a few chairs, but are still stylized and suggestive. Often the background is filmed in a hazy focus that heightens the stylized effect. The film never became very popular. The extreme political shifts that produced the Cultural Revolution had already begun. As with all traditional Xiqu, the film was banned during the Cultural Revolution, and those who participated in its making were arrested or sent to the countryside for reeducation or worse (Yau 1987, 124).

White Snake is based on the legend of two snake spirits, White and Blue, who change to human form. White and a young scholar, who does not know of White’s true nature, meet and fall in love. An evil Buddhist priest, Fa Hai, disapproves of the union. He convinces the scholar to get White drunk since this will cause her to revert to her snake form. When the scholar sees the snake, he is so terrified he becomes fatally ill. White travels to the mountains in search of an herb of immortality that will cure her husband and successfully battles the

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7 The term “realistic” has been used in a confusingly broad array of circumstances, often to refer to the political content of a work regardless of the level of stylization with which that content is presented (e.g., Bruck 1988). The term is used here to refer to one end of a spectrum of performance styles where the goal of the artist apparently is to reproduce physical reality to the greatest extent possible.

8 In early versions of the legend, the villain and hero roles were reversed. The snake spirit was portrayed as an evil, man-eating demon. The virtuous Buddhist priest was the hero rescuing the unfortunate scholar from a horrible fate.
animal spirits that guard the herb. The scholar is saved but the priest does not give up. He lures the scholar to his monastery and holds him captive. When White Snake and her spirit helpers attempt to rescue him, White is captured and Fa Hai orders that she be imprisoned under a pagoda. In this version of the story, Blue rescues White, kills the priest, and forgives the scholar for his lack of loyalty.

Produced by the Shanghai Jingju Company, which prides itself on daring innovation, the film opens with what by early 1980s Chinese standards must have been very exciting special effects. The model of a volcanic mountain shudders then explodes, releasing two animated snakes that slither through the air into a fog bank. When the fog clears, two beautiful young women dressed in traditional Xiqu costumes but without the stylized makeup are in their place. Some scenes in the film are shot on location, others on a sound stage. The supernatural powers of the snake spirits and the Buddhist priest give rise to increasingly elaborate special effects. In the final scene, the priest is engulfed in flame then eaten by a giant crab. The camera’s “x-ray vision” allows the audience to see through the crab’s shell to watch his final death throes. To a contemporary spectator, whether in the West or China where Hollywood blockbusters are increasingly available, the special effects in White Snake would probably appear quite amateurish. But the film was released only three years after the 1977 opening to the West and the decade-long steady diet of model revolutionary works. It became wildly popular.
Two Chinese film theorists blame what they perceive to be the relatively underdeveloped state of Chinese film theory and technique on widespread notions such as “considering politics but not art, considering content but not form, and considering the philosophies of artists but not their artistic techniques” (Zhang and Li 1990, 11). *White Snake* can be seen as an example of the reverse of this thinking. It seems that the makers focused almost exclusively on the flashy potential of the cinematic form, often at the expense of the integrity of the Xiqu raw material that was its subject matter.

**Syntax of Cinema**

Since film can include compositions in space of many elements at once, the syntax of film must include both developments in space as well as in time. The modification of space in film is often referred to as “mise-en-scène,” the modification of time as “montage.” It is misleading to say, as some theorists have, that *mise-en-scène* is static while montage is dynamic. The viewer reads the shot and so is actively involved. Using the tools of *mise-en-scène*, the filmmaker manipulates our reading of the shot (Monaco 2000, 179). This is especially true in these Xiqu films, which involve so much movement in a single shot.

When speaking of *mise-en-scène*, a useful distinction is made between closed and open form. Closed form is where the frame is self-sufficient, for example, where the camera faithfully follows the subject. On the other hand, if the subject leaves then reenters the frame, the form is open and the viewer is
subliminally aware of elements outside the frame (Monaco 2000, 185). In *Women Generals*, the first few moments are very open. The enemy’s flags are seen passing the camera then the entire army enters an empty frame. The camera zooms out to allow a messenger to enter, and then the army exits the frame, continuing in the same direction of their entrance. In the next scene, two messengers aligned with the Yang family enter an empty frame, perform an intricate series of traditional movements representing horse riding, then exit (see Illustration 1). The next scene shows the Yang family hall as servants again enter an empty frame. Implicit in each of these scenes is the existence of the place where the subjects are coming from or going to. This “offstage” area, implicit in the subjects moving in and out of the frame, is thoroughly consistent with the theatrical style of the film and actively engages the imagination of the spectator. The “offstage” area has a dual identity: it is a continuation of the fictional world of the drama, but it is also the domain of the actor independent of any character portrayed. Extensive utilization of the “offstage” area thus encourages spectator awareness of the actor in a manner that contributes to the successful completion of Xiqu expression and reception.

*In White Snake*, the opening moments are essentially closed. The camera follows the snake spirits in flight, indicating movement by passing scenery behind them (see Illustration 2). In the subsequent scenes, Blue and White stroll through a real garden, admiring its beauty. They often look “offstage,” out of the frame. Almost always, however, what they were looking at is revealed in the next
shot. This is essentially a closed form that creates a significantly more passive role for the spectator than in *Women Generals* or traditional Xiqu. The closed form drastically reduces the input required from the spectator to engage Xiqu’s code with his or her own imagination to supply “offstage” or out-of-frame elements. The closed form also limits spectator awareness of the actor as actor by limiting reference to any world beyond the frame.

At a more abstract level, concerns with other elements outside of the shot are crucial to how film creates meaning. Monaco asserts that films create meaning both denotatively (i.e., through stated meaning) and connotatively (i.e., through associative meaning). Relying on basic semiotic concepts, Monaco asserts that there are two ways of achieving connotation in film. First, one can compare the shot with the universe of all other possible shots. For example, a Xiqu actor shot from below—as was done with the enemy characters in both *White Snake* and *Women Generals*—appears dominant because we, perhaps unconsciously, compare it with a Xiqu actor shot from above, which would diminish his importance. This first process is called paradigmatic. In the second process, one can compare a particular shot to the other shots that actually precede it, rather than the universe of possible alternate shots. This second comparative process is called syntagmatic (Monaco 2000, 161-63).

**The Paradigmatic Referent**

The paradigmatic model is particularly enlightening in thinking about Xiqu. First, considering Xiqu in its pure stage form, the possible universe from
which movements and images are chosen is limited by the physical restrictions of the stage. Arguably, it is precisely the spectator’s awareness of these limitations that makes Xiqu so exciting. The famous boat scene in the traditional Xiqu play *Autumn River* (秋江, Qiu Jiang) is exciting because the performers are able to create a sensation of traveling in a boat on the water despite the spectator’s clear perception that there is neither boat nor water. Xiqu’s gravity-defying acrobatics are most amazing because the spectator knows that the performers are in fact gravity-bound. The floating/flying sensation created by the performer’s lifted torso and quick running steps in *paoyuanchang* is magical because we know the performer is moving on solid ground.

When viewed from this paradigmatic level of analysis, the makers of *White Snake* chose not to transfer this aesthetic aspect of Xiqu to the screen while the makers of *Women Generals* did so quite successfully. In *White Snake*, the limitation of the physical stage is removed in the first frame, and replaced with “realistic”9 special effects that leave nothing to the imagination. There is no longer any tension between the physical limitation of a stage performance and the perception that the performers—through the mastery of their art and by engaging the imagination of the spectator—have creatively transcended the physical barriers of the stage. Similarly, Eisenstein noted the “canon of continuity” in Xiqu and that Mei Lanfang’s performance was a vivid example of “how the

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9 Obviously, the effects represent supernatural events (a volcanic eruption splits open a mountain, releasing two flying snake spirits) and so use of the term “realistic” is again problematic. It is nonetheless used here since the clear intent of the film was to reproduce as closely as possible what such events may have looked like had they actually occurred in physical reality.
established and stable ‘canon’ can simultaneously be the source of the most vivid pleasure in creatively overcoming it within the limits once set” (Eisenstein 1987, 251).

In Women Generals the dynamic tension of traditional Xiqu is preserved. The settings are suggestive and stylized. The messengers do not arrive on real horses, they maintain the Xiqu convention of walking while carrying a horse whip to denote riding. Conversely, White and Blue instead of using paoyuanchang to signify travel, are pasted against a film clip of real scenery whizzing by. The choice emphasizes cinematic technique, which at the time the film was released was excitingly innovative to its intended audience. But the choice also eliminates the performer-created magic of seeming to fly with feet still firmly on the solid ground.

Within this paradigmatic system, the connotative structure of philosopher C.S. Pierce has been immensely important in the study of semiotics of both theatre as well as film. Pierce identified three categories of signification: Icon, Index, and Symbol\(^\text{10}\) (Monaco 2000, 164; see generally Aston 1991, 6). The three categories are not mutually exclusive. As a result, it has been argued that the classifications are unnecessary so that it is more useful to use the concept of the “signifying function” where the relationship between signifier and signified cannot be determined until the spectator decodes it through a “productive”

\(^{10}\text{Both Indexes and Symbols can also operate as syntagmatic referents since the associative or symbolic meaning can be created through previous actual uses of the signifier. They are discussed here because the choice between an iconic, indexical, or symbolic signifier is essentially a paradigmatic operation.}\)
Nonetheless, the classifications are useful here because they offer a basis for predicting which Xiqu elements will remain “opaque” to the uninitiated spectator and which elements may be accessible even without an understanding of Xiqu conventions. Xiqu directors must be aware of these different levels if they hope to reach the increasingly large percentage of uninitiated potential spectators.

The first and third of Pierce’s categories are fairly straightforward. First is the Icon, where the signifier is linked to the signified by its similarity to it, its likeness. In Xiqu terms this would include the realistic miming of feeding the chickens and doing needlework in *Picking up the Jade Bracelet* (拾玉镯, Shi Yu Zhuo) as well as the flying *paoyuanchang* and the rowing of the boat already mentioned. This iconic process of signification would be the most accessible to uninitiated spectators. The third category, the Symbol, is an arbitrary sign in which the signifier represents the signified solely through convention. Xiqu examples of this would include the two distinct systems of complex color symbolism that apply one to Xiqu costumes, the other to the make-up of the *hualian* characters. Such arbitrary signs will of course be much less likely to be understood by the uninitiated spectator.

The second, middle category—the Index—is perhaps the most interesting. It would include a sign which is connected to its object neither by arbitrary convention nor because it is identical to it. Rather, an Index is a sign that has an inherent relationship to the object represented. Here, there is a shift
along the continuum from denotative to more connotative modes of expression. In this indexical process of reference, an associated detail or notion is used to invoke an idea or represent an object. For example, media sources often speak of "The Whitehouse" to refer both to the President and to the idea of Presidential power. Monaco notes the Hollywood cliché of this concept are the falling calendar pages to indicate the passing of time (Monaco 2000, 166-69).

A clear example in Xiqu is the use of the four triangular flags strapped to the back of a performer portraying a general. As can be seen in the opening shots of Women Generals, when marching armies appear on the Xiqu stage they are accompanied by flag bearers in a representation of historical practice. The four flags strapped to a general’s back, however, have no such historical precedent. On the traditional Xiqu stage, they indicate that the general is accompanied by troops and also evoke the associated idea of his or her military power. In addition, they offer the opportunity for display of skill: during combat scenes, performers make sharp movements of the torso to whip the flags, and sometimes use them to catch and return spears thrown by enemy soldiers.

The tension and distance between the image of some real event and the stylization of that event on the Xiqu stage is maintained at both the Index and Symbol levels of analysis. At the Icon level this distance is compressed. Unless an Iconic mime sequence is accompanied by the clear audience awareness that the thing being mimed is absent, there is little room for artistic magic at the Icon level. The makers of Women Generals maintained this
distance throughout: the messengers carry prop whips, they do not ride real horses. White Snake operates primarily on the icon level, its makers filmed real gardens and real boats. In Women Generals, a major focus of spectator perception remains on the skill of the performers. In White Snake, this focus shifts to the cinematic technique, with the result that the work of the performers is often trivialized.

The Syntagmatic Referent

The second method of establishing connotative meaning is by comparing a particular shot to those that actually precede it in a process of syntagmatic connotation (Monaco 2000, 163). A comparison of battle scenes from Women Generals and White Snake illustrates the use of editing either to enhance or defeat the exhibition of performance skills. On the traditional Xiqu stage, a crowded battlefield is established by symmetrical lines of opposing soldiers who enter from opposite sides of the stage and execute a series of precisely choreographed parallel movements before exiting. A series of battle scenes often end in large group tableaux. The presence on the stage of large numbers of soldiers brackets, rather than co-exists with, a series of individual combat and segments involving a single hero against several enemies. In Women Generals, extended single shots are used, allowing for spectator perception of the intricate and precise movements of an entire combat.
sequences. Uniquely cinematic techniques are also employed. An individual battle is foregrounded, while other groups of combatants are seen in the background, each involved in distinct battle choreography, as opposed to the unison or parallel group movement of the traditional Xiqu stage. The effect is a heightening of the tension, danger, and confusion of the entire battle, without detracting from the precise beauty of the foregrounded combatants' skill. The soundstage scenery consists of a flat open space with a backdrop suggestive of mountainous terrain. The setting allows for the performers' full range of movement. It is a cinematic example of what Tao-Ching Hsü celebrates as Xiqu's "unadorned stage":

In general, elaborate property limits the scope of action and in the extreme case of a stage full of furniture the actors can hardly move... In studying the Chinese theatre one cannot help but be led to the conclusion that scenery and property tend to enrich the acting, especially acting in the Chinese style, if they are imaginary, but are handicaps if they are real. (Hsü 100-101)

In sharp contrast is the scene in which White Snake battles the spirits who guard the magic herb that could save her husband's life. The scene was clearly filmed on a sound stage, but the setting is a fairly convincing and elaborate array of realistic representations of trees and rock outcroppings. The editing of this sequence includes many awkward cuts that detract significantly from the appreciation of the display of the performers' combat skills. There are several longer shots that better capture the excitement, but fog and a setting tightly crowded with trees and rocks block the view of the performers' feet and appear severely to restrict their movement. Again, the syntagmatic choices made in
White Snake highlight elaborate scenery and flashy film techniques over performer artistry.

One particularly unfortunate example of filmic technique undercutting the power of the Xiqu performance language occurs at the climax of the scene after White has beaten back the opposing spirits. She does a back bend and grabs the herb with her teeth. The moment is shot first from far below, so that the performer is barely visible, and then from directly front so that her extraordinary flexibility is masked through foreshortening. The next frame cuts to a close-up of the performer when she has already almost reached vertical. The quick tempo of these cuts maintains the excitement of the battle and emphasizes the flexibility of filmic montage. But as a consequence, the filmic technique trivializes an exceptional display of the performer’s strength, control, and flexibility. The effect is very similar to the rapid-fire editing of dance sequences in music videos and films such as Baz Luhrmann’s Moulin Rouge. No one shot is long enough to give the audience time to appreciate the dancer’s technique or the choreographer’s artistry. Instead, the editing gives the audience a barrage of images that creates excitement primarily through the rapidity of changing shots, rather than placing any reliance on the artistic impact of the raw material that is the performance.

Interestingly, in America, the process by which different shots are linked together is spoken of as cutting or editing, words that focus on the removal of what is not wanted. In Europe, the more common term is montage, which
suggests a building up (Monaco 2000, 216). Applying this distinction to the current analysis, the makers of *White Snake* have edited out much of the stylistic distance between the signifier and the signified that makes Xiqu work artistically. In contrast, the makers of *Women Generals* respected that distance, and built upon it through careful selection of cinematic technique.

**Synthesis of Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic Models**

*White Snake* also includes an unfortunate example of self-defeating inconsistency between paradigmatic and syntagmatic choices made in translating the Xiqu performance language to film. Borrowing a scenic effect from the model play *Shajiabang*, a boatman in *White Snake* arrives on a prop boat. Lost is the magic of the precisely coordinated mime between the boatman and his boarding passenger, one rising to tiptoe as the other bends at the knees, together creating the unmistakable illusion of a boat on the water. This scene was clearly filmed on a sound stage, not on a real lake, and no actual water is visible. Since it comes after the opening sequence in which White and Blue strolled the banks of a real lake, the artificiality of the sound stage is highlighted.

At one point in the sequence, the filmmakers do attempt to employ a traditional Xiqu convention for boat travel. Echoing the pose of the boatman in *Autumn River*, the boatman in the film stands on one leg, the free foot resting on the opposite knee, alternately bending and straightening the standing leg to create a bobbing effect. But the previous shots of the “real” boat have destroyed the attempted illusion. The filmmakers attempt to justify the use of the
conventional bobbing movement by framing the shot to exclude the boatman’s foot, thus hiding the real boat. The attempt fails because they have just shown the boat in the previous frame. The magic of the movement is rooted in the simultaneous perception of the sign (an actor standing on the stage) with the appreciation of the signified (the illusion of a man bobbing in a boat). Through the traditional syntax of Xiqu, spectator imagination supplies the boat. The movement would make no sense if the actor were standing on a real, but stationary boat, hence the filmmakers’ choice to shoot the actor from the ankle up. But the movement likewise fails when the preceding shots so firmly implanted with the spectator the image of a real, but stationary boat.

On the paradigmatic level, by expanding the universe of possible shots to include the “real,” the makers of White Snake placed focus on the cinematic language at the expense of the potential magic of Xiqu’s stylistic distance between sign and signified. On the syntagmatic level, the potential for magic is further deflated by inconsistency of choices in the cinematic language: once the real lake and boat have been shown, the use of Xiqu conventions to portray these elements, instead of magically transcending a physical limitation, are perceived as trivial and artificial.

Conclusion

Eisentstein spoke of montage as a collision of disparate images—that the juxtaposition of shot “A” with shot “B” will create in the spectator a distinct idea, “C” (Monaco 2000, 402). There is most definitely a collision of ideas in White
Snake—that of the conventions of the performance form with the “realistic” style of the cinematic choices. But there is no sense that the intent was to create a distinct third idea through the participation of the spectator. Perhaps one could argue that the juxtaposition highlights the absurdity of the conventions and the costumes of traditional opera, thus presenting a Marxist dialectic. On the other hand, given that the film was made in the early 1980s—a time of opening to and reclaiming of the traditions buried during the Cultural Revolution—this collision between styles should not be viewed as an attempt to reject those traditions. Rather, it should be seen as merely an accidental by-product of experimentation with new film techniques. The extreme popularity of the film indicates that the mix of styles was not perceived as negatively incongruous by audiences in the early 1980s.

Like traditional Xiqu, Women Generals is full of space for the audience to supply its own “C.” White Snake, though wildly successful commercially, disrupted the artistic equation of Xiqu by compressing most of this space through realistic/iconic cinematic choices. Though some might criticize Women Generals as being insufficiently “cinematic,” the film preserves the power of Xiqu’s traditional performance language by maintaining important paradigmatic and syntagmatic limitations from the physical stage so as to foreground the skill of the performer on the screen. It also adopts a filmic level of stylization that enhances rather than subverts the traditional Xiqu syntax, thus achieving a successful synthesis of film and Xiqu syntax into a coherent artistic language.
Regardless of the comparative artistic merits of these two films as cinema, the above discussion opens fruitful territory in which to investigate directorial choices for the stage that seek to innovate within acceptable parameters of Xiqu convention. This territory will be explored in the following chapters. In chapter 5, I will analyze a regional Xiqu adaptation of Medea whose director was primarily trained in Huaju. In chapter 6, I will analyze a Jingju adaptation of Lao She’s famous novel Camel Xiangzi where the director’s primary training was in Xiqu.
CHAPTER 5
CASE STUDY OF HEBEI BANGZI MEDEA

Illustration 3. Medea and Pelius (1995 program, no photographer given)

Illustration 4. Medea and children (1995 program, no photographer given)
In this chapter I will use the concepts discussed in previous chapters to analyze an internationally successful production of Euripides's *Medea* (美狄亚, *Meidiya*) done by the Youth Troupe\(^1\) of the Hebei Province Hebei Bangzi Company (河北省河北梆子剧院青年团, *Hebeisheng Hebei Bangzi Juyuan Qingniantuan*) and directed by Huaju director Luo Jinlin (罗锦鳞). Information in this chapter is based on seven individual classes (each lasting nearly two hours) I had with the director in his capacity as head of the Directing Department of the Central Drama Academy, where he also serves as Assistant Head (Luo 1998a). During these meetings, we discussed the rehearsal process of *Medea*, as well as the history and current general situation of Huaju and Xiqu directors in China. In addition, I attended a live performance of the *Medea* in December 1995 in Beijing and have studied a video of the production made in October 1995 by the Hebei Province Shijiazhuang Television Station (河北省石家庄电视台, *Hebei Sheng Shijiazhuang Dianshi Tai*). I will first analyze directorial choices in *Medea* with regard to individual communication systems in accordance with Whitmore’s taxonomy as addressed in chapter 3. I will then analyze how the director integrated these various systems in terms of the concepts addressed in chapter 4.

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\(^{1}\) For Xiqu companies, many of which have several troupes, the designation “Youth Troupe” (青年团, *qingnian tuan*) means that the performers in the troupe are generally under 30 years old, not that the troupe performs primarily for young audiences.
Framing systems

1. Intellectual, Historical, and Social Frames

The impulse behind a particular production can have important impact on its ultimate manifestation onstage. Contemporary Xiqu productions are generally developed as a result of a group decision by company personnel that the project is worth pursuing (see e.g., Wichmann-Walczak 2000, 105-06). In contrast, this production of Medea was instigated by an individual director uniquely situated to take on the task of fusing traditional Xiqu performance techniques and ancient Greek tragedy. Because of his important positions at the Central Drama Academy, Luo has significant artistic and political clout in the world of Chinese theatre. He brought an additional level of prestige to the project because his father was an important Greek scholar. His interest in Xiqu was fostered at a young age by his mother, an accomplished amateur Jingju performer. He himself does not sing Jingju, but plays jinghu (the lead melodic instrument of a Jingju orchestra) and the small gong. Moreover, when he was still a student at the Central Drama Academy, he trained with famous Xiqu and Huaju artist Ouyang Yuqian, discussed in chapter 2, in “stage speech,” including Xiqu speech techniques.

In addition to the Medea project, which was rehearsed in 1989, Luo Jinlin has directed three other Greek Tragedies, Oedipus (1986, performed by staff and students of the Central Drama Academy), Antigone (1988, performed by the Harbin Theatre [哈尔滨话剧院, Harbin Huajuyuan]) and Trojan Women (1992, performed by the China Coal Mine Art Troupe [中国煤矿艺术团, Zhongguo... ]
These were all done using Huaju actors, but incorporated some Xiqu performance elements as well. All four of the productions have toured internationally, including to Greece’s International Festival of Ancient Greek Drama in Delphi, where Medea was invited back for a second performance in 1997 (Luo Jinlin 1998a, 1998b).

a. The Tradition

Luo had originally planned to work with a Jingju company to produce Medea. After discussions with several troupes and performers, however, he decided that pressures to preserve traditional conventions in this nationally representative Xiqu form were too confining. He decided instead to approach a regional Xiqu company where he found the performers and company administrators more open to experimentation. He believed Hebei Bangzi was an appropriate form because people from Northern mountainous regions of China are generally thought to be more open, more expressive, less reserved than those from Southern regions, and the same distinction is recognized in the Xiqu forms from these regions. Moreover, Luo found Hebei Bangzi to be particularly appropriate because it already had many tragic stories in its repertoire. He eventually reached an agreement with the Hebei Province Hebei Bangzi Company, which was chosen at least in part for the fact that company officials were willing and able to devote substantial financial resources to the project. With approximately 300 members, the company also had the human resources to offer the over 40 performers, musicians, and crew necessary for the production (Luo Jinlin 1998a).
b. Publicity

Despite, or perhaps because of its extensive international touring, the production was not staged in Beijing until December 1995, when it was performed three times as part of a series of traditional and newly developed or adapted works presented by the company. Although it received substantial coverage in the English language Beijing press (Mao Jingbo 1995, Fan Zhimin 1995), no English language programs were available at the Beijing performances. Nonetheless, Luo’s 1995 notes in the Chinese language program stressed his intercultural goals for the production:

Using a Chinese Xiqu traditional performance form, combined with ancient Greek tragedy’s traditional chorus to perform an ancient Greek tragedy has been a wish of mine for many years. To combine these two great ancient traditions is a very interesting artistic project.

I hope that both Western and Eastern audiences will be able to accept and appreciate this attempt. I have been happy to work for the communication and fusion of Eastern and Western art. (Luo Jinlin 1995)

Several years later, in a paper presented at the 1998 Asian Conference on International Theatre held in Hanoi, Luo stated that he believed Chinese audiences:

saw an utterly untraditional show in spite of the traditional form, appreciating the novelty and innovation, while the Western audience came to know some of the basic elements of Chinese traditional opera through seeing an entirely uniquely Chinese mode of presenting ancient Greek tragedy and enjoying meanwhile the ingenuity of it all. (Luo Jinlin 1998b, 3 [no translator given])

Whether this is in fact how spectators have received the production cannot be stated with certainty, but the following discussion makes clear that it is a fair
assessmnt of the balance achieved in this production between tradition and innovation.

2. Physical Environment

The production was planned for a large, proscenium style theatre. When I attended the performance in 1995, nothing had been done to alter the lobby or auditorium spaces. The only innovation in terms of the use of the physical space involved the six chairs (two rows of three chairs each) for the chorus that were placed down and stage right of the proscenium arch. The chorus of six female performers moved back and forth between this seating position and the stage as needed,\(^2\) supporting one of the traditional Greek choral functions of serving as “an ideal spectator, reacting to the events and characters as the dramatist might hope the audience would” (Brockett 2003, 23).

3. Audience Frames

Working with playwright and composer Ji Junchao (姬君超) in service of his goal to reach both Chinese and Western audiences, Luo made substantial changes from the plot of the Greek original. The first seventy-five minutes of the 135-minute production were devoted to events occurring before Euripides’s point of plot attack. The first scene portrayed Medea meeting Jason, and aiding him in attaining the Golden Fleece. In the second scene, the two returned to Jason’s home to find that his half-uncle, Pelius, had ordered his father’s death.\(^3\) Jason

\(^2\) The multi-faceted use of the chorus will be discussed in more detail below.

\(^3\) As Pelias’s half-brother, Jason’s father Aison had a claim to the throne. After Jason had been gone so long on his quest for the Golden Fleece that it appeared he would never return, Pelias wanted Aison put to death. Aison requested and was granted the right to commit suicide instead;
was then also captured. Medea obtained Jason's freedom in exchange for her promise to restore Pelius's youth. Instead, after Jason was freed, she tricked Pelius into boiling himself to death in a magic cauldron. (Due to time and technical constraints, the actual boiling of Pelias occurred offstage). To convince Pelius to enter the cauldron, Medea gave him the Golden Fleece, saying it would protect him.

In choosing this early point of plot attack, Luo reasoned that Chinese audiences would not be familiar with the mythological basis of the play or the characters and he wanted them fully to understand the relationship between Jason and Medea. He also saw an exciting opportunity to utilize Xiqu's extraordinary martial and acrobatic performance skills to portray these events, and hoped these scenes would be particularly exciting to Western audiences (Luo Jinlin 1998a).

The third scene of this adaptation was set thirteen years later, just before Euripides's play begins. In the scene, Jason criticized Medea harshly, saying that had she not given the Golden Fleece to Pelius, they would not now be living in poverty. Next, Creon entered with his daughter, who was clearly infatuated with Jason, to invite Jason to the palace. Despite pleas of his family, Jason accepted the offer. Scene 4 began at the same point as Euripides's opening scene with Medea's servant worrying about what would happen now that Jason had left Medea.

Aison's wife then also killed herself. Thus when Jason finally arrived home, he discovered that his family was dead and that Pelias was responsible. For further explanation of the complex mythological relationships involved see Appolodorus 1997, 48-56.
Concerns about modern audience tastes both in China and abroad also impacted Luo’s shaping of the production in three additional ways. First, despite the plot additions just discussed, Luo limited the total running time to two hours and fifteen minutes. Second, because of the pervasive impact of realism in showing even the most graphic violence, Luo believed audiences would rather see than hear about Medea killing her sons. As discussed below in the section on movement, his innovative staging of the killing was both highly stylized and very moving. He said that if he had been doing a film version, he would also have chosen to stage the princess being burned alive by the poisonous robe, which Euripides leaves to a messenger report (Luo Jinlin 1998a).

Another important innovation adopted by Luo had a particularly strong impact on the traditional audience function of applauding the entrance of leading performers. Luo felt that the initial liangxiang pose during entrances of major characters, and the applause it usually elicits, inappropriately broke the rhythm of the dramatic build he was attempting to establish. As a result, with one exception, he chose not to use the convention. Even for Medea’s first entrance, as well as for each subsequent entrance, she almost sneaked in, either because masked by the chorus or because other onstage movement drew audience focus elsewhere. The performer playing Jason did take a liangxiang for his initial entrance, but this served the plot in that it was the first time Medea saw Jason.

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4 This is reminiscent of a common criticism of Xiqu productions coming from Huaju trained artists that is summed up by Tian Han’s admonition that audiences should “see the play, not the person” (看戏.不看人, kan xi, bu kan ren) (Zhu Wenxiang, 1998).
Luo exploited the convention within the fictional world of the drama to convey Medea's immediate infatuation with Jason (Luo Jinlin 1998a).

**Performer Systems**

1. **Role Type**

   Hebei Bangzi has the same four major role type divisions as Jingju—sheng, dan, hualian, and chou—as well as a full array of subdivisions based on age, social status, and highlighted performance skills. The roles of Medea and Jason were portrayed as young dan and young sheng role types respectively. Both roles were incredibly demanding on the performers, employing extensive sections of martial movement and other dance-acting as well as difficult sung passages.

   The role of Medea was particularly complex. In the first two scenes, in which Medea obtains the Golden Fleece and helps Jason escape from Pelius, the performer utilized skills from several subcategories of young civil dan: the lively, flirtatious voice and dance-acting skills of the huadan (花旦, “flower dan”), the more vigorous dance-acting skills of the huashan (花衫, “flower shirt”), as well as the combat skills of the daomadan (刀马旦, “horse [and] sword dan”) and the acrobatic skills of the wudan (武旦, “martial dan”). In the third and fourth scene, she utilized the dramatic singing and graceful movement of the qingyi (青衣, “blue cloth”), the subcategory of refined young civil dan well suited to Medea’s new position as wife and mother of two sons. She also combined these qingyi performance skills with segments of more vigorous huashan dance-acting. The
fifth and final scene demanded that the performer break through even the four broadest role type categories. To portray the overflowing intensity of emotion and driven resolve of Medea that preceded killing her sons, Luo decided to use the powerful, wide-armed poses of the hualian role type. This choice to break role type so radically—drawing from movement of the broadest, boldest male role type to portray a young female character—is thoroughly appropriate given that the essence of Medea’s crime is to break through the “natural” boundaries of her role of mother/nurturer to murder her own children.

The fact that Medea’s movement crossed role type divisions would likely be readily apparent to initiated spectators, but not to those unfamiliar with the role type divisions. Because Luo was well aware that audiences at performances outside of China would likely not be familiar with the complex system of role type indicators, he had the performers come out in costume before the performance began to introduce themselves and the characters they were about to portray. But this brief introduction did not include more detailed information about movement vocabularies specific to each role type (Luo Jinlin 1998a). Only two hualian characters appeared in this production—one was Jason’s uncle Pelias, the other was Creon. Both roles were fairly small, involving brief appearances onstage, none of which included the broad martial poses adopted by Medea in the final scene. These performances would therefore likely not provide a sufficient introduction to hualian movement vocabulary such that an uninitiated spectator

5 As discussed below in the gesture and movement sections, the movement was developed by several technique directors with input from the performers, but final choices between possible movement options were made by Luo.
would recognize this as the source of Medea's movement in the final scene. Thus an uninitiated spectator would likely read Medea's poses as indicative of strength and extreme emotion, but probably not appreciate their further significance as a radical rupture in the complex signification system of traditional Xiqu role type divisions.

Another important breaking of traditional boundaries between role type occurred for the role of Jason's new wife. Luo wanted to convey that Jason's decision to remarry was the result of a lust for power rather than a rush of a new love. Euripides's Jason assures Medea that his decision is made primarily out of the desire to provide financially for her and their sons (lines 550-570). Particularly in light of China's rampant political corruption, Luo wanted to stress Jason's political aspirations. The main tool he employed toward this goal was to portray the princess as unattractive and clumsy (Luo Jinlin 1998a).

I recorded my own perception when viewing the production in 1995, before even meeting Luo, describing the second wife in my notes as a "huadan in a qingyi suit." Traditionally, a princess will be portrayed as a qingyi role type and move with slow, graceful elegance that includes an extremely subtle sideways tilt of the torso. The lively huadan walk exaggerates this sideways movement of the torso. When done by a performer in a huadan's traditional, slim, body-hugging costume of pants and short tunic, the effect is light, vivacious, charming. When done by a performer wearing the wide, stiff, brocade robe of a traditional qingyi princess, as occurred in Medea, the sideways torso movement is bizarrely exaggerated. This princess also spoke with a huadan's boisterous colloquial
abandon, in contrast to the refined, highly stylized speech traditionally employed by *qingyi* princesses. For the uninitiated audience, again the significance of role type boundary crossing would likely not be accessible. On the other hand, the princess’s single scene is preceded and followed by scenes in which Medea’s refined physical and vocal grace is exhibited. Thus even an uninitiated spectator would likely grasp Luo’s intent to portray the princess as less attractive, refined, and intelligent than Medea.

2. Personality

The personalities of the leading performers had an important impact on the shaping of this production. The company originally chose three performers to play Medea: a star performer in her 50s, an established but not yet star-level performer in her 30s, and a promising new comer in her 20s. Luo ultimately determined that the oldest performer was not sufficiently open to experimentation and the performer in her 30s, while an accomplished singer, did not have sufficient movement skill for the role. Contrary to the traditional star-driven casting process, Luo settled on the youngest, least well-known performer, Peng Huiheng (彭蕙蘅). Her performance was a great success both in China and overseas, earning her many awards and much popular acclaim (Luo Jinlin 1998a; Mao Jingbo 1995).

The role of Jason was originally created by the extraordinary female performer of male roles, Pei Yanling (裴艳玲). In 1989, when this production was in rehearsal, Pei was already a well-established and very popular performer.
This status gave Pei the political clout within the company to demand that several scenes featuring Jason be added to the production. One particularly interesting section, not included by Euripides, involved an extended and moving encounter between Jason and his sons who begged him not to abandon them and their mother. Jason responded that he was remarrying in order to better their position, so that they would be part of the royal family. Jason was portrayed as a compassionate father, hugging the boys and gently wiping their tears. The section greatly increased Jason’s sympathy as a character within the broader arc of the plot.

The involvement of Pei Yanling in this Hebei Bangzi production ultimately had an unexpected and exciting impact on Jingju. According to Luo, Pei was frustrated by the fame the actress playing Medea achieved from the role. Pei’s frustration is perhaps not surprising given such press as this description in the English language *China Daily* of the production’s success in Greece:

> Jason is sung by Pei Yanling, one of Hebei Bangzi’s most renowned female singers. Her courageous stunts and handsome bearing on stage convinced audiences that she was a man. But still, it was always “Medea” who stole the show. Peng Huiheng, 24, was praised by Greek reviewers as “a perfect Medea” for her heartbreaking singing. After every show, she was surrounded by audiences asking for her autographs. (Mao Jingbo, 1995)

Unbeknownst to the author of the article quoted above, Pei Yanling had already left the company.6 She moved to the Hebei Province Jingju Company (河北省京

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6 In the 1995 performance I attended, Jason was played by male performer Chen Baocheng (陈宝成)—who was very good, but clearly did not have the fame and status of Peng Huiheng. Peng received a substantial two-paragraph long biographical note in the program, while Chen was given no biographical description.
and three years later gave an astounding and award-winning performance in a new Jingju adaptation of the story of Zhong Kui (钟馗), the wronged scholar turned gatekeeper of hell, at the 1998 Second National Jingju Festival in Beijing, discussed in chapters 6 and 9.

3. Voice

A distinguishing characteristic of Hebei Bangzi is that the vocal placement used by performers of young dan roles is even higher-pitched and more sharp, some might say shrill, than in Jingju. Recognizing that foreign audiences often complain of Jingju singing as being too shrill, Luo urged the composer to utilize lower pitches as much as possible. Both the Jason and Medea roles incorporated natural voice singing, a break from the conventional use of falsetto for these role types. All of Medea’s spoken sections used falsetto voice. Jason, as conventionally appropriate to a young sheng role, mixed falsetto and natural voice placement. The production contained a very high percentage of singing as compared to speech. Of the speaking, most was done by Jason and Medea. Appropriate to the weight and seriousness of these roles, they used almost exclusively heightened, stylized speech. Performers of other roles did not employ vocal techniques outside their respective role types.

4. Facial Expressions and Make-up

Consistent with his goal of introducing foreign audiences to Xiqu’s performance conventions, Luo chose to use traditional make-up patterns for all of the roles. One make-up choice of note was the design for Creon. The primary
color of a *hualian* design tells the initiated spectator basic facts about the character's personality. The primary color of Creon's make-up was red, symbolizing loyalty, uprightness, and courage. White, on the other hand, would indicate craftiness and suspicion (Pan Xiafeng 1995, 97). From the choice of red make-up for Creon, an initiated spectator could assume that Creon was essentially a good person, doing what was right under difficult circumstances. Hence, he would be perceived as a sympathetic character despite his harsh actions in banishing Medea. For spectators unfamiliar with the color symbolism, however, a different impression was likely. In the scene in which Jason was offered the new marriage, both Creon and his daughter appeared onstage with Jason. The princess flirted with Jason and gave him the royal red robe appropriate to his new status. Creon said little, nodding and laughing as he watched his daughter, then exited. Combined with the comically awkward portrayal of the princess described above, Creon's actions would likely be read as an overindulgent accession to an unworthy daughter's whims rather than a carefully considered political decision about the future of his kingdom that the choice actually entailed. Thus a spectator unfamiliar with the color symbolism of Creon's make-up would likely find him an extremely unsympathetic character.

As discussed above in chapter 3, unlike the complex system of color signification in Xiqu make-up, Xiqu facial expressions, though often quite exaggerated as compared to more realistic performance forms, are generally readily recognizable even by uninitiated spectators. The only departure from this system in *Medea* occurred in the last scene. A major innovation of the
production, discussed in detail below, involved Peng Huiheng dropping Xiqu stylized performance to a much more realistic level, including shedding real tears and allowing realistic facial expressions, "ugly" by Xiqu standards, to convey Medea's grief after killing her children.

5. Gesture

To develop the gestural and movement sequences, director Luo employed several technique directors: one designed movement for Medea, one for Jason, one handled combat sequences, and one focused on developing movement for the chorus. During the rehearsal process, a technique director would create several possible sequences for a given event or circumstance in the production, then Luo would choose whichever of the options he found most effective. He did not give credit to the performers for developing any of the sequences, though they surely had some input. As the following discussion will make clear, many of the gestural sequences in the production were more decorative rather than necessary to the portrayal of the characters' circumstances. This is a common point of criticism in Xiqu productions developed by Huaju directors using technique directors, instead of the performers themselves developing the gestural sequences (Wichmann 1990, 159).

The production was able to utilize Xiqu's wonderfully rich system of stylized gestures to a fuller extent than many traditional productions, especially with regard to the portrayal of Medea, because of Luo's decision not to be bound by role type divisions. During her first appearance onstage as Medea, Peng Huiheng used chouzi, the long silk pieces also used by Mei Lanfang in his play
Heavenly Maiden Scatters Flowers (天女散花, Tiannu San Hua). The role of the Heavenly Maiden is a huashan (花衫, "flower shirt") role type, which integrates elements of refined qingyi, lively huadan, and martial daomadan performance techniques. Chouzi are draped across the performer’s neck and extend about fifteen feet beyond each hand. The first three to four feet of fabric beyond each hand is weighted with extra layers, allowing the performer to toss the entire length of silk and create spectacular swirling patterns similar to the ribbon dance in rhythmic gymnastics. The fabric is about 18 inches wide and a skillful performer catches air into the chouzi so that even in very intricate patterns the fabric opens to its full width. The Heavenly Maiden’s chouzi are made with three strips of silk, pastel pink, yellow, and blue, running their entire length. Medea’s chouzi were a solid, bright red.

In Heavenly Maiden, the chouzi signify the Buddhist goddess’s flying trip through the clouds. They had a similar meaning here. Luo and the playwright chose to emphasize Medea’s half-god, half-human ancestry. Before her first entrance, the chorus called “Fly here, Medea ... Are you god? Are you human?” After her entrance, the Medea performer executed a long and intricate sequence with the chouzi, during which the chorus described her: “The god of the heavens gave you a soul; the god of the earth gave you steadfast loyalty; the god of the moon gave you magic powers; the god of love chooses your lover.”

In the next scene, Medea operated on earth and sea. She traded the chouzi for a magic fan, which when closed was used as an extension of the hand
for basic gestures such as pointing. When open, the fan was used in impressive circular motions, which, like the chouzi were more for pure spectacle than for communication of meaning. But Medea also used it to charm the dragon spirit guardians into releasing the Golden Fleece, to charm Jason's uncle into releasing the captive Jason, and in the final scene to kill her children. In each case, Peng held the fan in the direction of the target of the magic, shaking it with small, quick motions. The recipients of the magic reacted by staring fixedly at the fan, following its movement with their whole bodies as though gripped by its power.

The meaning of these fan movements would likely be readily understood even by uninitiated spectators. To portray Medea obtaining the Golden Fleece, Peng also incorporated the strong, quick gestures of a martial dan, and even did a diving somersault from a high platform.

The third scene began after the passage of thirteen years, and Medea's costume change also demanded a change of gestural language. This more mature Medea wore a looser fitting, pale blue informal robe typical for qingyi roles. For further visual interest, Luo chose to use with the extra-long water sleeves developed in Chuanju, a Xiqu form from his home province of Sichuan. These sleeves are 4 feet long, instead of the standard 2 to 2.5 foot length used in Jingju, and create an exciting effect when tossed out to their full length. The sleeves are so long that standard watersleeve gestures—such as the smaller in-down-out circular toss and flutter, and the subtle two or three flicks of the wrist to pile the sleeves back up on the forearm—do not work. Instead, the performer must use stronger movements, usually tossing the sleeves up and outward with much
higher velocity than is necessary for the standard Jingju sleeves. To gather the long sleeve back, the performer must extend her arm forward, then pull it up and in toward the body with a sharp movement that pulls the sleeve toward her so she can catch its entire length in a single grasp. It is a very dynamic move, and in Medea was usually accompanied by percussion in which a large gong sounded at the moment the sleeve was caught. One particularly effective gesture sequence occurred at the beginning of scene 4, after Jason had left for the palace and Medea was left alone to contemplate her fate. The performer finished an aria about the unfair position of women in her society in a pose with her arms above her head, palms up with fingers pointing in, sleeves hanging down her back in the gesture used for extreme grief (Yu Handong 1994, 211). Next, she tossed the sleeves over her head and forward, then pulled in and grabbed first one then the other sleeve. Crossing her arms behind her back, she then tossed the sleeves forward, each over the opposite shoulder. From this position, she sang the word “death” four times, slowly lowering her arms so that the sleeves fell listlessly off each shoulder. Watersleeves are used primarily by the elegant qingyi role type, but as the above example demonstrates, the use of extra long sleeves demanded a much more vigorous physicality.

In the final scene, Medea changed costume one last time into the nü da yao bao (女打腰包, “martial female girdle”), a costume used for female characters who are ill or pregnant (Zhongguo Xiqu Xueyuan 1997, 329). The costume involves a pleated length of fabric that is tied around the performer’s chest and hangs to about knee length. The corners of the fabric can be held and
manipulated to create a sweeping, wing-like effect. It is in this costume that Medea used the broad gestures of a martial hualian role type, discussed above. The fabric spanned the width between her outstretched arms, making the gestures and her entire presence seem larger.

The production incorporated a broad array of role types in the supporting roles, and each of these performers used the gestural language traditionally employed in that role type. Only Medea and Creon’s daughter crossed traditional role type boundaries to utilize a more varied set of gestures.

6. Movement

This production incorporated three interesting innovations with regard to movement. The first involves the overall structure of the play. There is a traditional hybrid category of plays that mixes civil and martial elements, appropriately called civil-martial plays (文武戏, wen wu xi). Often the first half of such a play standing alone would be readily characterized as a civil play, while the second half alone would be considered a martial play. Newly written historical plays of the 1950s and 1960s, such as Women Generals of the Yang Family and White Snake (both discussed in chapter 4) are also structured in this way. Because of the choices made to begin the Bangzi Medea much earlier in the story than Euripides’s original, the production inverted the hybrid elements of a civil-martial play, so that it could accurately be labeled a martial-civil play.

The production began with a prologue involving the chorus standing stationary in front of their chairs and singing a brief passage setting the action in Ancient Greece. But for the following thirty minutes, there was almost non-stop
action. The first scene moved at a blistering pace from one complex movement sequence to the next. First Cupid entered announcing his mission to unite Medea and Jason⁷ while doing an intricate series of martial movements. The chorus moved to the stage and joined Cupid in a fast-paced dance sequence using their water sleeves. Medea entered at about five minutes into the performance, using the entire stage for her chouzi movement, which was also accompanied by unison dance movement of the chorus.

Next, Jason entered and did an elaborate movement sequence conveying a treacherous journey on horseback at the end of which he met Medea. Cupid's participation in their attraction was signified as each held up a gold arrow toward the other. There was a pause of several minutes as Jason described his quest for the Golden Fleece, followed by an extended ocean traveling sequence lasting approximately six minutes. The performers playing Jason (holding an oar) and Medea used the small, running paoyuanchang steps to circle the stage. Meanwhile, the chorus and the six supernumerary male performers, also using paoyuanchang, carried blue silk banners to signify surging ocean waves. Next was a seven-minute sequence in which Medea used her magic fan first to battle then to charm the dragon spirit (represented by four martial male performers in identical green costumes) guarding the Golden Fleece.

Scenes 2 (in which Medea tricked Pelias into boiling himself and lasting about twenty minutes) and 3 (in which Jason was invited to the palace and lasting

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⁷ The goddess Hera was angry at Pelias (Jason's half-uncle) for making offerings to all other gods but her. She convinced Aphrodite, Cupid's mother, to cause Medea to fall in love with Jason so she would help Jason against Pelias.
about fifteen minutes) proceeded at a more moderate tempo, employing more speech and song than in the first scene. As with the scene 1, scenes 2 and 3 were very focused on the events of the plot.

In scenes 4 and 5, the focus shifted to the evolving emotions of the characters. These scenes featured song, with softer, more intermittent movement that served as accompaniment to the singing rather than the movement itself being the primary focus and means of progressing the story. This dramatic structure created interesting and effective tensions: the amount of movement and tempo decreased in inverse proportion to the growing intensity of the emotional content portrayed.

Two additional noteworthy innovative uses of movement occurred during the section where Medea killed her children. Luo chose to use Medea’s magic fan, the power of which had been clearly established earlier in the production, as the murder weapon instead of the sword described in Euripides’s original (c. line 1255). This choice allowed Luo great freedom in staging the killing. He chose to emphasize the children’s suffering rather than Medea’s action by having the Medea performer freeze in an aggressive pose as the performers playing the children switched suddenly into slow motion. They moved diagonally downstage left from Medea turning and moving their arms as though they had been hurled across the stage with great force. As they reached the downstage left corner, they froze with arms outstretched. The musical accompaniment also abruptly cut out. Following a moment of complete stillness and silence, first one child then the other crumpled to the floor with an audible and disturbing thud. This
sequence was clearly influenced by film technique, but was still movingly effective in live performance.

This slow motion sequence also proved an effective bridge to the next moment, involving the final notable movement innovation of the production. After the children fell to the floor, Medea stared at them briefly then did the conventional movement signifying extreme grief: sweeping her arms out and up over head, flicking the wrists so that her water sleeves hung down her back, she simultaneously fell to her knees. Traditionally, the next movement would involve fast shuffling forward on the knees toward the object of grief, while maintaining the upright torso with arms overhead. In this production, the Medea performer began the traditional movement but to convey the character's overwhelming grief, she fell forward and crawled on hands and knees in a realistic and, by Xiqu standards, ugly and awkward motion toward her children. This use of realism was to my perception extremely effective. It also created a fascinating dialectical tension between form and content that will be discussed further below.

Visual Sign Systems

Except for the second of Whitmore's Visual Sign Systems—Space and Setting—Luo chose to use traditional Xiqu elements. Costumes, headdresses, Color and Texture were all in traditional style. Likewise, to fully exploit the rich colors and elaborate beauty of the hand embroidered costumes, Luo chose to use the consistently bright, non-colored lighting usually used in the staging of traditional plays. The only notable light change was a brief blackout between
scenes 2 and 3 while the chorus’s lyrics told the audience thirteen years had passed.

1. Space and Setting

In this production, Luo did not even use the table and two chairs of the traditional Xiqu stage. The only set piece used in the entire production was the platform from which Medea did the diving roll after capturing the Golden Fleece. The open stage was covered with a green carpet. The upstage wall consisted of black flats on which were painted stylized waves, reminiscent of the wave pattern commonly embroidered on the lower section of Jingju robes (see e.g., Zhongguo Xiqu Xueyuan 1997, 3-36).

In Luo’s (Huaju-trained) perception, the traditional use of space in Xiqu is monotonous (Luo Jinlin 1998a). Despite use of a completely unadorned stage, he consciously chose to ignore conventional movement patterns and placement of actors in order to achieve more variety in the use of the stage. Traditionally, a circular flow of movement is created by most major entrances occurring from upstage right, followed by diagonal movement to downstage left, and exits to upstage left. To my perception, after watching hundreds of hours of traditional Xiqu performances, this upstage right to downstage left diagonal becomes a visual “anchor” for all stage movement. I find that this perception is further supported by the traditional positioning of the orchestra in the downstage left corner of the stage, partially visible to the audience. Luo also used this position for the orchestra in Medea. But by basing the chorus in the downstage right position, Luo altered these visual anchors and patterns of movement. When
seated, the chorus was at least as strong a visual presence as the partially hidden orchestra, replacing the traditional two-pointed diagonal with a triangular "anchor" between the upstage left "mouth of the nine dragons" position, the orchestra downstage left, and the chorus downstage right.

Moreover, in the second half of the play, the upstage right position was established as the direction of the palace. Creon, the princess, and Jason all used this direction for their entrances and exits, reinforcing the traditional upstage right to downstage left diagonal. But Luo disrupted this traditional visual anchor by simultaneously establishing the interior of Medea's house in the direction of the upstage left corner. Medea's entrances and exits at this upstage left position established a strong visual counter-anchor from upstage left to the downstage right position of the chorus, adding interesting visual tension.

Luo also broke the traditional rule that the number of performers in the supernumerary dragon set (龙套, longtao) be divisible by four, so that when the set divides, each subset will still be comprised by an even number of performers (Li Wencai 1998). Instead, Luo used six female performers in the chorus and six male supernumerary performers, treating each group as a separate dragon set. In scene 2, his blocking moved even further from tradition by splitting the six chorus members unevenly. When Pelias entered with his son and daughter to pose in the upstage right corner, the chorus framed them with two performers placed on a slight diagonal to downstage right, and four performers along a stronger diagonal stretching to downstage left.
As the scene continued, Pelias drank together with his son and daughter. Such drinking scenes are common in the traditional Xiqu repertoire. With three characters involved, the setting would usually include three tables—one placed upstage center, one placed downstage right, and one placed downstage left. Luo used the traditional placement, but instead of using prop tables, he had the six chorus members kneel in pairs to represent the tables. In each pair, one performer carried a tray with the traditional prop representing a wine carafe, the other had a tray with the traditional prop wine cup.

Later in this scene, after Jason had been captured, Medea convinced Pelias of her power to restore his youth by tossing an old ram into a magic cauldron and removing a young ram. In production, the cauldron was represented by the chorus kneeling in a circle. To represent the sides of the cauldron, each chorus member held a square brown flag hung on a stick from the top edge. The splash created when the ram was thrown into the cauldron and the subsequent bubbling of the magical process were represented by each member of the chorus flipping a watersleeve into the circle and then tossing it up and down. This is an innovative use of banners and supernumerary performers, but it has strong precedent in the traditional cannon. For example, performers in the play White Snake carry banners embroidered with wave designs, simultaneously portraying both water sprites and the water through which the sprites are swimming (Pan Xiafeng 1995, 168). Here the chorus portrayed the cauldron and the bubbling liquid inside.
The ram was represented by a black flag on which an old ram had been painted in white in a cartoonish style. The flag’s appearance onstage was accompanied by a recorded realistic sound effect of a weak, sheep-like “baaaaah.” A green flag, painted with a smaller, more youthful ram was later removed from the cauldron, accompanied by a higher pitched, more energetic “baaah” recorded sound effect, to represent the transformed young ram. As with the cauldron, the ram painted on the flag had no direct precedent, but did have a strong corollary in traditional Xiqu in the representational style of the wheels painted on two yellow flags that are held to either side of a performer to represent travel by carriage or wagon. On the traditional stage, sound effects such as horses whinnying and babies crying are played live by the suona⁸ player who produces sounds that resemble but clearly do not attempt to realistically reproduce the given sound.

This scene was not intended to be comic, but many spectators laughed audibly during the performance I attended in 1995. In my opinion, the portrayal was not at all effective due to the odd mix of styles. Compared with the traditional use of water sleeves as an external extension of a character’s interior emotions, the chorus’s use of water sleeves to portray the splash of the cauldron seemed simplistically representational. The cartoonish painting of the ram and the realistic, recorded sound effect were stylistically unique in this production and as a result, seemed out of place. Finally, the portrayal of the cauldron scene did

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⁸ The suona is a double reeded, wooden wind instrument with a metal bell. By squeezing the reed, the player can produce an astonishing range of squeaks and squalls in addition to stirring melodies.
not incorporate any exhibition of Xiqu performance skills, but rather had the inorganic quality of a clever, but un-integrated directorial solution to the problem of staging this event. The scene was particularly ineffective as the set up for Pelias's subsequent offstage death. He exited clutching the Golden Fleece that Medea had told him would protect him in the cauldron. His mortal scream from offstage was made trivial by the preceding, unintentionally humorous ram transformation sequence.

Luo viewed his grafting of uses of the chorus in Greek theatre onto the pre-existing Xiqu tradition of an offstage chorus as one of the major innovations of the production. The "helping chorus" (帮腔, bangqiang) is a feature of the regional Xiqu musical system called gaoqiang (高腔) that was adopted by many regional forms during the Xiqu modernization movement of the early 1950s. The helping chorus is used particularly frequently in Chuanju, the major regional form of Luo's home province Sichuan. Its functions are varied and include establishing atmosphere, developing the circumstances of the scene, expressing the inner emotional lives of the characters, and representing third person (or audience) criticism of characters' actions (Li Hanfei 1991, 787-88). The chorus in Medea performed essentially the same functions. Luo's innovation was thus primarily the addition of a visual layer to the aural functions of the Xiqu helping chorus already in established use. In one particularly effective example, the chorus moved onto the stage and mirrored Medea's collapse to the ground after learning Jason had left her. But as Medea developed her plan to take revenge,
the chorus shifted from empathetic replication of Medea’s movement to opposing movements (and lyrics) conveying strong condemnation of the plan.

**Aural Sign Systems**

The production utilized an orchestra comprised of the traditional complement of percussive and melodic instruments and employed no notable innovations with regard to the percussion score. Hebei Bangzi is part of the Bangzi musical system, which, like Jingju, uses a “beat tune” structure, discussed in chapter 3. The singing done by performers of the individual characters in *Medea* used Hebei Bangzi melodic structures and metrical types with some addition of Hebei Province folk melodies (Luo Jinlin 1998a). The major departure from tradition with regard to aural sign systems was in the composer’s use of recurring melodies for the chorus that incorporated both Chinese folk and Western musical flavors.

The intensive use of fast movement in the first half of the production, described above, was accompanied by pervasive quick-tempo percussion and singing. The second, more emotional half used more moderate tempos, but never the highly ornamented melodies of slow meter (慢板, *manban*). These choices regarding tempo are in keeping with Luo’s assertion that traditional Xiqu’s slow pacing is no longer palatable and must be altered to serve the tastes of contemporary audiences (Luo Jinlin 1998b, 3).

The previous discussion indicates how the director drew from many sources for the innovative elements incorporated into this production. He utilized elements from regional Xiqu forms other than Hebei Bangzi, from Western theatre,
and from contemporary film technique, with the stated goal of engaging contemporary spectators both inside and outside China. In the next section, I analyze notable aspects of directorial choices made in the combination of these elements.

Syntax

1. Closed vs. Open Form

A major factor distinguishing the two films discussed in chapter 4 was the idea of closed versus open form. As previously argued, traditional Xiqu is an essentially open form: what a character sees is often left to the spectator’s imagination. A strong impression of a world continuing offstage and out of view is created through the entrances and exits required by the epic structure of most full-length Xiqu plays. The first scene of *Medea* was more closed: Medea and Jason met for the first time, traveled to the dragon’s lair, and captured the Golden Fleece with no intervening stage exits. The remaining scenes were all quite open, each containing strong references to places and events offstage. In the second scene at Pelias’s palace, Jason was captured and carried offstage. The place he was being held was never portrayed onstage but was a constant referent since the motivation for all of Medea’s efforts to trick Pelias with her magic cauldron was to obtain Jason’s release. In the second half of the play, the offstage areas of Creon’s palace and Medea’s home were firmly established. However, Luo chose to close the action more than in the original play by bringing the killing of the children onstage instead of leaving the event to a messenger’s after-the-fact report as Euripides had done. As mentioned above, Luo’s decision
to follow Euripides and use a report of the princess’s death from the poison robe, rather than stage it, was wholly practical. He would have preferred to stage the event because he believed to do so would be more in keeping with the expectations and tastes of modern spectators. But because of physical stage limitations, budget concerns, and a perceived need shorten the running time of the production, Luo decided to use the messenger’s report (Luo Jinlin 1998a).

The use of closed versus open form was made more complex by the multiple functions served by the chorus. Their movement back and forth between their seats outside the proscenium arch and the main playing space onstage echoed the fluidity with which they shifted from representations of furniture to practical stage assistants to a multi-bodied manifestation of Medea’s intense internal emotions to objective critics of her actions. Luo intended that while seated, the chorus would watch the action in an engaged manner, in contrast to the impassive demeanor of the traditional dragon set performers discussed in chapter 3. The reactions of the Medea chorus were limited to subtle facial expressions that would not distract from the onstage action, further supporting their role as bridge between the spectator and the stage. The chorus chairs became a kind of liminal space removed from the action, but still visible to spectators in the audience who could watch the chorus watching the action in addition to watching the action directly themselves.

2. Paradigmatic Referents

As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the ways that film is thought to create meaning is through the paradigmatic referent by which the spectator
compares the shot actually used with the universe of potential shots.

Throughout the previous discussion of Medea I have been using two obvious paradigmatic referents to gage the innovation of directorial choices: 1) the traditional Xiqu performance language, and 2) Euripides’s original script. Luo for the most part maintained the traditional focus on performer skill by eschewing use of sets, elaborate lighting, or other technical stage illusions. His choice to stage events that constituted backstory or were merely reported via messenger in Euripides’s version allowed him to exploit a fuller range of Xiqu performance skills. As such, the choices were consistent with the traditional Xiqu performance equation that communicates narrative events as a context for the goal of exhibiting performance skills.

Pierce’s formulation of the Icon, Index, and Symbol categories of paradigmatic referents is a useful aid to understanding the success of Luo’s directorial innovations. Luo’s main attempt at Iconic portrayal—the cauldron and the ram-painted flag—was not particularly successful. The illusion created by Iconic movement in traditional Xiqu such as the precise mime of sewing or feeding chickens is effective because the performer’s skill creates the illusion of an object despite the spectator’s awareness that the object is not there. This portrayal, in which the chorus became the cauldron and a black ram flag was exchanged for a green one, involved no particular skill and stood out as a stylistic aberration within the world of the production.

The purely symbolic signifiers used in the production included costume and make-up choices, and were traditional rather than innovative. As discussed
above, Creon's red facial make-up indicated his essentially good nature. When
Jason returned from the palace, he wore the white fur pieces hanging down his
back that conventionally designate a character as an outsider (Bonds 1997, 25).
Here, Jason was an outsider of Creon's society. It is very unlikely that uninitiated
spectators, whether foreign or Chinese, would appreciate the significance of
these purely symbolic elements.

Luo also employed Pierce's intermediate category of signifiers, the Index.
Medea's fan was well established as an associative detail of her magical powers.\(^9\)
The choice also gave opportunity for the actress fully to exploit her considerable
dance-acting skills. Another Indexical reference occurred through the use of the
children to represent both the past happy family life and the potential for any
future happiness. In Euripides's version, Jason uses the children's welfare as
justification for accepting the new marriage to the princess (lines 545-550), and
Medea asserts that she kills them to make Jason suffer (line 1374). But the
children themselves appear only briefly onstage; their only lines come from
offstage during the killing. In contrast, their presence was highlighted in this
production by the choice to add several scenes in which they took quite active
part. The obvious practical problems involved in asking young children to
appear onstage in a live performance do not exist in Xiqu which has a fully
developed role type usually performed by young women called wawasheng (娃娃
生), for the portrayal of young children.

\(^9\) This is an example of an indexical signifier that operates both paradigmatically (a fan rather than
Euripides's sword was used) and syntagmatically (the fan was associated with Medea's magical
power through previous actual uses).
In scene 3 of the Bangzi Medea, the children exhibited their martial skills as both Jason and Medea look on proudly, allowing a brief glimpse into the happy past omitted by Euripides's late point of plot attack. In scene 4, discussed above, in which the children begged their father to relent, Jason's compassionate reaction to their sadness further developed the image of the family's happy past. Finally, the staging of the killing of the children, with their crumpling to the floor, was a movingly vivid visual expression of the end of any potential happiness for Jason or Medea. Unlike Euripides, Luo did not include Medea's escape to Athens in the sun chariot at the end of the production. Both Jason and Medea remained seated on stage with the bodies of their dead children as the chorus sang a closing aria about the powerful will of the gods.

3. Syntagmatic Referents

The other major way a film creates meaning is through comparing a particular shot with those shots that actually precede it. The concept of the syntagmatic referent is particularly useful in analyzing the final minutes of this Bangzi Medea. As discussed above, to express the extent of Medea's grief after killing her children, Luo had her drop the Xiqu style and crawl toward her children, then hug them while weeping, all in a very realistic style. The significance of the shift of style was heightened by the previous portrayals of Medea's grief at learning of Jason's betrayal where the Xiqu style was maintained. Previous portrayals included numerous cries of injustice and weeping, so that even an uninitiated spectator had several strong examples of the Xiqu stylistic
performance language for grief as a referent to compare the clear shift to a much more realistic style of performance.

In defending Xiqu’s stylized representations of grief against comparisons with more realistic portrayals, Xiqu artists and scholars commonly give two reasons for it being inappropriate for a Xiqu performer to shed real tears onstage: first, crying affects the breath and vocal control of the performer and so would adversely impact singing and speech; and second, the tears would ruin the elaborate make-up (e.g., Chen Zengkun 1998; Ma Jingbo 1995). As a result, real crying is commonly perceived as a violation of the basic Xiqu aesthetic that everything onstage be beautiful. During the performance of the production that I attended in 1995, I sat close enough to the stage to observe that the performer playing Medea did in fact weep real tears, but the two anticipated problems did not materially affect the performance. First, from the time the performer shifted to a more realistic style to the end of the performance, she was given no singing or speech so her sobbing and caught breath did not affect vocal skill. Second, the performer maintained the realistic style consistently to the end of the performance so that even though her make-up was slightly smeared, the effect was consistent with the realistic style of performance to which she had shifted rather than being in conflict with a more heightened stylization.

The final event in the production was the entrance of Jason and his discovery of his children’s death. The performer playing Jason entered in fully heightened Xiqu style, calling for his children and looking back toward angry sounds from offstage representing those seeking revenge for the death of the
princess. While the Medea performer sat dazed and expressionless next to the children, the Jason performer moved around the stage with the quick steps of paoyuanchang, until catching sight of them. He took one dead child’s arm, pulling him and urging him to escape quickly. As the nurse informed him in a listless, despairing tone that the children had been killed by their mother, the performer playing Jason moved to center stage. At the end of the nurse's speech, in a sharply percussive series of movements, he balanced on one leg, body and other leg stretched flat and parallel to the floor. He then jumped, spun in the air and landed flat on his back. After a pause representing unconsciousness, he slowly moved to sitting, then standing. Singing a frantic aria while taking several steps toward the children, shaking his head and outstretched hands, he used the conventional gestures to convey distress. In the lyrics, Jason begged Medea to kill him as well. Instead, she waved her magic fan toward him, and dropped back into a dazed forward stare. In response, the Jason performer leapt backwards in a diving somersault, then rolled his body in a circle around the stage while simultaneously circling his head to flip his ponytail.

All of these movements by the Jason performer would likely have been a very effective portrayal of grief within a universe of Xiqu stylization. However, Luo's choice to expand that universe to include Medea's more realistic portrayals of grief in the moments just before Jason's entrance undercut the power of these exhibitions of great physical and vocal skill. If Medea's grief was so great, it pushed her to a different, more realistic mode of expression, the fact that Jason
remained in the highly stylized Xiqu world of expression can most reasonably be interpreted as indicating that his grief was not as overwhelming as Medea’s. By juxtaposing the two stylistic portrayals in this order, Luo’s choices had the unfortunate effect of emphasizing the artificiality of Jason’s reaction, rather than the connection between the emotion portrayed and the skillful though conventional means of that portrayal.

Conclusion

While this Bangzi Medea was quite successful abroad and among popular audiences in China, it was not viewed as particularly impressive by the several members of the Xiqu Academy faculty I interviewed who had seen the production. The directing teacher who also portrayed Emilia in the Jingju Othello, discussed below in chapter 8, said she and her colleagues were puzzled by the Medea production’s overseas success, given how many elements they viewed as merely “average” (一般, yibàn). Nonetheless, the production’s positive international reception prompted those working on the Jingju Othello, which was intended primarily for foreign audiences, to use Medea as a model. Luo’s choices to maintain traditional elements of bare staging and elaborate costumes were likewise planned for Othello. In addition, the Jingju Othello began with scenes of Desdemona using a red silk ribbon chouzi dance—but unlike Medea, Desdemona had no supernatural powers to give the movement meaning beyond its beauty. As in the Bangzi Medea, the Jingju adaptation of Othello also included events onstage that the playwright had left to after-the-fact verbal reports. The storm encountered by Othello’s ship on its way to Cypress was staged to give
the opportunity for acrobatics and spectacular unison movement, each
supernumerary performer swirling a silk water banner. The music of the Jingju
Othello, like the Bangzi Medea, also incorporated many influences from Chinese
folk music. On the other hand, the Jingju Othello (perhaps because of its
unfortunate timing relative to the U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in
Belgrade which temporarily rendered suspect all things Western, including
playscripts) never had a public performance. Thus, Medea's value as a model
for creation of other foreign-bound Xiqu productions has yet to be established.

The success and innovation of this Xiqu production of Medea, though
incorporating the artistic input of scores of Xiqu artists, can rightly be attributed to
the strong control maintained throughout the project by the director, Luo Jinlin.
Trained in the Huaju world, he did not question the propriety of strong, centralized
directorial locus of creative authority. In the following chapter, I will discuss a
production developed through a much less centralized artistic process, with a
director whose primary training was in Xiqu.
CHAPTER 6
CASE STUDY OF JINGJU CAMEL XIANGZI

Illustration 5. The Birthday Party (photo by author)

Illustration 6. The Drunken Dance (photo by Zhang Maosheng)

Illustration 7. Fuzi's First Rickshaw Ride (photo by author)
In this chapter I continue the case study approach of the previous chapter to analyze a recent award-winning Jingju adaptation of Lao She's famous novel *Camel Xiangzi* (骆驼祥子, *Luotuo Xiangzi*, also translated as *The Rickshaw Boy*). Adapted by playwright Zhong Wenyi (种文衣) and produced by the Jiangsu Province Jingju Company (江苏省京剧院, *Jiangsu Sheng Jingju Yuan*), the project was directed by Shi Yukun (石玉昆), whose primary training is in Xiqu. The production was awarded a gold prize at the Second National Jingju Festival (第二届中国京剧艺术节, *Di'erjie Zhongguo Jingjujie*) held in Beijing in December 1998-January 1999. Information in this chapter is based on: multiple viewings of live performances of the production; an interview with the director; published discussions of the creative process by administrators and artists involved in the production; critical reception; and, informal discussions about the production with various theatre artists and educators including my Jingju performance teacher, Professor Chen Zengkun of the Xiqu Academy, and Professor Luo Jinlin of the Central Drama Academy who directed the production of *Medea* discussed in the previous chapter. I have also studied videos of later television broadcasts of the Jingju Festival performances done by China Central Television and Beijing Television stations. In addition, I have analyzed other available adaptations of the original novel including a VCD of a 1995 revival of the Beijing Peoples' Art Theatre's (北京人民艺术剧院, *Beijing Renmin Yishu Juyuan*) 1958 Huaju production (script adaptation and direction by Mei Qian [梅阡]), and a
1982 feature film (screenplay adaptation and direction by Ling Liaofeng).¹

Framing Systems

1. Intellectual, Historical, and Social Frames

   a. Lao She's Novel and Earlier Adaptations

      A crucial element framing this project is the fame of the author and of the novel on which it was based. Lao She was born in Beijing in 1899 to a very poor family. By attending tuition-free schools, he graduated and became the only literate member of his family. He studied and taught in London from 1924 to 1930 during which time he wrote his first three novels. He returned to China, teaching at various universities through the war against Japan (1937-45) while participating in resistance activities. He spent some time in the United States lecturing and writing before returning to China after the Communist victory in 1949. He worked feverishly with the new government on projects related to arts and education (Lao She 1988, 1 ["About the Author"]; Hu Jieqing 1979, 3-5). But as a famous foreign-educated intellectual, he was an early victim of the political upheavals of the Cultural Revolution. In 1966, the day after being interrogated by Red Guards, his body was found by Beijing’s Lake of Heavenly Peace (太平湖, Taiping Hu). Though official versions label his death a suicide (e.g. Mu 1999, 9), there is continued debate over whether he was still alive when released and

¹ Xiangzi received a fourth reincarnation in the form of a 22-part television miniseries that began broadcasting in mid-February 1999, in conjunction with commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Lao She's birth.
drowned himself in a lake called "Heavenly Peace" as a carefully chosen act of ironic resistance, or was actually tortured to death. Officials ordered cremation of the body before it could be examined (Bady 1980, 20).

Written in 1936, *Camel Xiangzi* was first published as a magazine serial and depicted the tragic and hopeless lives of the poor in a miserable, unjust society. In an afterward to the 1954 Chinese language reprinting of *Camel Xiangzi* in book form, Lao She criticized himself for not giving the characters any way out of their desperate situation, for not seeing "the hope of revolution," or knowing "any revolutionary truths." Writing that he felt deeply ashamed after supposedly hearing working people comment, "Judging by this book we are really too wretched and hopeless!" he continued:

> Today, nineteen years later, the working people have become masters of their own destiny. Even I now understand something about revolution and am very grateful to the Communist Party and Chairman Mao. The present reprint of my book should surely have only one aim and that is to remind people of the frightful darkness of the old society and how we must treasure today's happiness and light. Never must the reactionaries be allowed to make a come-back. We must safeguard with all our might the victories of the revolution. (Lao 1988, 230 [trans. Shi])

After the Cultural Revolution, Lao She was fully rehabilitated, most of the blame for his demise being laid with Jiang Qing and the Gang of Four (Bady 1980, 15-20). Ironically, during the time of the 1999 performances of the Jingju *Camel Xiangzi* a major shift was occurring in Beijing from government assignment of housing to private ownership. After decades of paying truly nominal rents,

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2 This and all subsequent quotes from the novel are from the translation by Shi Xiaoqing (see Lao She 1988).
everyone was suddenly scrambling to get enough money together for down payments on apartments that they were being forced to buy or vacate. Not surprisingly, these events were a ubiquitous topic of discussion. I also heard numerous complaints from people working at the Xiqu Academy (both teachers and custodial staff) that they were feeling left behind in China's economic boom. I heard no mention of these changes as suggesting any newly developing relevance of Lao She's novel and the squalid living conditions he describes, nor did I find any such reference in print. Nonetheless, under such circumstances it is difficult to follow Lao She's instructions to read *Camel Xiangzi* as a reminder “of the frightful darkness of the old society and how we must treasure today's happiness and light” (230), given the widening gap between rich and poor in contemporary China.

The plot is set in Beijing in the 1920s amid the societal chaos created by rival warlord armies vying for control of the region. The main character, Xiangzi, is orphaned and as a young man and comes to Beijing to make his way in the world. Because he is physically large and strong, he settles on rickshaw pulling as his path to success. He decides to live frugally, saving all he can toward buying his own rickshaw in order to profit more quickly from his labors than was possible when paying rent to a rickshaw yard. The script for the Jingju adaptation begins the action just after Xiangzi has bought his own rickshaw, showing him at his most happy and successful. But in this unjust society, hard work and dedication are not enough to maintain one's position. Xiangzi takes a
risk, going after a high-paying fare in a dangerous area. He is set upon by soldiers, his new rickshaw is stolen, and he is pressed into service as the soldiers move outside the city. Military fortunes shift causing the retreat of the soldiers holding Xiangzi, who leave him behind. He finds that they have also abandoned three camels. Xiangzi heads back to Beijing, along the way selling the camels for 30 pieces of silver. The 1982 film adaptation begins with Xiangzi losing his rickshaw. Opening credits then roll over shots of him leading the camels. In contrast, the script for the Huaju adaptation begins the action after he has already returned to the city and to the rickshaw yard where he used to live.

In the novel, the spinster daughter of the owner of the rickshaw yard, Hu Niu, takes a special liking to Xiangzi, eventually getting him drunk and seducing him. He is disgusted with himself for falling prey to such a loose woman and takes a monthly job pulling rickshaw for a teacher, Mr. Cao, hoping eventually to save enough to buy another rickshaw. Hu Niu visits Xiangzi at the Cao’s home, falsely claiming to be pregnant and with an elaborate plan to gain her father’s consent to marry Xiangzi despite his loathing of lowly rickshaw pullers. The teacher, Mr. Cao, puts his socialist ideals into practice by treating his servants fairly and with respect. But he is also politically naïve and these same principles get him into trouble. He is accused of being a radical and is followed by the secret police. Before he can be arrested, the Cao’s escape, leaving Xiangzi to protect their home. The person charged with arresting Mr. Cao turns out to be the former soldier who stole Xiangzi’s rickshaw, and is now working for the secret
police. Demanding a bribe, he threatens Xiangzi with arrest and violence so that Xiangzi eventually turns over all his savings, including the 30 pieces of silver from the camels.

With no alternative, Xiangzi returns to the rickshaw yard where Hu Niu publicly announces her "pregnancy" at her father's 60th birthday party. Her father is disgusted and disowns her, throwing them both out. They live on her savings for a time, before Xiangzi goes back to rickshaw pulling. Eventually, Hu Niu really becomes pregnant, but dies in childbirth when there is not enough money to pay the doctor.

After Hu Niu's death, Xiangzi promises his friend, Fuzi—the sweet daughter of an older rickshaw puller and the girl he should have married—that he will return for her as soon as he has found a job. He eventually pulls himself out of his grief, gets a job again with the Cao family, and goes to find Fuzi. Meanwhile, Fuzi has been sold by her father to a brothel. Xiangzi arrives too late: Fuzi has committed suicide. Xiangzi gives up all hope and the novel ends with the following passage:

He had tried his best, so had [Fuzi], yet all that remained to him were useless tears and she had hanged herself. A straw mat and a grave in this wasteland, that was where a life of toil led!

Back at the rickshaw yard, he slept numbly for two days. He could never go to the Cao house now, nor did he even send them word, for Mr. Cao could not save him. After two days he took the rickshaw out, his mind and soul a blank. Thought and hope were gone, he slaved only to fill his stomach then sleep. Why hope any more? Watching a skinny stray dog waiting by the sweet-potato vendor's carrying-pole for some peel and rootlets, he knew that he was just like this dog, struggling
for some scraps to eat. As long as he managed to keep alive, why think of anything else? (Lao 1988, 229 [trans. Shi])

In the Jingju adaptation, the production ended after Xiangzi discovered Fuzi’s death, with images drawn from Beijing funeral processions of the time. The Huaju adaptation ended the action much earlier, just after Hu Niu’s death. The film adaptation ends with a montage of Xiangzi getting older and slower, losing his rickshaw and eventually finding an old former puller dead in the street, a clear foreshadowing of Xiangzi’s own likely end.

Describing the process of script development for the Jingju adaptation, director Shi Yukun noted that the playwright kept focus on the character of Xiangzi and the key plot points of importance to him (Hui Min 1999, 9). I agree with this assessment at least in part as a result of my impression that both the Huaju and film adaptations developed secondary characters and subplots more fully. On the other hand, I found the Jingju production to be the most successful adaptation of the three in large part because of its early point of plot attack. The Jingju production allowed spectators a view of Xiangzi at his best, most hopeful, and happiest, making his fall to destitution all the more tragic.

b. Project Impetus and Director’s Background

The Jingju adaptation of Camel Xiangzi was developed by a process much more typical for new Xiqu works than was the production of Medea discussed in the previous chapter. Instead of being instigated by a single

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3 The novel went through numerous revisions both by the author and by overly ambitious (mis)translators (Kao 1980, 37-38). The ending quoted here is the one referred to by the Jiangsu Jingju Company in rehearsal (Hui Min 1999, 7).
director’s artistic impulse, this production was chosen by Jiangsu Province Jingju Company personnel based on a number of factors. According to the head of the company at the time, Gao Shunying (高舜英), 20 scripts on varied subjects were examined by the company’s artistic research office. This one was chosen because it was both well written and well adapted to serve Jingju’s unique performative qualities. In addition, since it was based on an original work by Lao She, company leaders hoped that the production could participate in the upcoming events commemorating the 100th anniversary of his birth. Finally, the Ministry of Culture had expressed the desire that the company produce a modern play (Hui Min 1999, 7). Director Shi Yukun also stated that another important impetus was to participate in the Second National Jingju Festival (1999).

Neither Jiangsu Jingju Company administrators nor director Shi Yukun himself describe his input in the choice of this particular project as significant. Moreover, he was only one among many invited to offer suggestions during the script revision process. Much like Hollywood screenplays and Broadway productions, this script and production went through numerous revisions, incorporating input from Ministry of Culture and Provincial Office of Culture officials, acknowledged Jingju experts, company administrators, leading performers, as well as the director. Playwright Zhong Wenyi stated that at a meeting organized by the Ministry of Culture to discuss the script, Xiqu experts raised 76 separate suggestions, while Xiangzi performer Chen Lincang later offered another 15 suggested revisions. She stated that she often felt she had
taken on more than she could handle as she attempted to incorporate the many suggestions (Hui Min 1999, 7-8). In addition, at the Jingju Festival all participating productions were discussed the day following their performance by a panel of Ministry of Culture officials and recognized Jingju artists and scholars. In part as a result of this discussion, the last section of the production was substantially re-worked before the February restaging in honor of Lao She’s birthday.  

Finally, the elaborate six-page performance program included a plot synopsis and extensive biographies but not director’s notes. All of these factors support the conclusion that director Shi Yukun had substantially less control over this production than Luo Jinlin had over Medea. Nonetheless, he was still the central coordinator of design and performance decisions on this popularly and artistically successful production.

Shi Yukun is an accomplished director working primarily in Jingju, but he has also directed in numerous regional Xiqu forms as well as in television, for a total of over 40 projects. A member of the Jiangsu Province Jingju Company, he is the recipient of numerous national and regional directing awards and is a "First Level" director within China’s national artist ranking system. Shi was born in Jiangsu province and graduated from the National Xiqu School (中国戏校,  

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4 The revisions were aimed at redressing the feeling that the story had reached a point of completion, while the production dragged on for another twenty minutes. The hasty revisions created more problems than they solved, and the Xiangzi performer expressed his dissatisfaction with the new ending when I met him briefly after one of the February performances. The analysis of this chapter focuses on the earlier award-winning version, and the points analyzed here were not significantly affected by the later revisions.  

5 This ranking system affects pay as well as prestige and other perquisites and was designed gradually to introduce free market forces into slate run enterprises and applies to factories as well as Jingju companies (Wichmann 1990, 167-68).
Zhongguo Xixiao, institutional predecessor of the National Xiqu Academy) and the Shanghai Theatre Academy’s (上海戏剧学院, Shanghai Xiju Xueyuan) Directing program. As the most successful director in the company, Shi was the obvious choice to direct this production. Interestingly, when mounting another play for its entry in the First National Jingju Festival held in 1995, the company invited an outside, Huaju-trained director to lead the project. While I have found no official statement to that effect, it is probably at least in part because the 1995 production was not particularly successful that the company decided to use its in-house, Xiqu-trained director for this important project.

c. The Tradition

As discussed above in chapter 3, Xiqu plays are commonly divided into three categories: traditional, newly-written historical, and modern. Set in Beijing in the 1920s and using costumes representative of that period, Camel Xiangzi is considered a “modern” play. The model plays of the Cultural Revolution, while outmoded in terms of their strident political content, and enduring a long period of disfavor through the 1980s (Wichmann 1990, 149-50), still exert strong influence in terms of the artistic solutions they incorporated in “modernizing” the traditional performance language. Many of the melodies and orchestral arrangements in the Jingju Camel Xiangzi were strongly influenced by the last of the model plays, Azalea Mountain. Nonetheless, the production was criticized for its failure to include enough singing, particularly for lacking any distinctly memorable new arias (Chang Lixing 1999; Chen Zengkun 1999), deficiencies not exhibited by the
model plays. On the other hand, the model plays are generally considered as having failed to develop a movement vocabulary comparable in richness to the traditional repertoire. The Jingju Camel Xiangzi was highly praised for its innovations in this regard (Yi Ping 1999, 5).

Another aspect of the tradition framing this production was the fact that at the First National Jingju Festival in 1995, the Shanghai Jingju Company’s play Cao Cao and Yang Xiu (曹操与杨修, Cao Cao yu Yang Xiu) had been declared the best new Jingju play of the last decade. I heard from numerous people that they thought Camel Xiangzi while good, was not as good as Cao Cao and Yang Xiu. On one level, the comparison was curious, since the content of the two plays was very different. Cao Cao and Yang Xiu was a newly-written historical play based on the famous historical novel The Three Kingdoms and reinvestigating the relationship between a cunning political and military leader (Cao Cao) and his forthright advisor (Yang Xiu). In contrast, Camel Xiangzi was a modern play about uneducated people at the very lowest level of society. On the other hand, comparing the two plays makes more sense when viewed from the position of lovers of Jingju on the lookout for exceptional new plays to reinvigorate the form. Unfortunately, Cao Cao and Yang Xiu has not inspired a wave of successful new plays in its wake. It is still too soon to tell what, if any, lasting influence Camel Xiangzi will have in the development of Jingju or other Xiqu forms.
2. Physical Environment

The Jingju *Camel Xiangzi* production was designed for a large proscenium theatre. The only element breaking the proscenium arch was the periodic appearance of a narrator on the downstage right apron. At the Jingju Festival, the production was presented at the theatre attached to the Central Drama Academy. This is a nice, modern proscenium theatre but it is smaller and located off a tiny back alley, making it much more difficult to find than other theatres at which festival productions were presented. After its success at the festival, the production returned for several performances at the Chang'An Grand Theatre, housed in a plush new hotel and office building located on a major boulevard.6

3. Audience Frames

The production was intended initially for a Chinese audience and there are no current plans for international touring. As Luo did with *Medea*, director Shi Yukun chose to eliminate entering liangxiang poses that traditionally gave audiences the opportunity to applaud star performers. Exhibitions of skill and performance innovations on the other hand frequently received applause during the performances I attended, though never reaching an intensity that slowed the pace of the production.

Since the Jingju *Camel Xiangzi* followed the very successful Huaju and film adaptations, many people in the audience were quite familiar with the story,

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6 This is the theatre discussed in chapter 3 in which bass beats from the neighboring disco are clearly audible.
as well as with the particular choices in characterization made by the performers in these earlier portrayals. One critic noted that since these characters were so familiar, he had been concerned how audiences would react to their Jingju portrayals (Yi Ping 1999, 5). But critical and popular responses were overall quite favorable. The Jingju portrayals included strong elements of Jingju while remaining “faithful” to the characters. The two lead performers even seemed to quote from Mei Qian’s famous 1958 Huaju production in their physical characterizations. The actor playing Xiangzi adopted a basic stance not found in traditional Jingju, in which he clasped his hands loosely, allowing his arms to hang in front of his body. This was also the basic stance adopted by the actor playing Xiangzi in the Huaju production. The actress playing Hu Niu stated she developed Hu Niu’s assertive, hip-swinging walk (completely uncharacteristic of Jingju) after studying the film and Huaju adaptations (Hui Min 1999, 9). At one point, she even raised a pant leg to stuff money in her sock just as the Huaju actress had done, though Lao She’s novel had not mentioned such an action. Within the context of otherwise original performances, these borrowed elements served as homage to the earlier creations.

Performer Sign Systems

1. Role Types

Neither of the two leading characters, Xiangzi and Hu Niu, fit readily into traditional Jingju role types. Lao She describes Xiangzi as unusually strong

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7 A video recording of a 1995 revival of this production, using the same actors despite their substantially increased age, was readily available on VCD in Beijing in 1999.
physically but disciplined and forward thinking. The former characteristic is often portrayed on the Jingju stage using the hualian role type, while the latter two—rarely associated with the rash hualian—are usually portrayed through the more dignified older sheng role type. Jingju actor Chen Lincang specializes in the jiazi (架子) subcategory of hualian roles which emphasizes speech and dance-acting performance skills in the portrayal of characters from a wide variety of social positions, including both military and civil occupations (Pan Xiafeng 1995, 47-48). Actor Chen Lincang’s highly developed dance-acting skills were a major factor in the production’s success. In addition, jiazi hualian roles often use a more naturalistic level of speech appropriate for the uneducated Xiangzi. But Xiangzi’s shyness and progressively more beaten-down status as victim of societal wrongs are qualities antithetical to the larger-than-life brashness of traditional hualian characters.

Similarly, Huang Xiaoci, the actress playing Hu Niu, specialized in the young dan role type. Performing primarily in the lively huadan subcategory, she also had extensive training in the performance techniques of the refined qingyi. Critics describing her portrayal sometimes characterized it as a poladan (泼辣旦), the subcategory of lively huadan used to portray “shrews who shout, abuse or behave atrociously in the street” (Pan 1995, 44). Lao She describes Hu Niu as ugly, masculine, and always ready to throw a curse (Lao She 1988, 42). But he makes it clear that she is also exceptionally capable in business affairs since she helps her father run the rickshaw yard, and that she has a much softer side that
she shows through her attraction to Xiangzi. Actress Huang Xiaoci found all these levels in her portrayal, incorporating the brashness of the *poladan* with the lighthearted flirtatiousness of a *huadan*, in addition to a dash of some quite "male" movements appropriate to Hu Niu's more masculine qualities, such as sitting with legs far apart or with her ankle on her knee.

In an interview, Huang Xiaoci described the rehearsal process that produced such successful, innovative performances. Saying she had never experienced such rehearsal conditions before, she explained that the director demanded uncharacteristic discipline. All performers were present during rehearsals and no one arrived late or left early. When an actor was not being used, he or she would sit to the side studying lines or Lao She's novel. Even during seated rehearsals the director required actors to read their lines with feeling and to sing in full voice. And after the actors began to work on their feet, they still continuously referred to the novel. According to Huang, when working through a scene the actors carried their scripts in one hand and a copy of the novel in the other. She herself read the novel six times, taking copious notes, and describing it as the wellspring of her characterization. In addition, Director Shi required the cast to study a video recording of the Huaju production as well as the film adaptation of *Camel Xiangzi*, which Huang stated also contributed positively to her performance (Hui Min 1999, 8-9).

The above discussion indicates that the two leading performers were not limited by the specific performance techniques of particular role categories.
Instead, working from the inspiration of Lao She’s original descriptions and spurred on by the popular performances of their Huaju and film counterparts, they created portrayals that were faithful to Lao She’s original descriptions; innovative with regard to, yet respectful of, prevalent popular images of those characters; and, universally accepted as “Jingju” portrayals even though the characters did not readily fit existing Jingju role categories.

2. Personality

As in the case of Medea, the personalities of the two leading performers in Camel Xiangzi had important impact on the performance and its development. Conversely, unlike Medea’s director Luo Jinlin who had nearly total control over casting, Camel Xiangzi director Shi Yukun had very little say in casting. Company administrators instead made the casting decisions. Female performer Huang Xiaoci was an obvious choice to play Hu Niu. She is a longtime Jiangsu Jingju Company member, a first level performer in the national ranking system, winner of the coveted national Plum Blossom prize for performance, and a native of Beijing where the play is set. In addition, she has over forty years performance experience, graduating with honors from the National Xiqu School in 1960. As discussed above, she had training in several subcategories of young dan role types, and had studied techniques from numerous young dan liupai (流派, schools or styles). She also performed several plays each from the styles created by two famous performers of lively huadan roles, Xun Huisheng (荀慧生) and Zhang Yuqing (张禺卿). Her experience with the melodic structures used in
these liupai strongly influenced the composer in designing the music for Hu Niu (Hui Min 1999, 8-9). Huang Xiaoci’s performance experience also included leading roles in several of the model revolutionary plays of the Cultural Revolution, as well as award winning performances in leading roles of two newly created plays (Camel Xiangzi performance program 1999). Her portrayal of Hu Niu, perhaps at least in part due to her huadan training, was more charming than Lao She’s description of Hu Niu, or than the portrayals in the Huaju and film adaptations, but still effective.

The choice of Chen Lincang to play Xiangzi was much less obvious, not because of talent but because of geography. When this project was being developed, Chen was head of the Gansu Province Jingju Troupe. Gansu Province borders Qinghai, Xinjiang, and Sichuan Provinces in western China, while Jiangsu Province is near China’s eastern coast (See Figure 3 in chapter 7). But despite his remote location, Chen had achieved fame, becoming a first level performer and also earning the Plum Blossom prize. Chen grew up in a Xiqu family. His grandfather performed sheng roles, his father was a famous performer of dan roles. Chen himself began studying at the age of nine, and like Huang Xiaoci, had over 40 years performance experience when he began this project. According to the Assistant Head of the Jiangsu Province Office of Culture, the Jiangsu Jingju Company had previously invited Chen Lincang to work on a production that had ultimately been abandoned. Nonetheless, the company determined that he had such a high level of performance ability that they wanted
to choose a play for him. And so they discovered this script, written by a playwright also from Gansu province (Hui Min 1999, 7). As a result of the exceptional success of this production, Chen has moved to Jiangsu Province permanently and has become the new head of the Jiangsu Province Jingju Company.

3. Voice

Following creative choices made during the Cultural Revolution for the model plays, the vocal qualities used in this production were much more natural than those used in traditional plays, particularly for speech. Of the two young dan roles, the performer playing the younger, sweeter Fuzi sang in falsetto and used mostly falsetto with some mix of natural voice for speech. The somewhat older Hu Niu character was portrayed using primarily the lower pitches of the actress's natural voice for speech. She then switched to falsetto for sung passages. This disjuncture, where the same character used one vocal placement for speech and another for song, also occurred for young female roles in the model plays and was a source of criticism since it indicated a failure to achieve the desired level of synthesis of speech and song into a "seamless" vocal whole. On the other hand, the natural placement used for vocal portrayals of young female characters in the model plays (and many modern plays that followed) indicate that falsetto voice is perceived as being inappropriate for portrayal of grown, modern women. Such a perception is equally true for a character as worldly wise and aggressive as Hu Niu. This is not to say that
actress Huang Xiaoci never used falsetto vocal placement for speech. In her vocal characterization of Hu Niu, she used her entire vocal range—from high-pitched, shrill vocal placement as she scolded her father, to low throaty sounds as she seduced Xiangzi. Following the elimination of the young sheng role type in the model plays and in keeping with the more realistic style of the production as a whole, none of the male characters in the Jingju Camel Xiangzi used falsetto voice.

A distinctive feature of Beijing's local dialect is a prevalent “r” sound replacing the “n” sound at the end of many words in standard Mandarin. Beijing dialect along with many colorful local expressions were used throughout the production. Consistent with the low education level of the characters, all but the scholarly Mr. Cao used the local dialect. Yet even Mr. Cao, though he used standard Mandarin and was the most dignified of the characters, spoke in a realistic style rather than the heightened stylization such characters use in traditional plays. The performers in this production avoided the rapid-fire barrage of language characteristic of vocal delivery in Cultural Revolution model plays. Instead, they utilized a wide variety of pitch and rhythm in their vocal characterizations, slowing words and using broader pitch ranges for emphasis or when leading into song.

Two other effective vocal elements were added to give the local flavor of Beijing. At the very top of the show, and during each of the subsequent blackouts, voices imitated the calls of merchants who pedaled their wares through
Beijing’s narrow alleys. Second, a performer of old dan roles portrayed a narrator character using a balladry style of old Beijing. Performers of old dan roles must have a dynamic, agile, and expressive singing voice in the natural vocal placement, and this performer was no exception.

The production contained a high percentage of singing, certainly more than many other recently created modern plays I have seen. Nonetheless, there were long sections of dialogue and, as noted above, critics wanted more singing, with more distinctive melodies.

4. Facial Expression and Make-up

As a modern play, this production continued the precedent established by the model revolutionary plays of using a minimal amount of make-up for a more natural effect even for the several hualian roles. In the model plays, to be poor was glorious and the heroes focused exclusively on furthering the revolution. *No romantic attractions existed in the world of these plays.* Make-up for female roles sometimes included cheek rouge for a healthy glow, but there was no sense of adding make-up for the sake of glamour. In contrast, performers portraying both the young and older female characters in *Camel Xiangzi* wore lipstick and some eye make-up, with the clear intent to be perceived as pretty both to the other characters within the fictional world of the play as well as to the audience.

Perhaps the most notable make-up choice was the decision not to alter Huang Xiaoci’s appearance so as to comply with Lao She’s unflattering description of her. The “hu” (虎) of Hu Niu means tiger, and Lao She’s Hu Niu
looked "so much like a tiger, she frightened men away" (Lao 1988, 42). Both the film and Huaju Hu Niu actresses were given artificially enlarged front teeth, though they were otherwise quite attractive and looked much younger than the "thirty-seven or eight" years Lao She describes. These enlarged front teeth would doubtless have posed practical problems for the precise articulation needed for Jingju singing. In addition, the choice for a more attractive Hu Niu in the Jingju production was consistent with the fundamental Jingju aesthetic goal that everything onstage appear beautiful. On the other hand, the choice also contributed to the conclusion that she was a not-completely-undesirable mate for Xiangzi—a conclusion at odds with Lao She's original.

Two of the male characters wore beards: Hu Niu's father and a destitute older rickshaw puller. As is usual in both modern and many newly-written historical plays, the beards were pieced and glued directly to the actor's face. In contrast, as discussed in chapter 3, the traditional Jingju beard consists of long strands of hair knotted to a wire frame that hangs from the actor's ears.

Overall, facial expressions in the Jingju Camel Xiangzi production were somewhat exaggerated, matching the level of stylization and pacing of accompanying gestures and speech, but still readily recognizable even by an uninitiated spectator.

5. Gesture

As with the model plays of the Cultural Revolution, the choice of modern costume in this production, discussed more fully below, eliminates access to
much of Jingju’s rich gestural vocabulary. Watersleeve gestures require watersleeves. In this production, as in the model plays, several substitutes for traditional costume pieces were used to develop gestural phrases. The Jingju Xiangzi often had a towel around his neck, a modern costume substitute also used by the hero in the model play *Shajibang*. Chen Lincang developed an elaborate series of stylized gestures using the towel to indicate wiping the sweat from his face and brushing the dust from his clothes. Another modern costume substitute was a red shawl worn by Hu Niu in the scene in which she visited Xiangzi at the Cao’s home and lied that she was pregnant. The Huaju Hu Niu also wore a red shawl in this scene. In the Jingju production, Hu Niu’s entrance cut off Xiangzi’s daydream about buying another rickshaw. Entering to the rhythm of the closing percussion of the previous sequence, actress Huang Xiaoci twirled the ends of her shawl so that they wrapped around her wrists, then struck a pose at the final gong of the percussion pattern. The movement was reminiscent of a common traditional male watersleeve technique expressing displeasure. In the traditional version, the actor maintains the wrap of the sleeves by fixing his wrists behind his back. Huang Xiaoci developed a female variation, fixing her wrists on either side of her waist. Later in the scene, she used the shawl to slap Xiangzi’s shoulder when he refused to attend her father’s birthday party. Xiangzi’s attendance was a key part of her elaborate plan to obtain her father’s consent to the marriage despite his frequent admonition that he would never allow her to marry a “smelly rickshaw puller.” Ending the aria
describing this plan, she repeated the shawl-twirling gesture from her entrance. During the remainder of the scene, she either allowed the shawl simply to hang from her arms or wrapped it daintily over her supposedly pregnant belly.

The shawl was used again later in the production to create another interesting gestural sequence. After Hu Niu's death, Xiangzi encountered Fuzi, the girl clearly more suited to have been his mate. Still grieving from the death of Hu Niu and the child, he carried her red shawl. After a brief conversation, he and Fuzi began to leave in opposite directions, but both stopped as she called his name. They turned and moved to each other, then looked down at the shawl. Moving apart again, they stretched the shawl between them. In the last moment, Xiangzi did a traditional gesture of drawing up the torso and dropping it down again that indicates reaching an unpleasant but necessary decision. He tossed his end of the scarf to Fuzi and exited. The innovative sequence drew on Xiqu conventional movement but would clearly convey the characters' unresolved longing for each other even to an uninitiated spectator.

One of the most interesting gestural innovations in the production occurred during the many points when Xiangzi's fortunes took a disastrous turn. Actor Chen Lincang developed an approach that incorporated traditional martial or dance-acting phrases done with fervent energy, but that ended in a slouching or a crouched position completely antithetical to Xiqu's traditionally lifted posture. For me, these phrases captured the essence of Lao She's novel: here was a strong, disciplined, motivated young man with seemingly great potential who was
powerless against the force of the great injustices that surrounded him. Many other more naturalistic gestures—putting a coin in a pocket, wrapping a jacket closer to the body, offering a cup of wine—were done subtly but with precision and effectively magnified and punctuated by accompanying percussion.

6. Movement

As previously mentioned, successful movement innovation has proved particularly difficult to achieve in modern dress Xiqu plays. *Camel Xiangzi* is the first modern play I have seen to successfully meld a high percentage of dance-acting into the production. It also stands in extreme contrast to the production of *Medea* discussed in the previous chapter for the restraint exercised by the director and performers in developing gestural and movement sequences that were deeply rooted in the emotional life of the characters. In *Medea*, plot situations, particularly in the first martial half of the production, were exploited to the fullest for the opportunities they created for spectacular movement. In *Camel Xiangzi*, movement was less spectacular but always effective in revealing precise emotional detail about the characters. Director Shi said that in developing the staging he followed the traditional rule: “when speaking isn’t enough, then sing; when singing isn’t enough, then move” (Shi Yukun 1999).

Xiangzi’s first entrance occurred after he had just bought his own rickshaw. Actor Chen Lincang developed an exciting sequence of quasi-martial movements and poses that clearly indicated the character’s joy and pride in
owning his own rickshaw and in his skill at pulling it. Lao She describes Xiangzi’s relationship to the rickshaw this way:

[T]his loveable rickshaw of his seemed alive to what he was doing: every time he swerved, bent a leg or straightened his back, its response was immediate and most satisfactory. They were never at cross-purposes in the least. Whenever they came to a flat open stretch, Xiangzi would run with only one hand steadying the shaft, the soft swish of rubber tyres behind spurring him on to run swiftly and steadily. On reaching their destination, his clothes would be wringing wet, as if just fished out of water, and he would feel tired but happy and proud, as if he had ridden a pedigree horse for many tens of li. (Lao 1988, 18)

Xiangzi actor Chen Lincang quoted this passage in an article discussing his development of what came to be called “the rickshaw dance” (车舞, chewu).

Chen noted that the first decision to be made was whether or not to use a real rickshaw. Chen reported that while modes of transportation are often mimed in Xiqu, the director wanted to use real rickshaws to achieve a more authentic feeling. The choice was extremely effective. The real rickshaws were visually interesting and created a dynamic sense of movement on stage. In addition, their large wheels are round and, at least when unoccupied, the rickshaw can be moved quite effortlessly. As a result, they coincided perfectly with the Jingju delineation of beauty as “round and effortless.”

The problem then was how to infuse the action of pulling a real rickshaw with specific movements drawn from Jingju technique. During this early rehearsal period, Chen spent long hours practicing pulling the rickshaw, thinking about the problem, and continuing to study Lao She’s novel. Through persistent experimentation (“from slow to fast, from low to high, from walking to running”),
Chen drew from the real experience of pulling the rickshaw and the skill of his entire Jingju-fluent body until eventually he developed the "rickshaw dance" (Chen Lincang 1999, 8). The dance included phrases that built in tempo from exaggerated, slow motion in-place steps to vigorous, quick running steps. Lines of singing were interspersed with percussion breaks during which Chen moved in and out from between the pulling shafts to take liangxiang poses clearly conveying his pride in the rickshaw. The dance established a conventional movement vocabulary that was revisited several times during the production, the energy with which it was performed varying depending on Xiangzi's fall or rise of fortune.

Chen's rickshaw technique was used to most entertaining effect by two episodes not in Lao She's novel. First, in the sequence following the rickshaw dance described above, Xiangzi met Fuzi and proudly offered her a ride in his new rickshaw. Even though her father was a rickshaw puller, she had never herself ridden in one. After carefully dusting her clothes and arranging her hair for this important event, she climbed in. Drawing on the movement language of his rickshaw dance, Chen Lincang developed a sequence to convey Fuzi's first exciting ride. The full impact of this choreography was not apparent until much later in the production, long after Hu Niu's death. Xiangzi re-encountered Mr. Cao who offered him his old job and even offered to employ Fuzi as well. In the brief time before he discovered Fuzi had been sold to the brothel and committed suicide, Xiangzi dreamed of the happy life they might have. This was
represented by a repetition of the first, joyous rickshaw ride. The choreography was replicated almost exactly, but without the real rickshaw—the actress playing Fuzi followed behind Chen, leaning her body and reaching precisely as she had done during the earlier ride in the real rickshaw. This sequence drew boisterous calls of “hao!” (“bravo!”) at every performance I attended. It called to mind the famous traditional play *Autumn River* (*秋江, Qiu Jiang*), in which a mischievous ferryman gives a young woman a ride in his boat. The illusion of a boat is created by the ferryman’s oar, its rocking motion by the precisely coordinated mime of the two performers. The truly impressive conceptual aspect of the imaginary rickshaw ride was that even spectators uninitiated in Xiqu’s tradition of mimed transportation could fully enjoy this staging since they had been given a production-specific initiation through the previous use of identical choreography with a real rickshaw.

Another effective dance-acting sequence came to be called the “drunken dance” (*醉舞, zuìwǔ*) (see Illustration 6). In the scene in which Hu Niu seduced Xiangzi, she first plied him with alcohol. Singing the final line of an aria, the Jingju Hu Niu actress sat on the table and slowly offered another cup of wine toward Xiangzi. At the moment he touched the cup to refuse it, the two shifted simultaneously into slow motion. To convey Xiangzi’s drunkenness, actor Chen moved drunkenly around the table, leaning and twirling in a precisely controlled slow motion, while Hu Niu’s pursuit of him was portrayed in equally precise slow motion. Breaking the slow motion, Hu Niu opened her blouse and rushed toward
Conveying that Xiangzi was no longer able to resist her advances, the two sank to the floor in an embrace. Kneeling facing each other, they held upstage hands and swept their downstage arms back and around in a motion with the quality of Western modern dance. Huang then turned and nestled into Chen’s lap as the lights faded. This was by far the most explicit romantic portrayal that I have seen on a Jingju stage. It was also much more explicit even than Lao She’s novel, the Huaju production, or the film. In all three of these, the creators chose to present only enough flirting to make the point, before ending the scene.

Using drunkenness as inspiration for Jingju movement has a traditional precedent in the famous play created by Mei Lanfang, *The Favorite Concubine Becomes Intoxicated* (*Guifei Zui Jiu*). As discussed below, the composer also drew from this precedent, using music from this play in composing melodies for the drunken dance.

Director Shi Yukun’s account of the creative process is similar to that reported by leading actors discussed above. He said they worked in the quite traditional way of focusing on telling the story, according to Lao She’s plot. In rehearsal they first explored the characters’ inner feelings then looked for external movements to express them (Shi Yukun 1999). Interestingly, no technique directors were used on the production. Rather, the director created a rehearsal atmosphere in which these gifted performers were able to use their extraordinary technique to externalize in very creative ways the inner lives of Lao She’s complex characters.
Visual Sign Systems

1. Costume

Costumes in this production followed lines and shapes appropriate to 1920s Beijing. Male characters wore loose fitting cotton jackets and pants with large patches of a different color fabric sewn at the knees. Female characters often wore pants and more fitted, double-breasted tops that buttoned down the side with frog fasteners. Both Hu Niu and Fuzi also appeared in traditional Chinese fitted long gowns. The major characters all had several costume changes appropriate to plot events and changing social standing. Colors and fabrics suited individual personalities and situations well.

The major innovation was the decision to include more realistic representations of poverty in the costuming. In traditional Xiqu, poverty stricken characters still wear silk and jewels, but of less elaborate design than those worn by more wealthy characters. The model plays of the Cultural Revolution adopted the overarching and unbending aesthetic goal that everything onstage should glorify the heroic actions of the workers, peasants, and soldiers. Peasants' cotton pants and jackets in these productions were neat, clean, crisp, and wrinkle-free. The only time tattered or torn clothing was shown was if someone had been captured and tortured by the enemy, and even then the damage was presented in a stylized way. In the Jingju *Camel Xiangzi*, a destitute old rickshaw puller appeared several times, symbolizing the likely eventual fate of all the younger pullers, including Xiangzi. The old man owned his own battered
rickshaw, disproving Xiangzi's theory that owning one's own rickshaw was a guarantee for success. The old man and his grandson who helped push the rickshaw wore tattered, ill-fitted clothing and ragged felt hats. The image created was neither beautiful nor glorious. Rather, it gave a powerfully truthful hint of the squalor endured by those living in poverty.

2. Space and Setting

The set for this production was one of the most effective I have ever seen and the director Shi Yukun used the space it created to full advantage. Shi had not previously worked with the set designer Huang Haiwei (黄海威) but had seen his work. Huang studied design for several years in France and was the designer for the controversial Peony Pavilion that Chinese officials prevented from performing at Lincoln Center in 1998.\(^8\) Shi met with Huang to discuss ideas. Initially, Shi knew that he wanted fairly abstract rather than realistic settings. He also wanted to show the contrast between the smallness and fragility of the individual characters and the enormity of the societal forces oppressing them. And while he required that the set have the look and feel of 1920's Beijing, he did not want a cliché such as the Front Gate near Tian'anmen Square that is related to the glory of the city. Rather, he wanted the set to bring out the fearful nature of this society and the pitiable surroundings in which the characters lived. Designer Huang suggested that the main set piece should be one of the great gates in the

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\(^8\) Since Lincoln Center had paid for the sets and costumes, these had eventually been allowed out of China and the production was performed in New York the following year, primarily using performers living outside of China (Oestrich 1999).
wall surrounding the city. Thinking more about this gate and Shi’s other requirements, they decided that the set should be very big, so as to dwarf the actors. In continuing discussions, they determined that the set should express how the society, while still very dignified and majestic, was putrid on the inside and already on the verge of collapse. Designer Huang eventually placed the entire set on an extreme sideways slant in relation to the stage floor (Shi Yukun 1999; see Illustrations 5 and 7).

Huang later added three giant stone lions to represent the three armies vying for control of the city. The lions were giant versions of the pair of stone lions that guard many doorways in China (and in Honolulu). Placed on the same 30-degree angle as the gate, the stage right lion was hung high in the air, downstage of the gate. The stage center lion was hung at a medium height, upstage of and framed by the gate. The stage left lion, on the same downstage plane as the stage right lion, was on the ground, its bottom sliced away at the same angle so it appeared to be partially buried. The overall effect was that the entire enormous structure was about to slide into a hole in the earth. Director Shi described the lions as ferocious and savage, representing the chaos caused by the warlords. He hoped the overall atmosphere created by the set design would make people sense that the political struggle and the ill fortune prevalent in such a society were the causes of the characters’ tragic fates (Hui Min 1999, 9).

The gate itself was quite thick as are the actual gates in the city walls of Beijing, creating a tunnel effect. The top of the upstage opening was an arch,
the top of the downstage opening was slightly higher and square emphasizing the depth of the wall. Shi used the gate entry point to hint at the gate of hell, the point of entry to each character's own personal hell. He placed many important moments here. The dream rickshaw and dream Fuzi both first appeared in the gate, as did the real though dreaded Hu Niu when she came to announce her (false) pregnancy (Shi Yukun 1999). In my opinion, while all of these moments were very effective visually, the idea of a gate of hell was not clearly communicated because the director also placed nearly every other entrance through the gate as well. The distinction between reality and dream, however, was clearly delineated through lighting changes, discussed further below. Since the gate served as the door or entrance point for nearly every location, for me it lost this particular level of metaphoric significance. The gate itself was raised slightly, with a gentle rake leading down to the main playing area. Combined with the director's decision to place all of the furniture pieces off to one side of center or the other, this kept sightlines open and created visually interesting entrances of important characters through the gate. The gate pulled focus to any performer standing in or just downstage of it as the enormous diagonal lines of the opening created emphasis by contrasting the vertical line of the actor's standing body (Dean 1988, 81).

Probably in part due to his experience working in television, director Shi handled the depth of field created by the gate in very satisfying ways. There was room for actors to pass upstage of the gate but in front of the stage center lion,
and the director used this area frequently for background atmosphere. For example, the street scenes opened with the stage equivalent of the establishing shot in film. In these sections, one rickshaw puller with passenger ran across the upstage plane, visible through the gate as he passed by. At the same time other rickshaw pullers with passengers crossed in various paths downstage of the gate.

The area downstage of the gate was open and flat, giving ample room for the pullers to maneuver their rickshaws and for furniture to be placed when necessary for interior scenes. The various locations were simply but effectively represented using different combinations of tables, chairs, stools, and benches. In addition, each interior scene had an identifying element upstage. For example, for the birthday party, a large red banner with the character for longevity (寿 shou) was flown in. For Mr. Cao’s home, a wall unit was placed upstage left.

All of these scene changes were made quickly and unobtrusively, with two exceptions. The first exception was a tall telephone pole unit set at the same 30 degree slant as the gate. The unit was onstage at the top of the show as background for the narrator’s opening song. During performances at the Jingju Festival, when Hu Niu came to tell Xiangzi she was pregnant, Xiangzi led her outside because he was afraid that Mr. Cao would hear her loud voice. As the actors crossed up through and around the gate, the telephone pole unit was rolled in from stage right. The pole was quite tall and not completely stable so that it jerked and drew focus as it was pushed onstage. When the production was
remounted a month later to commemorate Lao She's birthday this second use of the pole had been cut.

The second exception to the usually unobtrusive scene changes was much more effective and occurred during the set up for Hu Niu's father's birthday party. Announced with firecracker sounds and celebratory music, the scene began with Hu Niu entering through the gate followed by off-duty rickshaw pullers carrying a table, chairs, and props. As the raucous sounds continued, Hu Niu pointed to the appropriate place for each item. The set up was choreographed into a dance. The rickshaw pullers moved and turned in unison, clearly indicating the bustle of preparation for a big event. The movements developed by the Hu Niu actress also established the character as an efficient boss. This transition was an effective example of turning practical necessity into an artistically satisfying moment.

3. Texture and Color

The wall of the gate gave the effect of rugged, gray stone. Rather than painting this effect on a flat surface, three-dimensional materials were used to create a very realistic representation of stones and mortar. The costumes of the rickshaw pullers were rough cotton in browns and dark blues. The costumes for Hu Niu and her father added splashes of brighter, primary colors, and were often made of silk or velvet fabric, consistent with their relative wealth. The total palette of color was similar to that used for the model plays of the Cultural
Revolution, but also in line with popular images in film and television of early 20th century Beijing.

4. Lighting

Lighting in the model plays of the Cultural Revolution was used for three major purposes: to create realistic effects appropriate for the situation, to glorify the heroes by bathing them in bright light, and to vilify the enemies by covering them in grotesque green hues. Lighting in Jingju Camel Xiangzi served five major functions. First, it operated similarly to the act curtain often used in traditional productions. After such a curtain closes, one or more performers continue the action downstage while set pieces are changed behind the curtain. In Jingju Camel Xiangzi, the light would pull to a tight circle leaving the rest of the stage dark. Action continued in the lighted area while pieces were placed unobtrusively in darkened areas. Lights then came up gradually on the entire stage as the actors continued into the next scene. These tight pools of light were also used for the surprise arrival of the soldiers who stole Xiangzi's rickshaw as well as for the disappearance of the dream rickshaw followed by Hu Niu's sudden arrival.

Secondly, several complete blackouts were used to indicate the passage of time and/or to allow for more major scene changes. The blackouts always followed scenes of sufficiently high intensity to sustain the dramatic tension during these longer transitions. In addition, the blackouts were enhanced by appropriate musical interludes.
Lighting effects were also used to establish the two dream sequences. One of these was the section described above in which Xiangzi took the dream Fuzi for a ride in the mimed rickshaw. The other occurred earlier; while still working for Mr. Cao, Xiangzi dreamed he got his own rickshaw back. The shiny rickshaw appeared in a pool of light and moved about seemingly of its own accord. This was achieved simply with a black cloth hung from the floor of the rickshaw to hide the person crouched behind to operate it. In both cases, the lighting shifted to more saturated color to indicate a dream state. The dream effect was further indicated through the use of synthesized "tinkling" sound effects.

Fourth, lighting was used to create the realistic effects appropriate to the setting, such as a sunny morning or a snowy night. For the latter, the light shifted to a saturated blue, with instruments focused so as to catch the falling of simulated snowflakes. And finally, lighting was used expressionistically. For example, in the moment after the secret police agent exited with Xiangzi's money, plaintive blaring horn music accompanied a sharp change of light from shadowy evening blue to a tight, searing yellow circle of light around Xiangzi. No shift of time or place had occurred. The lighting shift was clearly intended to externalize Xiangzi's excruciating pain at this unjust loss. As with other elements of this production, in my opinion the lighting was never overdone and served the action well.
Aural Sign Systems

I found the aural layers of the production to be richly varied and exciting, containing many melodies I did not recognize. Jingju experts were less impressed (Chen Zengkun 1999; Chang Lixing 1999). At the time I saw the Jingju Camel Xiangzi, I had not yet seen the model play Azalea Mountain (杜鹃山,
Dujuanshan), which has a major hualian role who sings several arias in the erhuang mode. When I did see a production of this play a few months later, I recognized many of the basic melodies sung by Xiangzi. Perhaps because Jingju fans particularly enjoy erhuang mode melodies but these are less prevalent in the repertoire (Hai Zhen 1998, 8-9), Xiangzi’s singing was not singled out for criticism. As mentioned above, Hu Niu’s melodies were criticized for lacking memorable innovation.

Director Shi described the overall stylistic requirements he gave the composer: “simple and unsophisticated, sincere, yet agonized and bitter, forlorn yet strong, both without losing the regional characteristic of Beijing, as well as without losing the romantic charm of Jingju” (Hui Min 1999, 9). In keeping with these stylistic requirements, the composer, Zhao Run (赵润), viewed his task as containing four major elements. First, not only the singing but also all other musical elements had to have the quality of Jingju. Noting that a large portion of Jingju traditional orchestral music is from a system of pre-existing melodies (曲牌体, qupaiti), he acknowledged that it might seem the modern play Camel Xiangzi could not fit into this pre-existing system. Nonetheless, he was able to
incorporate elements from these pre-existing melodies into his musical design. For example, he adapted music from the play *The Favorite Concubine Becomes Intoxicated* for the “drunken dance” discussed above. Noting that to indiscriminately copy the music would be monotonous, the composer extended and augmented the orchestration with a synthesizer. For Xiangzi’s rickshaw dance, he adapted the pre-existing melody called “deep night” (“夜深沉,” “ye shenchen”) (Hui Min 1999, 8). This melody is a representative example of a Jingju pre-existing melody, based on Ming Dynasty Kunqu. It was used by Mei Lanfang in his famous play *Farewell, My Concubine* (*Bawang Bie Ji*) (Cao Baorong 1996, 46) and so is associated with the emotions of love and loss that permeate that play. Composer Zhao had originally used this melody in the prelude. By borrowing it for the rickshaw dance and for the later scene when the rickshaw was stolen, he hoped to imply the inevitable strength of fate (Hui Min 1999, 8).

Composer Zhao viewed his second task as giving the entire score a Beijing flavor. Although the “Jing” (京) of Jingju comes from Beijing, Jingju is not merely a regional opera form. As discussed in chapter 3, it evolved out of a complex integration of many different regional Xiqu forms. Zhao knew that if he used only Jingju music, the production would not have the Beijing-specific flavor it required. As a result, he chose to incorporate elements from a Beijing drumming and rhythmic storytelling form (*jingyun dagu*), a Beijing balladry form (北
As well as the Beijing regional Xiqu form quju (曲剧) that Lao She is credited with having created, Zhao worked to permeate the music of the production with these uniquely-Beijing elements (Hui Min 1999, 8). In my opinion, the music had a very cohesive feel despite its diverse source material.

Zhao's third task was to ensure that the singing clearly expressed the characters' distinct personalities. To express Xiangzi's series of successes and failures, Zhao exploited the full range of major Jingju modes. Over the course of the production, Xiangzi's melodies shifted from xipi mode (perceived of as positive and purposeful) to inverse xipi (more tragic, fatalistic), from erhuang (also perceived as more tragic, fatalistic, or passive) to inverse erhuang (perceived of as an intensification of the emotions communicated by erhuang). Zhao intended that this modal progression would give the feeling of going from bad to worse (Hui Min 1999, 8).

In composing Hu Niu's singing, Zhao wanted to capture the quality of a tiger as well as a level of charm. To accomplish this he drew foundational melodies from three different liupai of young dan role singing. He used the pretty, lively style of Xun Huisheng (荀慧生), one of the four great dan performers whose major innovation involved incorporating Hebei Bangzi melodies and singing styles into Jingju (Tianjin Jiaoyu Chubanshe 1995, 1:82-83). For the tiger quality of Hu Niu, composer Zhao used the stronger style of Shang Xiaoyun (尚小云), another of the four great dan performers whose major innovation was the development of

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9 These modes are discussed more fully above in chapter 3.
a more masculine, forceful singing style for female roles (Tianjin Jiaoyu Chubanshe 1995, 1:81). Composer Zhao also incorporated elements of modern Jingju singing developed by Zhao Yanxia (赵燕侠) in her creation of the leading female role in the model revolutionary play Shajiabang (Tianjin Jiaoyu Chubanshe 1995, 1: 555; Hui Min 1999,8).

The fourth task for composer Zhao was to incorporate modern technology to unify the entire musical “package” (包装, baozhuang). Zhao noted that use of taped music limits the actors’ freedom since it cannot adjust to timing variations between individual performances. On the other hand, in his opinion, employing a large orchestra to achieve the same musical variety facilitated by the use of recorded music can make it difficult to achieve the necessary level of unison between the musicians. In addition, Zhao was working under economic constraints that limited the number of musicians he could use. He decided to bring the computer music serial workstation together with the traditional Jingju orchestra to create the accompaniment. In the end, the orchestra was limited to twelve members, including Zhao who operated the computer workstation that he himself had created. A basic Jingju orchestra consists of eight members (Wichmann 1991, 243). In addition to the computer workstation, the orchestra

\[\text{10} \quad \text{The reason for this difficulty is that a Jingju orchestra must follow the performer, particularly with regard to singing. There are many unmetered passages of singing in which the performer has great flexibility, and even in metered passages a performer may make slight melodic variations to which the orchestra must adapt (Wichmann 1991, 245). In my experience of Western opera and musical theatre, both singers and musicians follow the conductor to a much greater extent. I have also experienced several Xiqu performances with orchestras that incorporated Western instruments where music was quite ragged. This situation results from the fact that musicians to play the Western instruments often must be hired from outside the company and economic constraints prevent extended rehearsals with the full orchestra (Wichmann 1990, 158).}\]
for *Camel Xiangzi* included several Chinese folk instruments not part of the basic Jingju orchestra. Zhao was pleased with the overall effect of the orchestra, saying that even compared to what could have been achieved with an orchestra as large as thirty musicians, he thought their smaller orchestra did very well (Hui Min 1999, 8). I agree with his assessment and found the music to be very well integrated. By weaving the folk elements through the Jingju singing sections, for example by incorporating them into the instrumental connective passages between the singing, the overall musical design was richly textured yet unified. I was especially interested by how often the composer chose melodies or orchestrations that to my perception went against the dominant emotion of the scene. For example, immediately following the scene in which the secret police agent extorted Xiangzi's money, Zhao chose to use a high-pitched, sharp sounding double reed instrument playing an almost mocking melody. The story is so desperately sad, but in my view the music often kept the tone of the production from falling over the edge into maudlin melodrama, a tendency which I had unfortunately encountered in many other modern Xiqu productions.

Efforts at innovation within the various sign systems discussed above were all keyed precisely to portrayal of the characters and their precise situations. Overall, these innovations were very well received. The main criticism leveled

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11 Additional instruments included the *pipa* (琵琶, lute), and two folk *erhu* (二胡). The *erhu* is a two-stringed spike fiddle, lower pitched than the leading stringed instrument, the *jinghu*. A special Jingju version of the *erhu* is commonly used in Jingju orchestras and was also used in this production. The folk version of the instrument has a much warmer sound and is commonly used in classical Chinese music.
against the production was that the composer had been too conservative in his
design of the sung passages. Until quite recently in the Jingju play development
process, the performers had primary responsibility for composition of the
melodies they would sing, based on the choice of underlying modes and metrical
types, speech tones of the lyrics, and expression of the character (Wichmann
1991, 131; see also 144-51). Beginning with the experiments in the
development of the Cultural Revolution model plays and continuing through the
1980s and 1990s, Jingju performers' creative authority has decreased as the
input of directors, composers, and technique directors has increased (Wichmann
1990, 165; Wichmann-Walczak 2000, 106). In the case of Jingju *Camel Xiangzi*,
the performers were given primary creative authority over aspects of physical
coloration while allowed only minimal input with regard to the musical
expression of the characters they portrayed. Conversely, the resulting
production was highly praised for its innovative movement and criticized primarily
around perceived deficiencies of its sung passages. It is thus interesting to
consider whether the division of creative authority on this project can be traced to
prejudice against Xiqu performers as "uncultured and uneducated" (a prejudice
often internalized by the performers themselves), that was prevalent in the early
20th century and revived in the 1980s (Wichmann 1990, 162). In Xiqu, song is a
primary medium by which the literary text (i.e., intellectual content) is conveyed to
the audience. Physical expressions are important to the overall synthesis of
Xiqu but surround rather than directly convey the lyrics. It is perhaps not surprising then that these performers would be deemed competent to take the creative lead in development of movement but not in the more "intellectual" area of musical composition. Resolution of this question is beyond the scope of this dissertation but worthy of further study.

In the next section, I analyze directorial choices affecting the integration of individual sign systems in accordance with the concepts outlined 4.

**Syntax**

1. Closed vs. Open Form

As discussed previously, traditional Xiqu is an essentially open form in part because there is a strong sense of the world continuing offstage, a sense created by the many entrances and exits demanded by traditional Xiqu's epic structure. Jingju *Camel Xiangzi* was structured in a similar way and produced a similarly open effect. Modern category Xiqu plays with their more realistic settings often leave less to audience imagination. In contrast, Jingju *Camel Xiangzi* with its abstract set metaphorically representing a decaying society clearly invited the audience to read the events unfolding before them within the broader context of China's radical social and economic reforms past and present. The after-the-fact reporting of two major events—Xiangzi's travel with the soldiers leading to his encounter with the camels, and Fuzi's suicide—further supported

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12 The privileging of intellect over physicality is rampant in the West and codified in Xiqu's ranking of the four performance skills with song and speech being more highly revered than dance-acting and combat.
the openness of the form. One exception worth noting is the fact that the seduction scene, discussed above, included much more detail than had Lao She's novel or the Huaju and film adaptations. This scene proved to be one of the highlights of the production and offered a exceptional opportunity for exhibition of character and situation-appropriate performance skills through the adaptation of modern filmic slow motion technique.

2. Paradigmatic Referents

As with the previous discussion of Medea, I have been relying on the idea of the paradigmatic referent, in which meaning is created by comparing a particular choice to the universe of possible choices from which it was selected, in order to gauge the level of innovation involved. The paradigms to which I have been referring in this chapter are performance conventions for modern category Xiqu plays, as well as Lao She's original novel and its earlier Huaju and film adaptations. Scenic and lighting design elements in this production were more elaborate than in traditional Xiqu or Medea. On the other hand, the production team adopted a metaphoric unit set approach, rather than the realistic multiple settings used in the model plays of the Cultural Revolution. As a result, the actors and their performance skills played a greater role in establishing the particular location than in the model plays. And unlike the film version of White Snake discussed in chapter 4, there were no moments when design elements or special effects interfered with the exhibition of performance skills. Rather, all elements supported the performers and the story. Indeed, this was one of the
very best examples I have seen of balancing effective use of theatre technology with effective exhibition of Xiqu performance skills. As with Medea, the few deviations from the original novel created additional opportunities for the use of Xiqu performance skills and so were in harmony with the basic Xiqu performance equation in which plot and character provide meaningful context for exhibiting those skills.

Analyzing this production in terms of the categories of Icon, Index, and Symbol paradigmatic referents developed by C.S. Pierce provides insight into the popular success of this production. The director chose two powerful iconic references—the roughly textured city wall that approximated the enormous scale of the original, and the real rickshaws. Both of these iconic elements were then altered in ways that caused them to operate on an Indexical level as well. In the first instance, by placing the wall on a slant, the director communicated the decay of the society. In the second instance, by showing both vibrant young pullers of shiny rickshaws as well as older pullers of broken down rickshaws, the director visually emphasized Lao She’s point that the rickshaw was both Xiangzi’s key to immediate salvation as well as the instrument of his ultimate destruction.

With regard to one important Index level referent, the director was less successful. As discussed above, in my opinion his attempt to use the city gate to represent the “gate of hell” was rendered less effective because the gate was used continually throughout the production in situations where this metaphor did not apply, though intense lighting changes did clearly convey shifts to dream or
expressionistic states. Another indexical referent, the red scarf, was used more effectively. Initially, it was associated with Hu Niu since she wore it to give Xiangzi the (false) news that she was pregnant. After Hu Niu's death, Xiangzi held it during an aria grieving for her. But in the next moment he encountered Fuzi. As they stretched the scarf between them it shifted in meaning to a broader possibility of romantic happiness unconnected to Hu Niu. This new meaning was expanded when Fuzi wore the shawl during the dream rickshaw ride. In a later scene, however, the director used the scarf as a powerful referent for the opposite of all the positive elements of love and family with which it had previously been associated. Immediately after learning of Fuzi's suicide, Xiangzi finds the red scarf on the ground and treats the spot as though it were Fuzi's grave. 13

The director adopted no purely symbolic elements from traditional Xiqu, such as the red make-up used for Creon in Medea, that would be incomprehensible to a uninitiated spectator. The one purely symbolic element, not used in traditional Jingju, were the historically accurate clothing decoration of a white sunburst or sunflower and poles with sprays of white paper attached at the tops used in the Beijing area to indicate mourning (Chen Zengkun 1999). The old man who informed Xiangzi of Fuzi's sale to the brothel wore a jacket with this sunflower design because he was in mourning for his grandson. This symbolic element was familiar to Chinese spectators, but not to me. The production was

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13 Because this analysis involves comparison of preceding uses of the shawl, it is another example of an Indexical usage that operates both syntagmatically and paradigmatically.
otherwise accessible even to spectators completely unfamiliar with Jingju conventions.

3. Syntagmatic Referents

As discussed above, meaning is also created by comparing a particular staging choice with the choices that actually come before it. The most effective use of this device was Fuzi's first rickshaw ride in the real rickshaw, as preceding referent to the later dream sequence in which the choreography was reenacted almost exactly, except for the miming of the rickshaw.

Compressing the structure of Lao She's original novel, every scene in this production in which Xiangzi found happiness or hope was followed immediately by a scene of despair. The scene near the beginning in which Xiangzi gave Fuzi a ride in his new rickshaw was followed immediately by the entrance of the older rickshaw puller who sang a few lines in a plaintiff voice before collapsing from hunger. Since the old man owned his own rickshaw, Xiangzi learned that owning a rickshaw was not the foolproof method of averting disaster that he had thought. Later, in a scene after Xiangzi and Hu Niu had married, she told him she was really pregnant and Xiangzi joyously considered the possibility of being a daddy to a fat baby boy. This scene was followed immediately by a brief scene in which Xiangzi's friends reported that they were unable to find a doctor willing to help Hu Niu in her difficult labor for the small amount of money they could pay. This short scene ended with the death of both Hu Niu and the child. Finally, after Mr. Cao offered Xiangzi his old job back plus
a position for Fuzi, Xiangzi’s reawakened hopes were portrayed through the dream rickshaw ride. This sequence was followed immediately by the entrance of the old puller, dressed in mourning for his grandson who died because they could not afford medicine. Answering his own question, “How can anyone live well?” the old man told Xiangzi he had heard Fuzi’s father had sold her to a brothel. This horrible news was followed by Xiangzi rushing to save her but arriving too late. The culminating impression left by this series of highpoints immediately undercut by news of disaster was a sense of the inevitability of fate. To be born into this lowest level of an unjust society was to be destined to suffering. This basic structure had been provided by Lao She’s novel, and heightened by the playwright’s compression of the narrative in the dramatic text. But it was the director’s skillful manipulation of shifts in rhythm and emotional intensity, however, that made the overall performance text so successful.

**Conclusion**

Director Shi Yukun did not have the same level of control over this production that Luo Jinlin had over Medea. Shi did not choose the project or designers, nor did he have significant input on script revisions, or casting of the actors. He nonetheless sparked innovative work by the set designer and composer and created a rehearsal atmosphere that provoked the actors to creative innovations that were both popularly successful and accepted by the experts as sufficiently “Jingju” in quality. Finally, he shaped the individual components with great precision into a very satisfying whole. But it is still too
early to tell whether *Camel Xiangzi* will have lasting impact in the sense of spawning successful new modern Xiqu plays in its wake.

With traditional style Xiqu productions intended for contemporary audiences, one of the director's biggest challenges is to stage conventional techniques in ways that are accessible to uninitiated spectators. The success of *Medea* in its foreign performances proves that director Luo Jinlin met this challenge, though it was viewed as less successful by Jingju experts. With modern style Xiqu productions, one of the director's biggest challenges is to find sufficiently "Xiqu" stage expressions of modern events and experiences. The awards and critical acclaim received by *Camel Xiangzi* prove that director Shi Yukun likewise amply met the challenge.

In the next chapter, I shift to a broader perspective. Based on survey responses, I analyze the working conditions and creative authority of a sample of Xiqu directors from a range of backgrounds.
CHAPTER 7
A SURVEY OF WORKING XIQU DIRECTORS

This chapter analyzes the results of a survey I conducted by mail of
working Xiqu directors. I mailed the survey to the 148 directors whose
addresses were given on the membership list of the Chinese Association of Xiqu
Directors (中国戏曲导演学会, Zhongguo Xiqu Daoyan Xuehui). Seven members
had not provided a mailing address. Of the 148 members who were mailed
surveys, only 13 were in the Beijing area—the others represented a broad
geographical range.

The content of the survey was in a sense a culmination of my year of
fieldwork. The questions were designed to explore themes, complaints, and
concerns about the challenges confronting contemporary Xiqu directors that had
come up repeatedly over the year in the course of my interviews and observations.
The survey was in three parts. In the first part, I asked about the respondent’s
extent of Xiqu training and performance experience, as well as current
circumstances of employment. Parts two and three contained identical
questions, but I asked the respondent to consider his or her most recent directing
project in answering one set of questions and the second most recent directing
project in responding to the other. The questions were designed to elicit
information about employment circumstances (company member or specially
invited), the extent of the respondent’s authority over various aspects of the

1 That I achieved any degree of success with this survey is due in large part to the assistance I received from
Fan Xing (then a graduate student at the Xiqu Academy, now a PhD candidate at University of Hawai'i at
Manoa), who gave invaluable assistance in construction of the Chinese language versions of the questions.
The survey went through numerous drafts, however, and any mistakes are mine.
production, as well as his or her assessment of the production's artistic and commercial success. I included a brief self-introduction and explanation of research goals as well as self-addressed, postage-paid return envelopes with the mailing. I received 33 responses, only two of which were materially incomplete.²

An English language translation of the survey is attached as Appendix A. The Chinese language original is attached as Appendix B. A description of a long delay that occurred before I received the responses is attached as Appendix C.

Training and Background

The membership list of the Chinese Association of Xiqu Directors contained only information about the individual members' gender, age, and geographical location. With regard to these factors, the 33 responses do not comprise an exactly proportionate representative sample, but they do offer an interesting range. Of the responses received, only one failed to provide even the biographical information requested. The following table compares gender and age of the respondent pool with that of the actual respondents. Note that 8 of the directors on the membership list provided gender information but did not provide age information, so the age breakdown in the pool is given out of a total of 140.

² One of the respondents had been retired for several years. He answered the biographical questions but then answered the project-specific questions based on his general experiences so these were excluded from the analysis. Another respondent stated that he thought the questions would not be useful based on his understanding of what PhD level research should entail and he therefore chose not to answer them.
Table 1: Gender and Age Breakdown of Total Pool and Actual Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Representation in total pool</th>
<th>Ideal Representation</th>
<th>Actual Representation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
<td>29 of 148</td>
<td>6.3 of 32</td>
<td>4 of 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Men</strong></td>
<td>119 of 148</td>
<td>25.7 of 32</td>
<td>28 of 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age 60 and over</strong></td>
<td>25 of 140</td>
<td>5.8 of 32</td>
<td>9 of 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ages 50-59</strong></td>
<td>79 of 140</td>
<td>17.9 of 32</td>
<td>20 of 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ages 40-49</strong></td>
<td>31 of 140</td>
<td>7.0 of 32</td>
<td>2 of 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ages 30-39</strong></td>
<td>6 of 140</td>
<td>1.3 of 32</td>
<td>1 of 32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Presenting this information in terms of percentages reveals which groups were under represented and which were over represented in the sample.

Chart 1
Thus women were slightly under represented in the actual responses received. Directors in their 40s were the most under represented, while older directors were slightly over represented. One possible explanation for this disparity is that directors in their 40s are likely to be at the most active point in their careers, while older directors may be beginning to slow down somewhat in the number of projects undertaken. If this is true, however, it represents an interesting shift in perceptions of who can serve effectively as a Xiqu director. A major impetus for bringing Huaju directors to work on Xiqu productions was the fact that they were older and could more easily gain the respect of mature Xiqu performers. The sample of surveys actually received is not big enough to resolve the question. Of the 29 directors over 50, 16 were involved in directing projects within the previous year. One of the three directors under age 50 had not directed for more
than two years, the other two directors had directed within the last year. Thus there is not a clear correlation between level of activity and age among the respondents.

Respondents were asked about their current employment situation. Of the 32 responses, the results were as follows:

Chart 3

Interestingly, only one director described himself as freelance though, as discussed below, many directors worked outside their home company or troupe on projects by special invitation. Multi-taskers are those who listed at least three categories. Troupe member directors are members of a company who
specialize in directing. None of the respondents chose the option describing their position as Huaju, film, or television director.

I received responses from a broad geographical range, from 16 different provinces plus Beijing and Shanghai, as indicated by the map below.

Figure 3: Map with Geographical Breakdown and Number of Respondents

(Oxford Encyclopedic World Atlas 2000, 84 [numbers added]).
Most of the respondents had formal training in Xiqu:

**Chart 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Formal Xiqu Training</th>
<th>Number of Respondents (32 Total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no ans</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 yrs</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1yr</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3yrs</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6yrs</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;6yrs</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those receiving formal training, all trained in one of the more highly stylized Xiqu forms. Some also had training in one or more of the less stylized forms, but none trained only in such forms. Of those with training, 7 had received at least some college level Xiqu training at the National Xiqu Academy. A total of 15 respondents had some training at a Xiqu school, while 7 received some training directly from a master performer. None of these categories is mutually exclusive and a number of respondents received training in two different circumstances. Length of training for the respondents might at first appear shorter than expected. It is, however, worth noting that given the age of many of the respondents, they would have been entering training before institutionalized systems had been fully organized following the 1949 Communist victory. Training for younger
respondents may have been interrupted by the upheavals of the Cultural Revolution.

The number of years of professional performance experience perhaps offers a clearer picture of which respondents could readily be identified as Xiqu "experts." As shown in the graph below, 25 of 32 respondents had ten or more years of professional performance experience. Of those, 16 had performed for at least 20 years. On the other hand, 6 respondents had no professional performance experience, and one had only performed for 3 years. Of the 32 total, 24 responded that they had performed in one of the more highly stylized forms, one had performed in a less highly stylized form, one had performed in both categories, and the remaining 6 did not respond to this question.

Chart 5
No pattern was discernible in terms of role types studied and/or performed. Many respondents had studied and/or performed both martial and civil role types. None of the respondents had studied or performed both male and female role types.

With regard to formal general education, 11 had some study beyond high school level, but only 3 completed the equivalent of a bachelor’s degree. None had graduate level study. Most of the respondents (25 of 32) had some formal training in Xiqu directing; of these, 13 had one year or more of training. A total of 12 respondents had some Huaju directing training, and 4 had some training in directing for film or television.

There was a broad range of directing experience represented by this sample. Of the respondents, 4 had directed over 100 Xiqu projects while 5 directors had directed fewer than 10 projects:

**Chart 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Xiqu Directing Projects</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;10 plays</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19 plays</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29 plays</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39 plays</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-69 plays</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-99 plays</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100+ plays</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Respondents (32 Total)
Slightly over one third (13 of 32) of the respondents had Huaju directing experience, with 7 of those having directed 10 or more Huaju projects. Of the 32 respondents, 11 had directed for film or television, but only 2 of those had directed 10 or more such projects. Not surprisingly given the common basis in realism shared by Huaju and film, there was significant overlap between those who had directed Huaju and those who had directed TV or film, with 9 of 32 having directed for both Huaju and film.

Following up on anecdotal evidence that Xiqu artists were supplementing their income with film and television work, I asked respondents to estimate the percentage of time they engaged in various activities (directing Xiqu, performing Xiqu, teaching Xiqu, directing Huaju, directing film or television, and other) during the last two years. I then asked them to estimate the percentage of income they received from the same activities during the same time period. I had assumed that work from film or television would be compensated at a significantly higher rate, and that if this were true it would be clearly evident from a disparity between percentages of time spent versus income earned. The results produced no such clear conclusion. Of the 29 who responded to these questions, for all but 6 respondents the percentage of time spent on each activity was within 10% of the percentage of income received from that activity. I will therefore first analyze time spent on the various activities for the entire

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3 For example, a famous martial male performer with the National Jingju Company appeared in a frequently aired television commercial for shampoo.

4 One respondent indicated that he had retired more than 3 years earlier so had no working activity during the two years in question. Two others did not explain their failure to respond to these questions and were in their early 50s, so not obviously yet of retirement age.
respondent pool, then look at the 6 directors who had greater than 10% divergence between time spent and income received on particular activities.

Of the 29 respondents, 18 spent 70% or more of their working time as Xiqu directors, 11 spent 31-69% of their working time in this activity, and none spent less than 30%. No more than three respondents engaged in any one of the other listed activities for more than 30% of their working time. The results are presented in the graph below:

Chart 7

Percentage of Working Time on Various Activities

Of the 6 respondents whose percentage of income deviated by more than 10% from the percentage of time spent on that activity, no clear pattern emerged. For 2 of the respondents (#3 and #4), although they spent more than 50% of their time engaged in "other" activities (likely administration, but this was

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5 I assigned numbers randomly to the questionnaires for purposes of identification during analysis.
not expressly stated), they received at least 80% of their income from their status as a Xiqu director. Only two of the respondents (#26 and #32) exhibited the inverse relationship I had expected where substantial percentage of income came from directing film or TV, with a much lower investment of time in that activity, while a substantial investment of time had been made in Xiqu directing, with a much lower return in terms of percentage of income. It is also interesting to note that for respondents #24 and #27, time spent on Huaju directing did not produce any income.

**Chart 8**

Chart showing the comparison of time vs. income for different respondents and activities. The chart includes categories such as Film/TV Dir, XQ Dir, Other, Film/TV Huaju, XQ Teach, XQ Dir, Other, and so on, with income and time percentages displayed for each category.
I requested specific information about income on the two project specific sections of the questionnaire and that information is presented below.

In addition to questions about training and employment, I also included in this first section two theoretical or aesthetic questions. First, I addressed the relationship between actor and character, asking the respondents’ opinion about whether in successful Xiqu performances, it is necessary for the actor to enter deeply the emotional experience of the character (在最成功的戏曲演出中,演员深入戏中角色的感受是必不可少的, zai zui chenggong de xiqu yanchu zhong, yanyuan shenru xizhong juese de ganshou shi bu ke shao de). All 31 of the respondents agreed with the statement (17 chose “agree,” 15 chose “strongly agree;” none chose “disagree” or “strongly disagree”). My purpose in asking the question was two-fold. First of all, I wanted to check the Brechitan-influenced assumption in the West that Xiqu performers do not engage in emotional or psychological identification with the characters they portray. I had also repeatedly heard that a prevalent problem among young performers was that they were perceived as merely performing conventions, rather than portraying the emotional life of the character. That 17 chose the “agree” option rather than the “strongly agree” option is consistent with the technical demands of the form. For example, as discussed in chapter 5 about Medea, it is often said that a Xiqu performer must not shed real tears in performance since sobbing breath would adversely impact singing. Nonetheless, the fact that all the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that entering the emotional life of the character is an
important element of a successful Xiqu performance coincides with the artistic goals expressed by Mei Lanfang (discussed in chapter 3), leading performers of *Camel Xiangzi* (discussed in chapter 6), as well as the Xiqu Academy directing faculty whom I interviewed (discussed in chapter 8).

Second, I asked respondents where they believed the artistic "center" of Xiqu now resides. The issue came up frequently in my interviews with the directing faculty of the Xiqu Academy, discussed in the next chapter. One Chinese author has argued that, as in Western theatre, a shift from playwright to actor and now to director as the creative center of a theatrical production has occurred in Xiqu over the centuries (Pan Yichen 1990). Admittedly, the question I formulated is a simplistic approach to a very complex issue. Nonetheless, the results of this sample are interesting. None of the respondents chose the composer as the creative center, and only one respondent each chose the actor as center and the playwright as center. The director was identified as the creative center by 7 of the respondents, while a strong majority, 18 of 32, chose the following formulation, variations of which I heard numerous times during my interviews with the Xiqu Academy directing faculty: under the leadership of the director, the performance is the center of Xiqu today (在导演指导下，以表演为中心, zai daoyan zhidao xia, yi biaoyan wei zhongxin).

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6 As discussed below in chapter 8, "performance centered" is distinguished from "performer centered" in that the latter includes performance elements designed primarily to elicit applause for the performer rather than further the portrayal of the character.
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of Artistic Center</th>
<th>Respondents (of 32 Total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under the leadership of the director, performance as center</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director as center</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor as center</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playwright as center</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composer as center</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Five of the respondents chose "other." Of these, one gave no explanation; one placed the center with the "writer-director"; one said the location of the center depended upon where one was in the process of developing a production; one said Xiqu is so multifaceted a clear center could not be identified; and a fifth offered a similar assessment, adding that perhaps the audience and experts could be deemed the center since they are the ones who determine the success of a given production.

**Problems Facing Xiqu Directors and Proposed Solutions**

One final question (#13) in this section, and the only question requesting a narrative response, asked respondents to describe what they believed to be the major problem facing contemporary Xiqu directors and what they believed would be the best approach to resolving the problem. Although I asked them to identify a single issue, many respondents listed multiple concerns. Based on the number of respondents raising a particular issue (and tallying as many issues as

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7 My ability to read handwritten Chinese characters is extremely limited. I received enormous help in the transcribing and translation of these responses from UHM graduate students Fan Xing, Pei-lin Liang, and Wei-yu Lin.
each respondent chose to raise), 2 major focal points and 10 additional areas of varying weight were identified. Each of these areas will be addressed in detail below.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem area raised, Solution suggested</th>
<th>Total Resp.</th>
<th>Individual Resp. #s raising the issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial issues, those raising government support in bold</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 12, 13, 16, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performers' artistic level</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1, 3, 9, 10, 23, 24, 25, 26, 29, 30, 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemp. society vs. Traditional form</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1, 4, 5, 6, 14, 15, 20, 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preserve Xiqu's unique characteristics</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4, 6, 15, 20, 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert awards vs. Audience</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2, 8, 18, 27, 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government control</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2, 11, 22, 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough good scripts</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1, 3, 23, 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreasing audiences</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23, 24, 29, 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directors not valued</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7, 21, 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directors' artistic level</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22, 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State repertoire</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13, 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient social support</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9, 23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not surprisingly given China's current massive economic shift from state controlled to market economic structure, the most commonly identified problems revolved around lack of money, with 16 respondents raising the issue, and 8 of those asserting that the solution lies in increased government funding. Several of these also mentioned that lack of support from local governments and politicians was particularly problematic. I found these results decidedly discouraging since the likelihood of government entities reversing the shift to a market economy and putting more funding back into support of Xiqu troupes seems very low indeed. It is unfortunate that so many directors were looking for
external and unlikely forces to rescue Xiqu, unlike for example, the Shanghai Jingju Company, which has undergone a profound self-initiated restructuring toward self-sustainability (Wichmann-Walczak 2000).

Nonetheless, several respondents gave interesting specific insights to this issue. Respondent #3 asserted that money was going to singing, dancing, and acrobatic troupes that can earn more money overseas rather than to support of Xiqu. Respondent #19 focused on the problem that the cost of renting a performance space often exceeded box office income, asserting that to continue to perform troupes must own their own theatres. Respondent #25 asserted that there was not enough money even for the top troupes and projects. This respondent advised a restructuring that allowed artists to work with whomever they wanted whenever they wanted so as to make use of the money that is available to its fullest.

The second most commonly raised issue concentrated around perceived deficiencies of Xiqu performers, with 11 respondents raising the issue. Of these, 4 respondents focused on the fact there were not enough good performers or the related concern that conditions were not good for the development of young performers. For 7 of these 11 respondents, the problem was that the artistic and/or educational level of the performers was deficient. Respondent #9 asserted that the educational level of Xiqu artists was much lower than that of society generally. Respondent #30 stated that the problem of educational level extended to troupes as a whole (presumably including troupe administrators as
well as performers). Respondents #3 and #25 asserted that performers did not take their work seriously enough. These respondents suggested such solutions as raising educational levels and pay, and improving living and working conditions. Respondent #3 also favored periodic strict testing on basic techniques. Finally, Respondent #31 asserted that raising the quality of the actors has become the duty of the director so that directors are performing the equivalent of a cram course during rehearsals. This understanding of the Xiqu director's remedial function was definitely shared by the Xiqu Academy directing faculty, whose views are discussed in the next chapter. Respondent #31 criticized as insufficient this approach in which ad hoc workshops are given by directors for individual projects, arguing that government support of system-wide performer training was required if Xiqu is to survive.

The third most commonly raised cluster of concerns revolved around the issue of tensions between contemporary society and traditional performance conventions, with 8 respondents raising versions of this issue. Respondent #14 asserted that there is a contradiction between modern ideas and traditional style and that this problem does not yet have a clear solution (#14). Five others (#4, #6, #15, #20, #33) asserted that Xiqu directors needed to meet the requirements of modern audiences by innovating, but did not offer specific suggestions. Respondent #1 argued that raising Xiqu artists' cultural level would help them form contemporary aesthetics. Respondent #5 offered the only clear

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8 Testing does currently occur nationwide among state supported arts groups but is of questionable efficacy in removing inferior performers.
prescription, asserting that “the fusion of Western theatre with Xiqu is the way, just as Meyerhold said.”

The next most common issue, raised by 5 respondents, was that the director should work to preserve the special characteristics of Xiqu generally and/or the particular Xiqu form in which he or she is working. Respondent #15 stated that “a modern Xiqu performance should not be simply Huaju plus singing,” rather it should stress the characteristics of the art form but also develop new conventions that are modern and artistic. Respondent #27 was concerned that if directors follow popular trends too much, Xiqu will lose its “true nature.” Respondents #4 and #6 were concerned that the director must preserve the characteristics of the Xiqu form involved but also “combine old regional forms with contemporary ideas” (#4) or “show their relation to modern life” (#6). Finally, Respondent #20 advised that a Xiqu director should “stress the distinguishing characteristics of Xiqu, emphasize local color, and also place emphasis on modern characteristics.”

Another group of 5 respondents (#2, #8, #18, #27, #31) raised concerns that new productions were being developed to please the experts and government officials who give awards. 4 of the 5 respondents asserted that the experts liked plays that the audiences did not, while Respondent #31 implied that the problem lay more with the producing companies since their focus was on winning awards rather than creating artistic and thought provoking work. Respondent #27 observed that such productions die very quickly, rather than
being taken into the regular repertoire of a company. The only information I have on this issue disputes the assertion: the award winning production of *Camel Xiangzi* has been adopted into the Jiangsu Province Company's repertoire, and was setting out on another tour when I visited in the summer of 2002. As will be discussed below, a strong majority of the respondents described the two productions that they addressed in this questionnaire as both artistic and box office successes. But as companies are increasingly forced to rely on box office receipts, to the extent this problem exists, its impact on the financial well being of Xiqu companies will likewise increase. As for solutions to the problem, Respondent #8 thought it would be helpful if the government spent more money on productions intended to please a popular audience. Only Respondent #18 offered a specific solution to the perceived problem that the tastes of the judges did not reflect those of audiences, suggesting that the judges who give the national prizes should not stay the judges forever.

Next, there were 3 clusters of concerns, each of which was raised by 4 respondents. Too much government control was perceived by 4 of the respondents as being a significant problem. For Respondent #2, government control produced productions that pleased the experts but not the audiences, so audiences were dwindling. And 3 of the respondents were concerned that government control, particularly with regard to the system of awards, limited creativity (#11, #32, #33). Respondent #11 argued that a way to encourage more creativity from Xiqu directors was to have "fair competition." Implied in this
statement is the perception that the government only gives awards to those productions it has spent money on, thereby encouraging artists to create productions that will please the leaders. Respondent #33 argued that the way to encourage creativity was to increase exchange among Xiqu artists rather than the current situation in which artists follow ideas, orders, or inclinations coming from the leaders. Interestingly, none of the respondents raised explicit concerns about direct government censorship of content or form.

For 4 respondents (#1, #3, #23, #29), lack of good scripts was identified as a major problem. Of these, 2 did not offer a solution (#23, #29). Respondent #3 simply stated Xiqu needed better playwrights. Respondent #1 urged the cultivation of new Xiqu artists generally, not just playwrights, by improving their cultural level, so as to help them form contemporary aesthetics and to find a balance between innovation and inheritance.

Finally, 4 respondents cited dwindling audiences as a major concern. Respondent #23, who bemoaned the lack of good scripts above, also asserted that even when there were good scripts, the productions did not draw audiences because Xiqu “is not very popular among the people.” Respondent #30 argued that since the reform and opening up instigated by Deng Xiaoping, audiences have too many choices and their standard of beauty has changed, a situation especially true for younger audiences. Only Respondent #29 offered the specific solution of educating audiences in more depth and scope about Xiqu (#29).
For 3 of the respondents, lack of understanding and or respect for the importance of the director in Xiqu was seen as a major problem. This point was also frequently asserted by the Xiqu Academy directing faculty. Respondent #7 asserted that still only a few people believe that it is necessary for Xiqu to have directors. He found it especially sad that performers still do not see this necessity and that troupe administrators and other government officials are also ignorant about the issue. This respondent believed that Xiqu has paid dearly for this misconception. But he also saw some hope in the fact that over the last 10 years there have been some strong productions with directors, asserting that maybe directors are the way to save Xiqu. Respondent #21 asserted that the director is still not the central focus within the process of Xiqu creation, but observed that people are gradually sensing the increasing importance of the director in Xiqu. This respondent also bemoaned the fact that many troupes only hire directors when they need a production to enter a competition. Implicit in this comment is either an assumption that company member directors (who would not need to be "hired") are less capable than outside directors or an assertion that there are companies without member directors. The latter would offer an interesting contradiction to official assertions discussed in chapter 2 that all Xiqu troupes have member directors.

The last three issues were raised by only 2 respondents each. Respondents #13 and #23 criticized Xiqu troupes for continuously performing the same stale repertoire. Respondents #9 and #23 decried the lack of support in
Chinese society generally for the art form, with Respondent #9 seeing the lack of societal support as extending generally to all of the arts. Finally, only 2 respondents raised the idea that directors need to work to improve themselves. Respondent #22 asserted that this effort should be made possible by government funding. Respondent #27 asserted that Xiqu directors should raise their own standards and expand their perspectives, warning that if they remain conservative then Xiqu will certainly lose its ability to attract modern audiences.

These concerns are perhaps most distressing in their passivity. Only 5 of the 32 respondents to this question chose to focus on aspects over which they had any direct control—the 4 who argued for preserving the unique characteristics of the particular Xiqu form in which the director is working, and the 2 (one of whom also raised the previous point) who argued that directors need to raise their own level. All of the other concerns are quite valid but seemingly beyond the range of Xiqu directors’ ability to exert positive change.

Project Specific Responses

In the second part of the questionnaire I asked the respondents to answer two identical sets of questions, one for each of their two most recent Xiqu directing projects. Of the 32 respondents who provided biographical information to the first part of the questionnaire, 3 did not answer the project specific questions. One of these indicated he had retired, the other 2 answered

\[9\text{ I compared data from these two sets of responses on numerous points but found no notable correlations, perhaps in part due to the substantial differences among the respondents in the time elapsed between their most recent and next most recent projects.}\]
inconsistently or not at all. A fourth respondent provided information about only one project. The questionnaires thus provide information regarding the situations of 29 directors on 57 separate productions. I will first discuss the types of projects and rehearsal periods, then analyze hiring circumstances and salaries, then the respondents’ assessments of the various productions’ artistic and commercial success, and finally their responses regarding extent of their creative authority in various aspects of production.

1. Types of Projects and Rehearsal Periods

The pool of productions represented a broad range of projects, with 32 of the productions being in a highly stylized Xiqu form and 22 in less stylized forms, with 3 no answers. In terms of style, and in keeping with the conventional wisdom that directors are not really necessary for traditional plays, only 6 of the 57 productions were described as traditional. Of the remaining 51, 25 productions were categorized as newly-written historical, 20 as modern, and 1 as a Xiqu adaptation of a foreign play, with 5 no answers. In terms of plot, 4 productions were described as tragedies, 15 as comedies, 8 as tragicomedies, 2 as mythological, and 25 as based on actual events, with 3 no answers.

The average regular rehearsal period was 5.8 weeks, with 2 weeks being the shortest period and 12 weeks being the longest. Not included in this average are two projects described as being rehearsed over 1 year and 2 years
respectively. In assessing the adequacy of the rehearsal period, respondents found the period too short in 13 cases, barely long enough in 25 cases, and appropriate in length in 15 cases, with 4 no answers. In the cases of the extremely long rehearsal periods, one found the length to be appropriate, the other said it was too long.

I expected a stronger correlation between style of play and length of rehearsal than the results revealed. It might be expected that traditional plays could be rehearsed more quickly since most elements of the production have already been set. One of the productions described as traditional did have an expectedly short 2-week rehearsal period, but another traditional project had a surprisingly long 12-week process. The average rehearsal period for the 6 traditional plays was 5.2 weeks, slightly more than the 4.9-week average for newly-written historical plays. Conversely, one might expect new plays to require longer rehearsal periods, and many of them did. But 3 newly-written historical plays and 1 foreign adaptation were rehearsed in only 2 weeks, while 1 modern and 2 newly-written historical plays were staged in only 3 weeks. Modern plays had the longest average rehearsal period, at 7.2 weeks. The averages for each category of play are shown on the graph below (again the 2 rehearsal periods lasting a year or more were removed from the calculations):

---

10 While major productions have occasionally been given such extensive rehearsal periods, as was the important production Cao Cao and Yang Xiu (Wichmann-Walczak 2000, 105), these cases are rare and would have skewed the averages obtained from the survey results.
It is somewhat surprising that traditional plays would have a slightly longer average rehearsal than newly-written historical plays. It is not surprising that modern plays required substantially longer rehearsals since much of the traditional movement vocabulary is based on traditional costume pieces and so cannot be directly incorporated into plays in modern dress. In addition, as was the case in *Camel Xiangzi* discussed in chapter 6, characters in modern plays are less likely to fit easily into traditional role types, requiring further innovation.
2. Employment Circumstances and Salaries

There is a perception that Xiqu directors are not given sufficient authority, and directors working with their own company are said to receive even less authority than directors hired from outside to work on a particular project. In order to gain some understanding of the accuracy of these concerns, I asked the respondents to indicate whether they were company members or had been invited from outside to direct on each of the projects. Of the 57 total productions, in 3 cases no answer was given to this question. As shown on the table below, for the 54 remaining productions, in 26 cases the respondent was a member of the producing company. In 28 cases, he or she had been specially invited from outside the company to direct the project. 9 of the respondents had been members of the producing company on both projects for which they provided information. 10 of the respondents had been specially invited to direct on both projects for which they provided information. 7 of the respondents were company members on one project and specially invited on the other. Finally, 2 respondents answered with regard to only one project.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hiring Circumstances</th>
<th>Of 54 Total</th>
<th>Total projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Company member</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specially invited</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comparing respondents' two projects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company member on both</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specially invited on both</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of each hiring circumstance</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answering for only one project</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contrary to my expectation, I found no clear correlation between employment status and respondents' perceptions about their creative authority. There was, however, an expectedly strong correlation with regard to salaries in that in 20 of the 26 cases the company member director indicated he or she had received either zero pay or no more than regular salary for work on the project. In addition, 4 company member directors indicated they had received less than 1000 yuan ($125 U.S.) on the project. Perhaps surprisingly, 2 company member directors indicated receiving more than 5,000 yuan on the project while 5 of the specially invited directors indicated they received 0 or no more than regular salary, and 2 received less than 1,000 yuan. Salaries for the entire pool are shown below:

Chart 10

Comparison of Salaries for Invited vs Company Member Directors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salary Range</th>
<th>Specially Invited Directors</th>
<th>Company Member Directors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5,000+ yuan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,001-5,000 yuan</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3,001-4,000 yuan</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,001-3,000 yuan</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000-2,000 yuan</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1,000 yuan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular pay</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a point of reference, my performance teacher received 800 yuan a month in his teaching position at the Xiqu Academy.
There was no single factor that correlated strongly with higher salaries, though education, formal directing training, and experience all appeared to play a role. Although none of the 3 respondents with Bachelor’s degrees received more than 5,000 yuan on a project, 2 of them received between 4,000 and 5,000 yuan. Of the 8 respondents who received more than 5,000 yuan on at least one project, 6 of them (75%) had the equivalent of an Associate’s degree (大专, da zhuan), while only 11 of 29 in the total pool (38%) had obtained an Associate’s degree. Of the 6 with associates degrees, 4 had earned it in Xiqu directing (#1, #11, #21, #31). Of the remaining 2, one (#8) had over a year of formal Xiqu directing training, had directed 105 Xiqu projects, and had performed Xiqu professionally for 20 years. The other (#7) had one year of Huaju directing training, had directed 80 Xiqu productions, and had performed Xiqu professionally for 14 years.

Though the 2 remaining respondents in the top bracket did not complete high school (#6, #32), they did have extensive performance (17 and 14 years respectively) and directing experience (90 and 13 Xiqu projects respectively). And though #32 had significantly fewer Xiqu directing projects, he did have 20 Huaju directing projects as well as nearly a year of formal Xiqu directing training. None in this bracket had less than 10 years of professional performance experience.
Table 5: Education and Training of Top Earning Directors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resp.</th>
<th>Educ.</th>
<th>XQ Dir. Degree</th>
<th>Other XQ Dir. Training</th>
<th>Huaju Directing Training</th>
<th>Yrs XQ Perf.</th>
<th>#XQ Directing Projects</th>
<th>#HJ/film Directing Projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Assoc.</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11</td>
<td>Assoc.</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#21</td>
<td>Assoc.</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>No ans.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#31</td>
<td>Assoc.</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>Assoc.</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>Assoc.</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#32</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td>9mnth</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Advanced degrees alone were apparently not enough to move respondents to the highest earning bracket. Of the 3 respondents with Bachelor’s degrees, the highest degree held by any of the respondents, none had professional performance experience and none were included in this top-earning bracket. Similarly, of the remaining 4 respondents who had a degree in Xiqu directing but were not included in this top-earning bracket, Respondents #3 and #4 had no professional Xiqu performance experience, and Respondents #4 and #20 were company members on both productions for which they provided information (and so would be unlikely to earn more than their regular salary). Respondent #30 was the only respondent with a formal directing degree and substantial performance experience who was not included in the top-earning bracket. She was not the only female with these qualifications (Respondent #31,
who was included in the top-earning bracket, was also female). She was, however, included in the second highest earning bracket (4,000-5,000 yuan).

To the extent that higher pay can be accepted as evidence of a director's perceived value, these results support the conclusion that while performance experience with less formal education may be highly valued, formal education with less Xiqu performance experience is not—a shift from the period when Huaju directors with no Xiqu experience were commonly brought in to head new Xiqu works.

It is not uncommon for more than one director to work on a Xiqu project. Of the 15 productions presented at the 1998-99 National Jingju Festival, 9 production programs listed only 1 director, but 5 listed 2 directors, and 1 listed 4 directors. To gain a broader perspective on this practice, I asked respondents how many directors worked on their projects. In 29 of the 57 projects, there was only one director, 21 projects had two directors, 5 projects had 3 directors, and 2 projects had 4 directors.

I also asked respondents to assess the working relationship between the directors, offering the following options: 1) “rich creative collaboration” (丰富的创作合作, fengfu de chuangzao hezuo); 2) “although the process was difficult, the resulting performance was comparatively good” (虽然排练过程中难，但是演出结果较好, suiran zai paijian guochengzhong nan, danshi yanchu jieguo jiao hao); 3) “damaging conflict” (造成损害的矛盾斗争, zaocheng sunhai de maodun)
douzheng); and, 4) "although during the process there was no significant conflict, the resulting performance was not too successful" (虽然过程中没有大的矛盾但是演出结果不太成功, suiran guochengzhong meiyou da de maodun danshi yanchu jieguo bu tai chenggong). Of the 28 cases with multiple directors, 17 respondents described their working relationship with the other directors as a good collaboration, 8 had a difficult process with a good result, 2 experienced damaging conflict, and 1 had no problems during the process, but assessed the result as unsuccessful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6: Number of Directors and Working Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Directors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Directors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Directors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working relationship in cases with multiple directors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rich collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult process, successful result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damaging conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okay process, unsuccessful result</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I also asked the respondents whether there had been a technique director working on the project. As previously discussed, Huaju directors without sufficient Xiqu experience are forced to rely on technique directors and the result has been criticized as producing performances with superficial technique rather than the more organic incorporation achieved in the traditional play development process. In 39 of the 57 productions represented here, no technique director
was used, while 18 productions did use a technique director. Surprisingly, only 2 of the 14 directors involved in productions using technique directors (4 of the directors each had 2 productions in this group of 18) had no professional Xiqu performance experience or substantial Xiqu performance training. In other words, technique directors were being used by directors with substantial Xiqu training. This may well be explained by the common practice of using technique directors in martial plays to stage combat sequences regardless of how much Xiqu experience the director may have. Unfortunately, I failed to ask respondents to classify the projects as either martial or civil, so I am unable to provide further analysis on this point.

I also asked respondents to describe their process in working with the technique director, offering the following options: 1) “He [the technique director] designed performance techniques on his own, which I approved” (他自己设计手段，我赞成它, ta ziji sheji shouduan, wo zancheng ta); 2) “we simply collaborated, there was no strict limitation [of duties]” (我们就是合作，没有严格的限度, women jiu shi hezuo, meiyou yange de xiandu); and, 3) “other.” In 5 of the cases the technique director designed on his or her own, in 6 cases the director and technique director collaborated, 4 cases were described as “other” and 3 did not answer this question.
Table 7: Use of Technique Directors and Working Relationship

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No technique director used</td>
<td>39 of 57 = 68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technique director used</td>
<td>18 of 57 = 32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TD designed alone</td>
<td>5 of 18 = 28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TD collaborated with director</td>
<td>6 of 18 = 33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4 of 18 = 22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>3 of 18 = 17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was no notable correlation between success of the production or salaries paid to the directors and whether or not additional directors or technique directors were used.

3. Artistic and Commercial Success

I asked the respondents to assess each production as to its artistic and commercial success, giving the following options: 1) "very successful" (非常成功, feichang chenggong), "successful" (很成功, hen chenggong); 2) "not too successful" (不太成功, butai chenggong); and, 3) "unsuccessful" (没有成功, meiyou chenggong). I chose to compare those projects receiving at least one "very successful" assessment with projects receiving at least one "not too successful" or "unsuccessful" because, as shown below, respondents usually described their projects as "successful" in both categories. Clearly, this is not the case given the universally accepted fact that Xiqu is in a state of severe crisis. I therefore interpreted the "successful" assessment as a fairly non-committal response and chose to compare the more extreme categories when assessing factors common to success or failure on a project. The results were as follows:
Chart 11

Assessments of Success

Only 6 of the 57 total projects were described by their directors as very successful artistically, while only 9 were perceived as having been very successful commercially. And only 2 out of 57 productions were described as very successful on both counts. The situations of the directors (#5 and #28) on these 2 very successful productions had almost nothing in common. One director was 68 years old with no Xiqu training or professional performance experience but 3 years training as a Huaju director. The other director was 38 years old with 10 years professional Xiqu performance experience, a few months of Xiqu directing training, but no Huaju training. One project involved a modern play in a less highly stylized Xiqu form, the other was a newly-written historical play in a highly stylized form. In one case the director was invited, in the other he was a company member. In one production a second director was involved, in the other the respondent worked alone. The director with no performance
experience used a technique director, the other did not. There is also the possibility that the director with no Xiqu training or professional experience was simply mistaken about the production's level of artistic success.

There was some correlation between success and high salaries. Of the projects in which a director was paid more than regular salary, he or she earned more than 5,000 yuan in 4 out of 6 cases where the respondent assessed the project as "very successful." Conversely, only 1 director (#6) made over 5,000 in the 7 cases assessed as "not too successful" or "unsuccessful". A comparison of salaries in very successful and less successful productions follows:

**Chart 12**

Salaries compared with Success of Production

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salary Range</th>
<th>Very Successful Productions</th>
<th>Not Too Successful or Unsuccessful Productions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5,000+ yuan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,001-5,000 yuan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3,001-4,000 yuan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,001-3,000 yuan</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000-2,000 yuan</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1,000 yuan</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not exceeding regular pay</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Creative Authority

Finally, in order to explore respondents’ perceptions of their creative authority I asked them to assess their level of involvement in the following areas: script development, music, movement, stage design, and casting. In making this assessment, I asked them to choose between: 1) “director was playwright, composer, etc.” (导演是编剧，作曲, daoyan shi bianju, zuoqu); 2) “had very big input” (非常大的作用, feichang da de zuoyong); 3) “big input” (很大的作用, henda de zuoyong); 4) “not much input” (不太大的作用, butaida de zuoyong); 5) no input (没有作用, meiyou zuoyong). I also asked them to assess their working relationship with the playwright, composer, leading actors, and troupe administrators, giving them the same options to describe that relationship as used in the questions regarding their working relationships with co-directors. The results were as follows:
I heard from several sources that there was a growing perception that playwright-director conflict was one of the most pressing problems in contemporary Xiqu. These responses dispute that claim.

Respondents also had significant input in designing the movement and set.
And clearly, though no respondents themselves also served as composers, the vast majority of them had significant input in all three major areas related to music. In addition, most had positive working relationships with the composer involved.
As discussed in chapter 2, in the past traditional Xiqu performers viewed the process of rehearsal as unnecessary, even insulting. Clearly, at least from this sample, the practice of using substitutes for leading performers in the early stages of rehearsal has been abandoned.
I decided not to include the option of "director was lead actor" or "director was administrator" on the survey, reasoning that since there would likely be multiple actors and administrators, giving the "director was actor/administrator" option would have been confusing.

As the preceding graphs show, in very few cases did the responding director indicate that he or she had had little or no input on a particular aspect of the production. Similarly, a strong majority indicated that their working relationships with all the artists about whom they were questioned had been very positive. In only 2 cases involving lead actors, and 2 cases involving troupe administrators, did the responding directors indicate that the relationship had been so conflictive it damaged the production. In no case was the director-composer relationship this negative.

As discussed more fully in chapter 8, there is a perceived problem that actors are being trained only to imitate their teachers and as result have trouble when asked to create a new role. In order to explore this issue further, I asked respondents their level of agreement with the following statement: "While we were rehearsing this production, the leading actor(s) perceived the performance conventions of their own role type or liupai as though they were shackles, and as a result their performance did not achieve an ideally complete expression of the character," (我们在排这出戏的时候，主演[们]把他[们]本行当或流派的表演程式看成了是镣铐，因此他[们]的演出达不到理想完成角色的表现，women zai pai zhe chu xi de shihou, zhuyan[men] ba ta[men] ben hangdang huo liupai de biaoyan
In 7 cases, respondents did not answer this question, with one of these noting that stringent role type and liupai divisions did not apply to the newer, less stylized Xiqu form in which he was working.

Chart 25

As discussed in chapter 8 below, the problem of actors being too bound by traditional performance conventions was perceived by Xiqu Academy directing faculty as quite prevalent. It is thus somewhat surprising that in only 11 of 50 cases did respondents experience this problem. Not surprisingly, though, there was some correlation between this issue and production success. Using the same indices of successful (at least one “very successful”) and unsuccessful (at least one “not too successful” or “unsuccessful”) as in earlier analysis, the issue of
actors being too bound by convention was more prevalent in unsuccessful productions, as shown in the graph below:

Chart 26

None of the respondents agreed strongly with the statement that leading actors had been too bound by performance conventions to fully realize the character, while just under 1/3 strongly disagreed with it from both the successful and unsuccessful categories. But the graph shows a striking inverse relationship: almost the same percentage of respondents agreed with the statement in unsuccessful productions (47%) as disagreed with it in successful productions (50%).
5. Artistic Goals

The final project-specific question was designed to elicit information about the respondent's primary artistic goal for the production. I asked them to choose which one of the following had the biggest influence on them during their work on the project: 1) preserve Xiqu tradition (保存戏曲的传统, baocun xiqu de chuantong); 2) please the audience (使观众喜欢, shi guanzhong xihuan); 3) give full expression of leading performers' artistic skill (充分发挥主演的艺术才华, chongfen fahui zhuyan de yishu caihua); 4) pursue my own artistic vision (追求自己的艺术幻想, zhuiqiu ziji de yishu huanxiang). Although I asked respondents to choose the one that had the biggest influence on their work in that particular project, many refused to be bound by my limitation and selected various combinations of the four. Of the 29 respondents, 10 gave different answers for the two projects. The results are as follows.

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12 The word huanxiang (幻想) has a primary association with fantasy or hallucination rather than the concept of "vision" I was intending. My mistake was generously overlooked by the respondents, who seemed to understand my intent.
Perhaps it can be assumed that the fewer options the respondent chose, the more strongly he or she felt about those choices. Viewed in this light, it is interesting how few respondents working in this “traditional” form gave as their sole answer the goal of preserving tradition. Even when all the combination answers that included preserving tradition as one factor are added (E, G, and I), the total is only 18, or less than 32% of the entire pool—meaning that 68% apparently did not view preserving tradition as an important enough factor in their work to select it.

Similarly, exhibition of actor skill, a primary element in the traditional Xiqu aesthetic equation, also had fairly limited influence. In only one case did a respondent (#3) give this as his sole answer. Interestingly, this respondent had no professional performance experience and only 3 years of Xiqu performance training. He described this production as “not too successful” artistically and
"unsuccessful" commercially. When the combination responses including exhibition of actor skill are added (E and F), the total is 19, or 33% of the pool—meaning that 66% did not view this as an important enough factor in their work to select it.

That pleasing the audience was such a common goal (15 gave it as their sole answer, 38 or 66% included it) is not surprising given the increasing demands that troupes become financially self-sustaining. In my opinion, the fact that so many respondents included pursuing their own artistic vision (14 sole answers, 36 total or 63%) is strong evidence that Xiqu directors view innovation as a major element of their artistic responsibility.

On the other hand, there is also a selfishness about desiring to pursue one's own vision, especially in light of how strongly the performer occupied the creative center in traditional Xiqu. This selfishness can be seen to have had a negative impact on the productions represented by this sample. A comparison of directors' artistic goals on successful and unsuccessful projects with the total pool, is graphed below (using the same defining factors to determine successful [at least one "very successful" response] and unsuccessful [at least one "not too successful" or "unsuccessful" response] productions as in the above analyses, and adding the category average for the remaining productions):
The results for "D) Pursue own vision" are the most striking. Of the 57 productions in the total pool, in 14 or 24% of the cases the respondents gave this as their sole goal. Of the 15 unsuccessful productions, 6 or 40% of the cases the respondents gave this as their sole goal, while in none of the successful productions did the respondents list this as their sole goal. Perhaps this is some indication that the focus on a single individual's vision is not as productive a path to success as a process in which the Xiqu director is able to strike a balance between all of these important competing concerns.
Conclusion

It must be remembered that those who chose to respond to this survey may not be representative of the pool of regularly working Xiqu directors. The respondents were willing to take the time to complete an unsolicited, mailed survey from an American researcher soon after a period of intense anti-American propaganda had permeated the Chinese media. On the other hand, the fact that they answered in such circumstances suggests that they felt secure in their positions and had an active interest in the development of their craft. That they answered a questionnaire at all when such things are uncommon in China suggests that they are open to new approaches. Perhaps these factors combine to make them an even more representative sample of influential and innovative Xiqu directors than I might otherwise have accessed.
CHAPTER 8
TRAINING OF XIQU DIRECTORS AT THE NATIONAL XIQU ACADEMY IN BEIJING

In the previous chapters I have addressed historical forces shaping the role of the Xiqu director, analyzed the product of two directors’ work, and examined the working situation of approximately thirty more directors. I turn now to a discussion of how future Xiqu directors are being trained.

The National Xiqu Academy in Beijing (中国戏曲学院, Zhongguo Xiqu Xueyuan) is the only college level institution for Xiqu training and has the only permanent, formal training program for Xiqu directors in Mainland China. The Directing Department was established in 1978, the same year that the institution as a whole was expanded from a “school” (学校, xuexiao), serving students through high school level, into an “academy” (学院, xueyuan), offering college level training.¹ For its first ten years, the directing program was less formalized, lasting only 12 to 18 months and serving primarily older professional performers and directors in their 30s and 40s who sought to raise their artistic level as well as their status within the bureaucracy of their own performance troupes. They often had little formal schooling and received a certificate of study rather than a formal degree upon completion of the program (Zhu Wenxiang 1998). In 1988, a formal four-year program leading to a bachelor’s degree in Xiqu directing was established. Professional performers and directors still study at the academy for

¹ There is still a middle school for Xiqu training operating in conjunction with the Academy (中国戏曲学院附属中学, Zhongguo Xiqu Xueyuan Fuzhong Xuexiao).
a year or two in various certificate programs, but this is a fairly ad hoc process. In addition, there are graduate students in directing who pursue a two to three year course of study that is focused more on theory than practice, though there are also a few students planning to pursue careers as professional directors.

The graduate study of directing is highly individualized based on the student’s background and research interests. But most graduate students are required to complete research and write a thesis.

In this chapter, I focus primarily on the four year, undergraduate program since it is by far the most fully codified and practically oriented of the directing programs. The information contained in this chapter is based on research conducted at the Xiqu Academy during the 1998-99 academic year including: interviews with Directing Department teachers; my own observations of classes, rehearsals, and student performance projects; and rehearsals for a Jingju production of Othello involving Academy faculty and students. I will describe the program curriculum, discuss faculty directing and pedagogical philosophies (primarily in the context of addressing what they perceive as major obstacles to their work), and analyze the program’s effectiveness both based on my own observations and on information about the employment status of recent graduates.

The former Head of the Xiqu Academy and the directing teachers I interviewed uniformly gave the same formulation of the Xiqu director's place in the creative process. In other words, the following formulation may be
considered the Academy’s “party line” on this central issue. Unlike in the time of
Mei Lanfang when Xiqu was centered around the extraordinary skill of individual
performers, those teaching at the Xiqu Academy assert that the form is now (or is
in the process of becoming) performance centered, with the director leading the
artistic input of all the artists involved in a production. The distinction between a
performer centered system and a performance-centered one has mostly to do
with aspects of performance that are “outside” the play—performance choices
made primarily to elicit applause rather than portray the character. The formula
is succinctly expressed in Chinese as “director lead, performance centered” (在导
演指导下，以表演为中心, zai daoyan zhidao xia, yi biaoyan wei zhongxin).

In order to achieve this balance, the directing teachers consistently
stressed two major elements required for a successful Xiqu director. First, was
sufficient understanding and competency in the complex system of Xiqu
performance conventions. This was generally perceived as having both a
creative component—allowing the director to find appropriate conventional
expressions for the particular dramatic situation at hand—as well as a remedial
component—being sufficiently skilled in performance methods that the director
could model for a performer who had yet to meet the director’s requests for a
particular moment of conventional expression. The second element they saw
as required for an effective Xiqu director was a high level of analytical ability and
creative capacity enabling the director to move from the literary text to an
acceptably “Xiqu” performance text. This element likewise had both remedial
and creative components. The ideal Xiqu director would be one who could recognize faults in the script, many of which are written by scholars who are not sufficiently well versed in the specific performative demands of Xiqu. According to the former head of the academy and leading architect of the current four-year directing program, Zhu Wenxiang (朱文相), Xiqu scripts are often too long, too dense, and do not leave enough room to exploit the full expressive power of Xiqu’s performance language. A Xiqu director must be prepared to deal with this problem by understanding dramatic structures and performance conventions well enough to make appropriate cuts and additions, to reorder scenes, and to make changes in wording that is difficult to sing or speak according to Xiqu’s rules of vocal stylization. The creative component of this analytical element involves deep analysis of the script to produce a directorial concept (导演狗思, daoyan gousi), and thorough understanding of the characters and dramatic situation to make artistically exciting choices from existing performance conventions, as well as innovating new performance elements when appropriate (Zhu Wenxiang 1998).

The Curriculum

The four-year directing curriculum is designed to produce directors that have strong creative and analytical abilities firmly grounded in an understanding of Xiqu’s conventional performance language. In addition to general liberal education requirements including philosophy, English, computer literacy, and physical education, all undergraduate students at the Xiqu Academy also study
Xiqu history, Xiqu aesthetics (which consists of a study of major aesthetic principles by looking at major works), and a more general course on artistic and literary theory required by the Ministry of Culture of all college level arts students. The specialized course of study in the Directing Department is divided into eight sections:

1) History of Xiqu Directing (戏曲导演史, Xiqu Daoyan Shi).

2) Introduction to Xiqu Directing (戏曲导演概论, Xiqu Daoyan Gaijun)—a course introducing students to the Xiqu director’s general functions in the creative process.

3) Xiqu Directing Technique and Method (戏曲导演技法, Xiqu Daoyan Jifa)—this is a course ensuring that the students understand the connotative and artistic impact of basic elements of the Xiqu performance language sufficiently well to utilize them in their directing work.

4) Study of Plays for the Xiqu Director (戏曲导演剧目教学, Xiqu Daoyan Jumu Jiaoxue)—this is the practical study of the performance of specific plays to aid directors in their understanding of Xiqu conventions, with particular focus placed on the distinctions between performance techniques of different role types. Professor Zhu stated that ideally a director would learn how to perform at least one play representing each of the four major role types, but according to Professor He, practical considerations including students’ and
professors’ time constraints do not allow for study of more than two or three plays.

5) Script Analysis and Director’s Concept (剧本分析与导演构思, *Juben Fenxi yu Daoyan Gousi*)—this section focuses on detailed analysis of literary scripts in order to develop a directorial concept and revise as necessary to prepare the script for performance.

Parts six, seven, and eight make up a three-year progression of primarily practical courses all called Xiqu Director’s Creation (*Xiqu Daoyan Chuangzao*).

6) In their first year, directing students create scenes (*xiaopin*) drawing on “real life” and performed in Huaju style. Students are divided into groups, with each group producing one scene that is written, directed, and performed by the members of the group. In the first semester, students complete three scenes focusing on important elements of dramatic content. The first draws generally from daily life, the second focuses on an event, the third on character relationship and conflict. In the next semester, the focus is more on compositional elements of staging. In their fourth scene, each group of students chooses a piece of music on which to base their work.²

In the fifth project, each group chooses a painting or photograph and

²Although they may choose any piece of music they wish, students tend to choose Western-style pop or classical rather than Xiqu music (Liu Xiaojun 1999).
develops a scene that either begins or ends with that image as the stage picture. In their final first year project, each group is given a poem or an idiomatic saying on which to base their scene. The order of these projects is identical to that used at the Central Drama Academy for Huaju directing students, and was in fact based on that program (He Bingyao 1999).

7) In their second year, directing students advance to work in Xiqu performance. Again, they are broken into groups, writing, directing and performing the projects, and again, they complete six projects over the course of the year. In each round of scenes, students focus on a different element of Xiqu staging. Each round is preceded by lectures and discussion on that element. In all three projects in the first semester, students work on the basic skills required for civil plays. In the first scene, students focus on use of percussion patterns in civil plays (锣鼓小品, luogu xiaopin). In the second scene, students focus on civil play movement (身段小品, shenduan xiaopin). In the third scene, they explore the division between song and speech (唱念小品, chang nian xiaopin), and choices between various modes and metrical types for particular sung sections. There is a final exam scene for the first semester incorporating these three elements. In the second semester, students begin with work on a scene utilizing martial movement (武打小品, wuda xiaopin), followed by a scene
incorporating large **group movement** (群体小品, *gunti xiaopin*), and finally a scene utilizing both **singing and martial** elements (歌武小品, *gewu xiaopin*).

8) In the third year, students work on larger pieces, lasting 30-45 minutes (片段, *pianduan* or 折子戏, *zhezixi*) using preexisting scripts. The performers again are primarily drawn from among directing students. Ideally, students would participate in two pieces each semester, covering a variety of styles: comic and tragic, older and newer, martial and civil.

Finally, in the fourth year, students are considered ready for practical experience with professional Xiqu companies by serving as assistant directors. If this kind of internship cannot be arranged, students can organize their own production at the Academy using students from the performance department.

As stated above, the goal of the curriculum is to produce directors with strong analytical abilities and creative capacities that are firmly rooted in Xiqu's conventional performance language. Whether the program that is "on the books" actually serves these functions depends largely on the training and teaching philosophies of the people who implement it. A discussion of the backgrounds of the directing faculty follows.

**The Faculty**

This curriculum was designed primarily by Zhu Wenxiang, former head of the Xiqu Academy. Although he is a scholar with no practical experience in
either performance or direction, he began attending Xiqu performances as a young child since his father was a dedicated Xiqu fan and amateur performer. In addition, his sister married a performer in Ma Lianliang's company and his wife was a performer with a Beijing Jingju troupe, giving Professor Zhu close ties to the Xiqu world throughout his life. He studied Chinese literature in college, graduating in 1962 from Beijing Normal University (北京师范大学, Beijing Shifan Daxue) after which he taught for several years. He was in the first graduate class admitted to the Xiqu Research Institute (戏曲研究所, Xiqu Yanjiusuo) of the National Arts Research Academy (中国艺术研究院, Zhongguo Yishu Yanjiuyuan) after the Cultural Revolution, where he studied with A Jia (the famous Xiqu artist and director discussed in chapter 2). He obtained a master's degree with focus on Xiqu performance and directing in 1981. In 1987, after several years as a researcher, he was appointed Deputy Head of the Xiqu Academy. Two years later, the Head of the Academy died, but he continued in this title as Deputy Head for four more years despite the fact that a new Head had not been appointed. Finally, in 1991 he was officially promoted to Head of the Academy, serving in that capacity until 1996 when forced to curtail responsibilities due to failing health. He nonetheless continues teaching and researching (Zhu Wenxiang 1998).

All of the other directing teachers I interviewed were trained from youth as performers and performed professionally for at least two years. I interviewed three experienced professors and three younger teachers. Professor He
Bingyao (何秉尧) is the oldest and most experienced of the Directing Department faculty. He performed for over 4 years as a martial older sheng, and began teaching in the performance department in the early 1960s (when it was not yet a college level institution), while also studying philosophy for two years at Peking University (北京大学, Beijing Daxue). He has performed in the Jingju and Hebei Bangzi Xiqu forms, as well as in one Huaju production, and has directed over 10 productions. He was invited to direct in geographically and artistically very diverse forms, working in the northern forms of Jingju and Hebei Bangzi, as well as the southern forms of Leiju (雷剧, from Leizhou on Hainan Island) and Yueju (粵剧, from Guangdong [Canton] Province), but has no formal directing training. He also directed a Jingju version of the Kyogen play Tied to a Pole, which toured Japan in conjunction with a Kyogen company performing the original version in spring 1998.

Intelligent, articulate, and passionate about his art, he is excited by innovation and highly critical of the traditional imitate-the-teacher approach to training performers. He also believes that the biggest problem facing the Xiqu director today is the simple fact that neither actors nor troupe leaders nor the general public have sufficient understanding of the important role the director should play in Xiqu’s creative process. He believes the only way this can change is by amassing a series of strong productions evidencing the Xiqu director’s utility (He Bingyao 1999).
The assistant head of the Directing Department in 1999 was Pei Fulin (裴幅林). Professor Pei trained as a performer of hualian roles and graduated high school level from an arts school in Shanxi Province, after which he was assigned to the Shanxi Northern Bangzi Theatre Company (山西北路梆子剧団, Shanxi Beilu Bangzi Jutuan). Related to Hebei Bangzi, Northern Bangzi is another highly stylized Xiqu form. After several years as a performer, he decided to explore directing. In 1981, he studied one year of Xiqu directing in Shanxi. In the following years, he continued performing with the company, in addition to directing over 17 productions. In 1988, he tested into the newly established four-year directing program at the Xiqu Academy. After graduating, he stayed on to teach. Since graduating he has directed one regional Xiqu production in Guangdong Province. In addition, he and two other professors from the Xiqu Academy (one from the Performance Department, one from the Design Department) recently were sent by the Ministry of Culture to a Huaju Company in Tibet to help with their creative work. During three years there (1995-98), Professor Pei directed several plays and wrote several more, despite the fact that his only experience with Huaju was studying and then teaching the first year realistic scene work at the Xiqu Academy (Pei 1999).^3

^3 This is a bizarre example of continuing government control in the arts. Professor Pei is a Communist Party member; he seemed very proud of being chosen to go to Tibet, and after his return was made assistant head of the Directing Department. In other words, this assignment does not appear to have been any kind punishment. When I asked why Xiqu artists instead of Huaju artists had been sent to work at a Huaju company, his only answer was that the assignment had been arranged by the Ministry of Culture.
Professor Pei was also chosen to direct a Jingju version of *Othello* that was in rehearsal during the spring of 1999, performed by teachers and students of the Academy. All volunteered their time, on speculation that an English producing group would like the production and fund a tour of England. Unfortunately, the project was derailed, by a combination of dissatisfaction over artistic elements of the production and the May 1999 U.S. bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. Staging was completed and rehearsed, but the only “performance” was presented in rehearsal costumes without make up in a rehearsal hall for Academy and Ministry of Culture officials.

I observed several weeks of rehearsal, and found Professor Pei to be fairly proficient in the analytical and creative elements of Xiqu directing discussed above. He would often accompany notes and suggestions with his own demonstrations of movement or singing. His performance level was clearly very high and he had many suggestions of his own for movement sequences. He also had a strong understanding of the characters and dramatic situation, and of the feeling and quality he wanted in each scene. On the other hand, rehearsals were quite disorganized and a substantial amount of time was wasted. For example, scores of people (including the lead performers) sat around for almost two hours while group movement was designed for Othello’s soldiers.

There was no equivalent of a stage manager assisting him, but several of the leading actors as well as the musicians were usually involved in the moment-to-moment problem solving, which more often than not resulted in apparent
consensus that something "worked," rather than Pei asserting directorial authority. As the actor playing Othello summed up the process during one fairly heated exchange of ideas, "Listen to the director! Listen to the Director!" Then after more discussion and experimentation, he said laughing, "It doesn't matter. Whoever understands, listen to that person!" (12 April 1999). This group process involving shared creative authority is apparently becoming more widespread in contemporary Xiqu practice, resulting at least in part from reactions against the totalitarian pressures of the Cultural Revolution and overbearing Huaju directors who turned Xiqu's core expressive conventions into decorations for psychological acting (Wichmann-Walczak 2000, 104).

The third professor, Yan Jun (闫俊) entered the then Xiqu School in 1961 and graduated from the performance department in 1969. Professor Yan stressed that despite the fact that the school was not yet officially college level, the training students received during this period was very high, and that current depth among the faculty did not reach that level. Implicit in this comment is a recognition of the substantial break in continuity of transmission of the tradition that occurred as a result of the Cultural Revolution. Also, during this earlier period the program was very open. Foreign theatre companies, directors, and actors visited and taught at the school. In addition, artists from other performing arts came to teach about their creative and rehearsal processes. Yan described it as a very exciting and dynamic time. Another aspect of openness was the fact that students studied beyond their assigned role type. Although he specialized
in performing older civil sheng roles, he also studied martial plays. All of this
dynamism stopped in 1966 with the advent of the Cultural Revolution (Yan Jun
1999). Today, some students begin at a very young age to specialize even on a
particular liupai within a subcategory of a particular role type.

In 1973, he and a number of his classmates were sent to Inner Mongolia
to work in the province-level Jingju company. The company was very large,
over 300 performers, but he rose quickly because of the high level of training he
had received at the Xiqu School. During his nearly 15 years in Inner Mongolia,
the troupe produced many new plays, often incorporating elements of Mongolian
music and dance. To encourage his development as a potential director, the
company allowed him to study in the Chinese Department at a university in Inner
Mongolia.

When his wife tested into the graduate American studies program at
Peking University, Professor Yan arranged a position teaching Xiqu history at the
Xiqu school (附中, Fuzhong) connected to the Xiqu Academy. At the same
time, he studied Xiqu history and theory for two years in the graduate program at
the National Arts Research Academy. In 1989, he studied a year of Huaju
directing at the Central Drama Academy, focusing on scene work and rehearsal
techniques using many Western methods, particularly from Stanislavsky. After
this training, he was asked to teach a class in theory and creation for the
Performance Department at the Xiqu Academy.
This class was designed to combat the already perceived problem that students were learning only to imitate their teachers and encountered great difficulty when they started working in a performance company and were asked to develop new characters themselves. Yan taught the course for three years, incorporating study of Stanislavsky and Brecht with practical scene work, most of which was Huaju rather than Xiqu style. He described the class as having mixed results. A major problem was that there were over 30 students and only two professors. Also, he felt many of the students were not academically prepared for the theoretical aspects of the class.

In 1996, when his wife decided to pursue graduate studies in the United States, he followed her. The course on performer creativity was discontinued at this time as well, at least in part because there was no one to teach it. A year later, after a divorce, Professor Yan returned to Beijing and has been teaching in the Xiqu Academy's Directing Department ever since. He directed several professional productions in Inner Mongolia, but had only directed one amateur project in Beijing (Yan Jun 1999). He thus has substantial performance experience and a quite varied base of theoretical study, but has little in the way of practical directing experience as a basis for his teaching.

Turning now to the younger Directing Department teachers, Liu Xiaojun (刘小军) had the most directing experience, in addition to substantial professional performance experience. From 1983-1988 he studied Qinqiang (秦腔, a form of Sha'anxi Province Bangzi) at the Gansu Province Arts School (甘肃省艺术学校,
Gansu Sheng Yishu Xuexiao), specializing in both martial and civil young sheng roles. He went to Henan Province for one year to study Yuju (豫剧, also called Henan Bangzi) then returned to Gansu Province to perform with the Gansu Province Yuju Troupe (甘肃省豫剧团, Gansu Sheng Yuju Tuan). In 1991, he entered the Xiqu Academy two-year professional training program (专科班, Zhuankeban) studying directing. He had no directing experience at this point. Of the six professors and teachers I interviewed, he was the only one to say directly that he decided to pursue directing because he was not a good enough performer, saying that his voice was not satisfactory (Liu Xiaojun 1999).

After graduating, he worked at the Beijing Film Studio (北京电影制片厂, Beijing Dianying Zhipianchang) directing their tourist show. Film sets would be retained after shooting had been completed for tourists to visit. Liu developed a show with Huaju actors based on day-to-day work of low-level studio employees. He then tested into the Graduate Program in Directing at the Xiqu Academy and when I interviewed him in May 1994 he was researching Xiqu pedagogical methods. He was in his first semester teaching a course on Xiqu plays to students in the directing program, attempting a more in-depth and theoretical pedagogical approach than had previously been used. Working through the play, he would identify and discuss the connotative and artistic intent of musical structures, movement patterns, elements of costume and make-up design, etc.

Also, during his time as a graduate student, he had his first professional directing opportunity. The production was in the Nanyang Bangzi (南阳棒子)
form, a Xiqu form centered in Henan Province. Originally, he was to have
served as assistant director for one of his professors. Before rehearsals began,
however, the professor withdrew due to illness and Liu was allowed to complete
the project alone. Given that a common explanation for the use of Huaju
directors in Xiqu's early modern period was that older Xiqu performers would be
unwilling to take direction from emerging young Xiqu directors, I asked Liu
whether he encountered any such problems. He said there was initially some
doubt about his abilities expressed by troupe leaders and performers, but that
these concerns quickly disappeared once he started working.

The other two young teachers have no directing experience outside the
Xiqu Academy. Qiao Huibin (桥慧斌) is the only female teacher I interviewed.
Her primary duty is teaching plays to the directing students in the fourth “Study of
Plays” section of the directing curriculum discussed above. She was also
involved in the Othello project directed by Professor Pei, portraying Emilia and
often taking the lead in the design of movement for the female characters. She
graduated from the Jiangsu Province Xiqu School (江苏省戏曲学校, Jiangsu
Sheng Xiqu Xuexiao), where she studied with Mei Lanfang's youngest living
disciple, Madame Shen Xiaomei (沈小梅). After graduation, Qiao was assigned
to the Jiangsu Huaiyin Jingju Company (江苏省淮阴京剧团, Jiangsu Sheng
Huaiyin Jingju Tuan), specializing in the performance of the lively young huadan
role type. In 1986, she entered the Xiqu Academy's Performance Department in
their advanced studies (进修, jinxiu) program. In 1988, she entered the four-
year directing program, graduating in 1992. Then in 1996, she entered the new Performance Research Program (表演研究班, *Biaoyan Yanjiuban*), for professional performers, the goal of which is to produce performer-scholars. In the program, students study theoretical as well as performative elements of several plays culminating in a public performance at a major theatre, and in addition write a master's thesis. Her research was on character development in Xiqu (Qiao Huibin 1999).

The youngest of the three new teachers, Wang Yongqing (王永庆), graduated from Xiaoshan Xiqu School (萧山戏曲学校, *Xiaoshan Xiqu Xuexiao*) in Zhejiang Province, and then performed older male roles (mostly civil, but also some martial plays) professionally for eight years with the Xiaoshan Shaoju Troupe (萧山绍剧团, *Xiaoshan Shaoju Tuan*). He then entered the Xiqu Academy's four-year undergraduate directing program, graduating in 1998, where he continues to teach (Wang Yongqing 1999).

Of the six teachers interviewed, three trained in Jingju, three in regional forms. Of those who had directed forms other than their performance specialty (He, Pei, and Liu), all reported no difficulty resulting specifically from working in

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4 This term is to be distinguished from Xiqu “artists” (艺人, *yiren*), a term which in the past implied substantial artistic but weak intellectual/academic abilities (Zhu Wenxiang 1998; see also Wichmann 1990, 162).

5 Shaoju is a fairly old Xiqu form, with strong musical influences from Ming Dynasty Kunqu. Wang asserts that its conventions are basically the same as in Jingju. However, its primary audience has been in rural regions with less-educated audiences and in serving that audience has reportedly become “ rougher” in its performance characteristics (Wang Yongqing 1999; Li Hanfei 1991, 401).
variant Xiqu forms. Professor Pei asserted that directors did not think of themselves as limited to one form. Teacher Liu was purposefully addressing this issue in his experimental class by choosing a play from the Sichuan Province form Chuanju (川剧), rather than a Jingju play. Four of the six had Huaju experience. Professor Pei had written and directed Huaju plays in Tibet. Professor Yan and Teacher Liu had studied Huaju directing at the Central Drama Academy. Professor He had performed in one Huaju production. The others had exposure to Huaju director training through the first year scene work in the four-year Xiqu Academy directing program. Only Professors He and Pei had significant depth of experience directing professionally. All cared passionately about the future of Xiqu, but were more than a little discouraged by the current situation.

Two areas were causing significant concern among the teachers. The first had a very direct impact on their daily teaching and involved a decision, for reasons discussed below, to accept students into the directing program with little or no Xiqu training. Second, there was a universal perception that new performers are being trained only to imitate their teachers. This combined with the more limited liberal education they receive as a result of focusing on learning plays was said to have produced performers with "no creative ability" (没有创造能力, meiyou chuangzao nengli). I will address each of these areas below.

6 I am using the somewhat awkward English title "Teacher" for the younger teachers who are not officially faculty because it is common in Chinese, and I hope it will help the reader unfamiliar with Chinese family names to keep everyone straight.
Xiqu Directing Students With No Xiqu Background

Until fairly recently, almost all of the students admitted to the four-year directing program had trained as Xiqu performers. When Professor Pei entered the program in 1988, all of his classmates had studied Xiqu (Pei Fulin 1999). There were three or four students in Wang Yongqing's 1994 entering class, but these all had other performing arts backgrounds, having studied either dance or Huaju (Wang 1999). In both the entering classes of 1997 (with a total of 19 students) and 1998 (with a total of 22 students), approximately 50% of students had not previously studied Xiqu. There are several reasons leading to this circumstance. First, because there is a general perception that Xiqu is in a state of decline, fewer young people are interested in the form resulting in fewer applicants to the program (Qiao Huibin 1999). A second reason results from the fact that Xiqu training is so rigorous that study of other subjects suffers. As a result, many Xiqu-trained students cannot pass the national college entrance exam—a frequent point of failure is the English language requirement (Zhu Wenxiang 1998).

This perception that Xiqu students as a group have a lower education level and generally narrower thinking also served as the positive justification for allowing other students into the program. The general perception that students who have graduated from regular high schools have a higher education level is borne out by their higher entrance exam scores. That their thinking is more "open," several teachers noted, was evidenced in their more interesting ideas for
scene projects (Zhu Wenxiang 1998; Pei Fulin 1999; He Bingyao 1999). Other

teachers were extremely frustrated with the situation, feeling that the students
without a Xiqu foundation required intense help and were holding other students
back (Wang Yongqing 1999; Yan Jun 1999).

The third and perhaps most important reason for the experiment came
from economic pressures resulting from decreased governmental support of the
Academy. Administrators of the Academy decided to experiment and accept
students who were less suitable but who could afford to pay their own way.

Students with Xiqu training and high enough scores to be accepted into the
program generally receive government financial support of their studies. In
addition, a main draw of this program for students who had not previously studied
Xiqu is its highly desirable location in Beijing and the difficulty of obtaining a
Beijing residency permit through other means (Zhu Wenxiang).

In my observations of students at work, I would have to agree with the
more negative assessments of the experiment. I observed weeks of rehearsal
of second year students preparing their Xiqu scenes. It was very clear that
those with a Xiqu background were "carrying" the others in the development of
the pieces beyond the initial idea through use of Xiqu conventions. In addition,
those with Xiqu experience were often tapped to perform in several different

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7 Interestingly, the Chinese government has not been satisfied even with this "better" general
education system, and launched a major reform movement to shift away from rote teaching
methods toward methods that encourage more student creativity and individual thought (see e.g.,
the following articles in the English language China Daily: "Education Reform to Cultivate
Creativity" [23 May 2000]; "Universities to Undergo Radical Reform" [26 February 2000]; "Broad-
Based Education Elevates Minds" [29 June 2002].
scenes in the same round, meaning that a larger percentage of their time was spent focusing on "performing" than would have occurred if all of the directing students were Xiqu-competent.

I saw similar difficulties with the first year students as I observed several months in their course on Xiqu fundamentals. In one unit of study lasting over two weeks, a professor from the Performance Department taught 30 percussion patterns, and required that the students be able to speak the pattern, know its name, dramatic connotations, and examples of its use from the traditional repertoire. Watching the oral portion of the testing, I observed that those without Xiqu training did very poorly. Yet familiarity with the full range of percussion patterns is fundamental to the Xiqu rehearsal process. Actors, directors, and musicians during rehearsals of Othello were constantly communicating with each other by speaking these patterns. In the next unit of study, when the same performance professor taught the first year students a series of group movement patterns, a number of the students could barely focus on the task. They were giggling and making fun of each other when asked to stand or move in accordance with Xiqu conventions.

I asked Professor He whether he expected the students without Xiqu background to gain a high enough level of proficiency in Xiqu conventions by the time they graduated that they would be able to direct a play on their own, without the aid of a technique director. Professor He said this was very unclear, because the few graduates without Xiqu background in the past were not working
as directors. Instead, they were working as critics and researchers (He Bingyao 1999). Certainly, this would not be the first academic program in the history of the world to admit students who have little hope of finding job placement in their specific field. Professor Yan and Teacher Wang expressed the strong opinion that the experiment had been a failure, and the administration was reconsidering whether to continue with it. But as Professor Yan acknowledged, financial pressures rather than artistic concerns would likely prove the deciding factor (Yan 1999). Indeed, several times during rehearsals for *Othello* there was discussion of the fact that the Academy was facing a substantial budget shortfall.

Yan’s prediction was accurate; the practice of admitting a high percentage of students without Xiqu background continues. On the other hand, his unfavorable expectations of their employment potential may have been exaggerated. At least one of these students without Xiqu training from the entering class of 1998 found work in Xiqu related television production. As discussed below, opportunities for employment in Xiqu related television are quite good. As a result, the Academy has recently instituted a separate program with this focus.

**Actors Who Can Only Imitate**

The Directing Department professors and teachers I interviewed unanimously asserted that actors’ lack of creative strength is a key impediment to the revitalization of Xiqu. They all criticized the traditional teaching method in which performance students imitate their teachers in order to learn as many
plays as possible, saying that students learn only to imitate and are unable to work creatively to development new characters. Conversely, Performance Department Professor Chen Zengkun strongly asserted that the traditional method of studying whole plays must remain the foundation of the Performance Department curriculum since he believes it is the only way to learn the key element of “synthesis” in Xiqu. On the other hand, he recognizes the utility of including creative work for performance students since the burden of their other general education requirements prevents them from learning the wide range of repertoire that traditionally produced performers thoroughly fluent in the Xiqu performance language (Chen Zengkun 1998).

Directing Professor He agreed with the “holistic” teaching approach—rather than, for example, breaking down the plays and teaching various elements out of context—since what they want the students to imitate is the final, synthesized product. Nonetheless, he firmly believed that the focus on imitation stunts actors’ creative potential (He Bingyao 1999). Teacher Qiao observed that this problem goes beyond an inability to create new characters. She believed it also prevents young performers from succeeding in the traditional repertoire. She said she often heard the complaint from Xiqu fans that young performers appeared to be performing only the conventions, rather than expressing the character (Qiao Huibin 1999). Teachers Liu and Wang confirmed that there were many elements of plays they had performed for which they did not know the meaning—from song lyrics to movement patterns, there
were elements they studied and performed purely by rote (Liu Xiaojun 1999; Wang Yongqing 1999). Professor Yan asserted that when he was a young student, his teachers were not responsive to his questions on such issues. He remembered one instance with particular frustration where he had asked why a character in an extremely stressful situation would enter the stage quite slowly. His teacher refused to answer, saying only that he had not done the movement correctly and needed to repeat it (Yan Jun 1999).

Moreover, during my research, I have heard many stories about how imitation has led to nonsensical conventions. As discussed in chapter 3, a common complaint against this rote imitation approach is that teachers' failings as well as their strengths are transmitted to students, such as the unattractive lip movements adopted by students of a teacher with ill-fitting dentures. Performance Professor Chen told how a famous aria with sad lyrics that traditionally had been sung at a slow tempo is now commonly sung much more quickly, because a famous performer in recording the aria sped up the last section in order to fit the entire piece on the 78-speed record (Chen Zengkun 1999). Such anecdotes are probably more entertaining than accurate, but they are so commonly recounted that they represent at least a widespread perception that mindless imitation is a common problem.

As further evidence that young performers can indeed be too bound by conventional practice, I watched a very talented, thoughtful, intelligent young performer struggle through her first process of creating a new role. The actress
playing Desdemona in the *Othello* project directed by Professor Pei had extreme
difficulty satisfying the director's concept of the role. A major problem was the
fact that she specialized in the Cheng *liupai* of young *dan* roles. In contrast to
the style of Mei Lanfang, Cheng Yanqiu style vocal quality is much darker, with
more dramatic variations in volume. The effect is decidedly "older" and "sadder"
than Mei Lanfang style singing. Professor Pei kept saying this actress's
performance was too slow, too heavy, too "Cheng style." He instructed her to
think more about the youth and vibrancy of the character, to forget about
conventions and think about the character and situation. As she worked in
rehearsal, she often said she wanted to get it "right." She reported feeling very
uncomfortable working without a clearly perceived goal. A more experienced
performer commented that she did not understand that creating a character was
a gradual process that required time. In my opinion, her final performance was
very effective. But the process was excruciatingly painful, requiring substantial
input from the director and the other lead performers who were more
experienced in developing new roles, as well as great courage and perseverance
on her part as she worked through her frustration and lack of creative self-
confidence.

This issue is the main reason that directing students' first six scene
projects are all based on "daily life." As Professor Pei noted, many of the Xiqu-
trained students know how to work only based on conventions, working from role
type to character. Although he acknowledged that role types themselves were original creations drawing from life, today they come down to performers ready-made and unquestioned (Pei Fulin 1999). Professor He believed that Xiqu performers must learn to “liberate” (解放, jiefang) themselves from the constraints of role types. He thought it was no longer possible to speak about characters as a particular role type since traditional plays come from feudal society, while today’s society no longer had such distinct stratifications. He believed that Xiqu performers must learn to use life rather than conventions as a starting point for their creative work (He Bingyao 1999). But this argument is not new. Mei Lanfang also stressed this need to root performance conventions in a deep understanding of the character’s feelings (Mei 1961, 23). Teacher Qiao noted that all conventions were someone’s creation originally and that Xiqu artists needed to return to this spirit of creativity (Qiao Huibin 1999). The hope is that by rooting the directing students’ first year creative work in their own daily life experience, they will develop deeper creative self-confidence and learn how to adapt Xiqu conventions to new dramatic situations in artistically effective ways.

This issue is also at the basis of the decision in the second year scene projects to work fundamental skills for civil plays before martial plays. Professor He explained that since a main goal of Xiqu is to express the character, they wanted students to focus first on internal feelings and conflicts and explore ways

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6 Interestingly, they use the term “life scenes” (生活小品, shenghuo xiaopin) rather than “realistic style” or “Huaju style” scenes. But the first-year students were in fact working in a realistic style.
of expressing these through Xiqu conventions (He Bingyao 1999). Martial plays are considered more difficult for student directors because there is often less information coming from the literary script since characters are busy fighting rather than singing about their internal thoughts. In addition, martial plays are simply harder technically to stage, as evidenced by the fact that even accomplished Xiqu directors still use technique directors to aid them in staging complex martial scenes (Zhu Wenxiang 1998). Teacher Wang, who had been responsible for the lectures leading into the martial play scene work, was particularly disappointed with these projects, feeling they showed that even the students with a Xiqu background simply did not have a deep enough understanding of the skills to incorporate them effectively into their own scenes (Wang Yongqing 1999).

The directing curriculum seems structured to address the problem of actors who can't create by producing directors who can. On the other hand, as Professor Pei explained, a Xiqu director should not be another teacher for the actor to imitate. Instead, the director's job is to help guide, or drive the actor toward discovery of the character (Pei Fulin 1999). But there was no course offered on working with actors, on ways a director could help actors break out of their creative constraints. Instead, the directing teachers all blamed the system of performer training and proposed changing that system as the main solution to the problem.
Western directors often employ improvisation as a tool to help actors develop a deeper understanding of character and discover effective outward portrayals of that understanding. Only Professor He reported having used improvisational techniques in his own directing work. The play involved a love story set in ancient China, but he had the actors improvise a modern love scene to help them connect with the feelings of the characters. He said the actors really welcomed the experimentation because they so rarely got to do this kind of work. He said some of the improvisationally-developed scenes were not themselves very good, but everyone had been very pleased with the process. Professor He stressed that the best way for a director to guide an actor to bring together feeling and convention was to use real life as the foundation for helping the actor develop an understanding of the character. Then in the creative process of rehearsal, using daily life as a starting point, the performer will discover through practice the character’s internal state, ambition, and how to express this through posture and gesture (He Bingyao 1999). Despite his success with this experimental approach, Professor He was still a strong advocate of changing actor-training methods as the major solution to the problem.

Only two other directing teachers had directed professionally, Liu and Pei. Teacher Liu’s one professional project was a newly-written historical play in which the characters did not require exploration beyond the parameters of traditional role types. His difficulties with actors consisted primarily of their
technical inability to perform movement sequences he had developed for them. He solved these problems by modeling the movement himself and drilling the performers until their performance level was satisfactory (Liu Xiaojun 1999).

Professor Pei's professional Xiqu directing experience was all before entering the Xiqu Academy directing program. He had not yet studied this kind of improvisational work. And I saw no evidence of its use while watching Othello rehearsals. In dealing with the problems experienced by the actress playing Desdemona, Pei either demonstrated what he wanted or told her to think about the character; he offered no active experimentation outside of the script.

Another important factor in the actress's ultimate success with the role of Desdemona took place under the director's radar. In her frustration, she went for help to her mentor in the Performance Department, who also happened to be my teacher, Professor Chen Zengkun. He helped her analyze the character in conventional terms, telling her he thought Desdemona's torso and posture should have the quality of the refined qingyi subcategory of young dan role types, while her arms and legs should have the quality of the lively huadan. He thought the final scene, in this version of which Desdemona much more actively defends herself against Othello, should be played as the martial daomadan. In addition, he helped the actress pick apart the text, making minor changes to fit the language more comfortably to Jingju vocal stylization. But he agreed with the director that this actress had been particularly limited by her training of role type and liupai. He believed this was because a teacher had taken her to study
Professor Chen thought this was an enormous mistake, that young students should study a very straight, traditional version of their role type and not specialize in a particular style until much later in their training, after their basic skills are well established.

Unfortunately, as a result of competition between teachers to produce the best students, the practice continues. Professor Chen reported another level of frustration resulting from the fact that he perceived significant tension between the Directing and Performance Departments such that he would not feel comfortable attending rehearsals or offering more above-board assistance for *Othello* or any other Directing Department project (Chen Zengkun 1999). The director, Professor Pei, confirmed the lack of collaboration between the Performance and Directing Departments, explaining that the curriculum was not synchronized because of the different goals of the two departments. In his view, the Directing Department taught the fundamentals for creativity, while the Performance Department taught plays in a fairly standardized way (Pei Fulin 1999).

My observations of the student scene work further convince me that the curriculum as currently structured is not addressing this key area of director-performer collaboration. In both first and second year scene projects, great emphasis is placed on the idea development and scriptwriting phase. Of the six first year scene projects, I was only able to observe performances of the fifth category of scenes, those based on a painting or photograph. In his comments
after the performances, Professor Pei gave most of the feedback. He praised the students for generally achieving clear directorial concepts, then excused low performance levels (actors not knowing their lines, blocking unclear, etc), because of lack of rehearsal time. Most of his specific comments were about the dramatic structure (e.g., not enough conflict, trying to cover too big an event), some about performance levels (e.g., actors that could not be heard), some about staging (e.g., blocking unclear), almost nothing about character development.

Despite the stated goals of the project, to help students learn to draw from “life,” several students chose to include dream sequences, using chemical fog to indicate the shift of reality. Other students chose film-inspired staging techniques. There was a montage of several quick scenes with background music and mimed talking to indicate compression of time. There was a scene involving characters creating a sketch for a radio contest in which the section of the plot they were working on was “rewound,” “fast-forwarded,” and “played in slow motion.” Other students chose “foreign” photographs and in these scenes the primary focus became portraying foreignness. There was a scene set in Russia with lots of drinking, dancing, and cheek kissing. There was an American love triangle complete with excessive (by Chinese standards) physical contact. In both the “higher tech” and “foreign” scenes, the more basic elements of staging had not been sufficiently attended to. Blocking was unclear and characters were undeveloped.
By far the most effective scenes did in fact "draw on life," on situations with which the students were actually familiar (children in a Xiqu class), or could themselves go and investigate (workers from the countryside at a construction site in Beijing). In his post-performance comments, Professor Pei commended students for coming so far with minimal teacher assistance, saying he understood the performances to be about 90% students creation and only 10% teacher input. In addition, all of the teachers had stressed the main goal of this first year curriculum was to open and enhance the students' creative thinking. Judged from this standpoint, even the messiest, foggiest scenes achieved this main goal. But it is sad that students missed the opportunity for deeper exploration of director-performer rehearsal interaction in these projects.

Professors commenting on the second year Xiqu scenes observed a similar situation of too much time spent on organizing and writing, not enough time on directing in rehearsal. Responding to the performances, former Academy Head Professor Zhu Wenxiang did not think this was a major problem since he saw developing of the directorial concept, including designing of the music and movement, to be the most important aspect of the project. But it is clear that these projects offer great un-tapped potential to address the issue of director-actor collaboration. It seems a highly unfortunate circumstance that no effort is being made to train directing students in techniques for empowering and encouraging creativity in performers who have been trained in the traditional
manner, since in reality, the majority of performers the directors are likely to encounter will have been trained in this way.

**Success Measured By Employment**

To the extent that job placement indicates success of an academic program, the students graduating in the spring of 1998 did very well. Until quite recently, all students were assigned work placements by the government upon graduation. This practice has gradually tapered off as students found their own work in the growing private sector of the economy and as government control has also lessened. The members of the class graduating in 1998 were on their own to seek employment.

There were a total of eighteen students; only four had not previously studied Xiqu, but had studied dance or some other aspect of literature or art. Seven of the students found positions in Xiqu companies, all in more prestigious urban areas. Four went to the Beijing Jingju Company (北京京剧院, *Beijing Jingju Yuan*), one to the National Jingju Company (中国京剧院, *Zhongguo Jingju Yuan*), one to the Shenzhen Art Troupe (深圳艺术团, *Shenzhen Yishu Tuan*), and one to the Dalian Jingju Troupe (大连京剧团, *Dalian Jingju Tuan*) (Pei Fulin 1999).

Five students are continuing their academic study. Four stayed at the Xiqu Academy: two in the performance department, one in the directing department, and one working on curriculum and planning. Another student went to the National Arts Research Academy. One student found a position at the
Foreign Languages Institute teaching Jingju to visiting foreign students (Pei Fulin 1999). No information was available for four other students.

The two remaining students found positions in television, one at the Beijing Television Station (北京电视台, *Beijing Dianshi Tai*) and one at China Central Television (CCTV) (中央电视台, *Zhongyang Dianshi Tai*). As government funding and audiences for live Xiqu performances decline, television offers a comparatively brighter employment situation for Xiqu artists. In 1999, CCTV 3 was an arts and entertainment channel that devoted about two thirds of its time to Xiqu related programming including: broadcasts of stage performances; plays filmed on a soundstage for television; TV dramas about life in the Xiqu world; and interviews with Xiqu performers, directors, and researchers. Other programs included broadcasts of symphony performances and music and dance variety shows. When I visited China in May 2002, the Xiqu programming had been shifted to the slightly less prestigious CCTV 11, but was now devoted to fulltime Xiqu-related programming. It is clear from the broadcast of stage performances that there are people who deeply understand Xiqu structure and performance conventions involved in the editing process. My overall impression from viewing hundreds of hours of such broadcasts is that cuts from one shot to the next rarely interrupt a line of singing and often happen in rhythm with percussion patterns.

Both Professors Pei and He were very pleased with this placement outcome. Professor He in particular was surprised at how well this class did.
The Huaju directing graduates from the Central Drama Academy did not do nearly as well, with a substantial percentage still unemployed by the end of 1998 (He Bingyao 1999; Pei Fulin 1999).

**Conclusion**

One of the main distinguishing characteristics of Xiqu is that it engenders a deep level of synthesis between varied elements of performance. I came away from my investigation of the Xiqu Academy’s Directing Department encouraged by the passion and talent exhibited by individual teachers and students on individual projects but extremely disheartened by the institutionalized lack of synthesis of these individual efforts. The rift between the Directing and Performance Departments was particularly troubling for two reasons. First, it prevented experimentation toward the development of working methods for actor-director collaboration in the Xiqu creative process. Second, it evidenced a continued, even heightened internalization of a prevailing prejudice against Xiqu performers as being uncultured and uneducated. This pre-1949 prejudice was observed as making a strong comeback in the 1980s (Wichmann 1990, 162). It was deeply unsettling to find it continuing even at China’s only college level institution for Xiqu training.

This prejudice manifested in the repeated criticism by the Directing faculty of Performance Department teaching methods and the creative abilities of the performers they produce. It is furthered by the Directing Department’s continually problematic admissions policy that weighs the allegedly more open
thinking of students who have received a liberal education equally against the
skills and innate understanding of Xiqu performance conventions brought by
students who have undergone years of intensive training. And it is practiced in
the system of Directing Department scene projects (borrowed directly from the
Central Drama Academy’s Huaju directing program) that privileges
intellectualized script development over deep practical exploration of actor-
director collaboration.

On the other hand, one need only look at the current conservative state of
regional theatre in the United States to see the debilitating effects of only a few
decades of institutionalization on the passionate creative drive behind that
experiment in not-for-profit theatre. I should not have been surprised to find
similar forces—such as guarding personal turf or focusing on economic survival
of the institution—undermining creativity at the National Xiqu Academy. Yet
even in the midst of all these negative and competing pressures, I watched the
creation of the most moving and dynamic production of *Othello* I had ever seen.
Although those involved with the project were dissatisfied with the language of
script (it was difficult to speak and sing using Jingju conventions) and the music,
they were nonetheless understandably disappointed by its cancellation.
Nonetheless, the young performers playing Othello and Desdemona achieved an
impressive level of synthesis between their own finely honed performance skills
and these complex characters that in my view resulted in truly compelling
performances. In the following, concluding chapter I offer further discussion on
this key issue of the actor-director relationship in Xiqu and present an integrated picture of the challenges facing the contemporary Xiqu director.
CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSION

In this chapter I summarize and synthesize the information presented above, returning to the semiotic equation with which I opened this study. With the goal of providing an integrated picture of challenges facing contemporary Xiqu directors, I address: the SOURCE material with which they are working; adjustments in the CODE they are making to reach contemporary audiences; issues related to performers' skills and designers' craft that are the TRANSMITTERS of the source material; the process of encoding of the source material that occurs during rehearsal to create SIGNIFIERS; and finally, the spectators' process of receiving and decoding to create the SIGNIFIED that occurs during performance, and from which they concoct MEANINGS. In order to assess changes made through the 1990s, the discussion is framed in partial response to an article by Elizabeth Wichmann-Walczak, which sets out a detailed picture of Jingju at the end of the 1980s (Wichmann 1990).

Source Material

Wichmann-Walczak noted a disturbing paucity of new plays in development at the end of the 1980s (Wichmann 1990, 150-151). At the end of the 1990s, which included two successful national Jingju festivals, the situation seems to have improved somewhat. The Second National Jingju Festival held in Beijing in December 1998 to January 1999 (第二局中国京剧艺术节, Di'erju Zhongguo Jingju Yishu Jie) offers a snapshot of the kinds of source material with
which Xiqu directors were working at the turn of the 21st century. Following traditional play development strategies, three of the fourteen new productions were very much star vehicles built around the extraordinary talents of a single leading performer. One play was designed for Pei Yanling, the original Jason in the Medea production discussed in chapter 5, and fully exploited her extraordinary martial, acting, and singing skills in this re-imagining of the traditional repertoire's gate keeper of hell, Zhong Kui (钟馗). The second of these plays and winner of another gold prize along with Camel Xiangzi, was Wind and Rain at Tong Ren Tang (风雨同仁堂, Fengyu Tong Ren Tang). The production included a major role type innovation by highlighting a much more youthful "old" dan character than appears in the traditional repertoire. The character was in her fifties and was portrayed as still quite lovely, rather than the stooped, white-haired old dan of traditional plays. Yet the role still gave full attention to the impressive natural-voice agility of its leading actress. The third production in this grouping, The Black Gauze Cap (乌纱记, Wu Sha Ji) highlighted the comic and singing skills of famous chou performer Wang Qingyuan (汪庆元).

Only one of the fourteen new productions (7%) can be said to have been director-instigated, slightly less than the 12% of playwright-director projects represented in the survey discussed in chapter 7. Cheng Changgeng (程长庚, a man's name) was written and directed by Ma Ke (马科), who also directed Cao Cao and Yang Xiu, named best Jingju play of the past decade at the First National
Jingju Festival. The title character was an important and innovative Xiqu artist in the 1800s from Anhui province and the show was produced by the Anhui Province Jingju Troupe (安徽省京剧团, Anhui Sheng Jingju Tuan). It included strong performances and was cleanly directed but contained no exceptional innovations.

Of the remaining thirteen new productions, two were re-workings of pre-existing scripts: one adapted a play from the traditional repertoire, People's Appearance at Famen (法门众生相, Famen Zhong Shengxiang); the other was based on Tian Han's mythological script Tale of the Golden Fish (金鳞记, Jin Lin Ji). In addition, there was also a faithful restaging of Tian Han's 1958 Jingju adaptation of the Yuan Dynasty play, The Western Chamber (西厢记, Xi Xiang Ji). This production was co-directed by a famous older performer (Ye Shaolan, 叶少兰), with the goal of giving intensive training to newer performers. Performance levels in the production were very high. The elaborate realistic-style settings were lovely; however, they required an inordinate amount of time to change, especially given that the play alternated between the same two settings several times.

There were a total of eight newly-written historical plays, including the three star vehicles and one director-instigated productions already mentioned. They reflected a wide variety of source material, ranging from a play about the love and death of the Liao Dynasty (907-1125) Emperor Xiao Guanyin (萧观音, title of the play) to the fanciful antics of The Big-Footed Empress (大脚皇后,
These plays were all quite strong and stylistically unified but contained no striking innovations.

Four plays were in the modern category, including *Camel Xiangzi*, discussed in chapter 6, and *Wind and Rain at Tong Ren Tang*, described above. The other two were the only plays in the festival set in contemporary China and were not particularly effective. Continuing a trend I witnessed at a 1996 festival of modern Xiqu plays, both productions were unfortunately worthy of the pejorative label "Huaju with song added." One involved conflict developing when a woman from the city comes to a mountain village (*Rough Man and Beautiful Sister*, *Cucu Han Jingjing Mei*). The other play, from the politically troubled Uygur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang Province, was the most overtly political of the entries. It portrayed the heroic actions of Communist party leaders assisting the local Uygur ethnic minority residents through an earthquake. The play incorporated Uygur folk dance and music but was otherwise unremarkable. *Camel Xiangzi* represented a breakthrough in terms of developing exciting movement for modern plays, but the modern era represented was the 1920s. The problem of representing more contemporary life on the Xiqu stage has yet to be successfully resolved.

Finally, there were several programs of traditional plays presented at the festival, including three full-length plays and two programs of excerpted scenes. According to the printed programs for these performances, none of them used directors. The range and interest of plays presented at the festival was
impressive. It is well worth noting, however, that the National Jingju Company, the largest Xiqu company in China, did not have a new play ready for the festival. Instead, the company presented only one evening of excerpted scenes from traditional plays.

Since directorial interpretation is also an element of the source material, it should be noted that in all of the productions of new plays, the directorial concept was of a “tell the story” rather than “confront the story” kind. The festival represented a much-improved environment for the development of new plays than witnessed by Wichmann-Walczak at the end of the 1980s. On the other hand, one critic in assessing Jingju’s status after the festival noted that prior to 1949, Jingju was producing an average of 1,350 new plays every 50 years. He observed sadly that in the most recent 50 years, nowhere near that many had been developed (Sun Huanying 1999, 14). Nor were any of the productions at the festival clearly geared toward attracting new, particularly younger audiences.

**Code**

As discussed throughout this study, a major responsibility of the Xiqu director is to manage the code through which the source material is conveyed. For a production to be successful, the contemporary Xiqu director must engage two codes—or rather, a code and a directorial translation of that code. The basic code is the extensive complex of traditional Xiqu conventions monitored by Xiqu experts. Its translation is achieved through the director’s effort to ensure that elements of the conventional code are placed within a context that allows even
the uninitiated spectator to comprehend them. This translation is most readily accomplished by assuring that particular performance techniques and conventions are clearly tied to, or motivated by, the character and the plot. All of the new productions entered in the festival pleased the experts at least enough to be invited to participate. In my opinion, they also succeeded fairly well at this translation of the code for the uninitiated. The production of *Camel Xiangzi* was particularly effective at this process by, for example, creating its own referent for the mimed rickshaw ride by including a previous ride with a real rickshaw. The productions of *Medea*, analyzed in chapter 5, and *Othello*, discussed in chapter 8 were also quite successful in this translation process. Both productions used performance conventions that made sense as expressions of the characters and their situations independent of spectator familiarity with the tradition that produced the convention. Thus, while the problem of getting contemporary audiences to like Xiqu has not been completely resolved, Xiqu directors have made significant advances in ensuring that if you actually got such a spectator into the theatre, he or she would probably at least understand what was happening onstage.

**Transmitters**

1. Performers' Voices and Bodies

Performers' voices and bodies remain the primary transmitters of the source material in contemporary Xiqu. The level of performances at the Jingju festival was overall very high. Emphasis was definitely on well-established performers in their 40s and 50s, such as Chen Lincang and Huang Xiaoci of
Camel Xiangzi. In contrast, to encourage the development of young talent, an issue also raised by several of the survey respondents in chapter 7, organizers of the First National Jingju Festival had encouraged participating companies to spotlight their younger performers. Nonetheless, the extensive media coverage of the Second National Jingju Festival and its participants contributed to a very positive atmosphere for the leading performers and represented a clear shift from Wichmann-Walczak’s observation that at the end of the 1980s that the “self-confidence and hopefulness of older, established performers [was] at a low ebb” (Wichmann 1990, 171).

Yet the general perception is that performer skills are on the decline. A strong argument supporting this conclusion is the fact that there have been no new liupai established in the modern era. In other words, no performer since 1949 has developed a new performance style that is guided by a clearly distinct aesthetic principle (Sun Huanying, 14-15). With the homogenizing effect of centralized training academies established under the Communist government, this result is not surprising, but it is nonetheless disturbing for the future vitality of Jingju. As indicated by several of the survey respondents in chapter 7, regional Xiqu forms have more leeway to develop since their role type structures are less rigid and they are not weighed down by the responsibility of serving as the nationally representative performing art. Admittedly, the process of creating a distinct and recognized liupai is much more difficult given the current, and I believe positive, trend to develop plays in which the characters transcend
traditional role types. Nonetheless, directors should be involved in facilitating the development of new performance styles—whether or not they reach the status of a recognized new liupai—through the encouragement and highlighting of unique abilities of individual performers.

2. Music

All of the productions at the Jingju festival, including Camel Xiangzi, as well as Medea and Othello, integrated musical elements beyond the traditional Jingju soundscape. Most used recorded or synthesized music particularly for transitional passages. Many also incorporated an offstage helping chorus and other elements from different regional Xiqu forms, in addition to drawing on elements from Chinese folk and classical music. As discussed in chapter 6, I found these elements to be used particularly effectively in Camel Xiangzi. Incorporating varied musical structures is the strategy by which Xiqu artists initially created Jingju. It has continued to prove an extremely fruitful area of innovation. Xiqu directors, as a result, must also familiarize themselves with these new options of musical expression.

3. Design and Lighting

All of the new productions at the Jingju festival incorporated elaborate lighting schemes and full sets designed specifically for that production. They were of varied quality, with Cheng Changgeng, directed by award-winning director Ma Ke, surprisingly being one of the least effective. The design used interesting projected images as a backdrop, but the steps and platforms with which the actors
interacted were very amateurishly constructed, covered with ill-fitted fabric that sagged and wrinkled. The set for Camel Xiangzi, with its expressionistic slant, was by far the most effective at the festival. But regardless of the artistic merit of the set designs exhibited at the festival and unlike the sound stage for the film version of Tian Han's White Snake discussed in chapter 4, none of them obstructed the free movement of the performers. Even with the most elaborate of the sets—which was for The Golden Fish and used colorful ground rows scattered over the stage representing giant coral and a giant lobster big enough for two performers to ride on its back—there was ample open stage floor to allow an exciting display of acrobatic skills. Thus, this practical problem of balancing elaborate set designs with performer expression seems to have been resolved.

Encoding

Now that extensive rehearsal is the norm rather than the exception in Xiqu, the question becomes how can the director best structure this time to produce the most effective results. Five directorial approaches are suggested by the productions and interviews analyzed in the previous chapters. One is the autocratic control exhibited by Luo Jinlin during rehearsals for Medea in which he maintained final say over every decision but was not himself able to develop the raw material that would eventually be included. A second is the autocratic control envisioned by the Xiqu Academy directing faculty in which the director steps in to provide the raw material. A third would focus more attention on encouraging actor creative self-confidence. A fourth approach, adopted by the
director of *Camel Xiangzi*, involves the director’s rigid control of actor attention while leaving room for actors to innovate on their own. The fifth approach is the creative consensus-building I observed during rehearsals for *Othello* and also witnessed by Wichmann-Walczak in Shanghai (2000, 105-06).

Regarding the first directorial approach, autocratic director without Xiqu skills, Wichmann-Walczak noted the distressing circumstance at the end of the 1980s of experienced Jingju performers feeling too intimidated to make suggestions during rehearsals led by a Huaju director. They felt sure their suggestions were not valid since they were “uncultured and uneducated” while the director was a college graduate. Moreover, they understood that the reason he was there was to teach them how to create character since Huaju had a system for that while Jingju did not (Wichmann 1990, 165). By the end of the 1990s, thankfully it appears that this idea that Huaju’s “system” can be directly imported to Jingju and employed to produce effective performances has been rejected.

Chen Lincang’s process of creating the rickshaw dance in *Camel Xiangzi*—through study of Lao She’s descriptions combined with his own physical explorations—is an excellent example of A Jia’s Xiqu-specific idea of *tiyan* (体验, “learn from experience”), discussed in chapter 2, for creation of characters in Xiqu involving complete integration of psychological understanding and stylized physical expression.

On the other hand, the emphasis on the necessity of a “system” for creating characters in Xiqu, or for directing new Xiqu plays among the directing
faculty at the Xiqu Academy seem misplaced holdovers from the days of complete centralized control of the arts. As one critic noted, during Jingju's (privatized) golden era, if companies did not produce new and exciting works then their members did not eat (Sun Huanying 1999, 15). By the mid-1960s, however, 90% of theatre artists were in state owned companies with as many as 800 people on the payroll of a single company (Wichmann 1990, 167). Ineffective and inconsistent efforts have been made to decrease the size of Xiqu companies. Nonetheless, many are still grossly overstuffed, with members still receiving paychecks regardless of whether they perform or have an audience (Sun Huanying 1999, 15). And unfortunately, similar forces are at work at the Xiqu Academy. A system of character creation or Xiqu directing that everyone follows and that works for everyone is the antithesis of the forces of competition that are expected to bring arts organizations to financial self-sustainability.

Feeding the second Xiqu directing approach—an autocratic director with Xiqu skills—is the persistence of the prejudice against Xiqu performers as “uncultured and uneducated.” One of the survey respondents in chapter 7 asserted that Xiqu performers' cultural and educational level was even lower than the general population. And the prejudice was rampant among the directing faculty at the Xiqu Academy, who were particularly concerned that training performers solely through teacher imitation stunted their creative abilities. These concerns have resulted in an emphasis on the remedial function of the Xiqu director—a belief that she or he needs to be able to step in to provide technique
since the actor is presumed to be deficient in this area. I strongly believe that this emphasis is misguided. With the continuous drilling by everyone around them that they are uncultured and uneducated, it is no wonder that young Xiqu actors do not feel confident in their ability to create new material. In my own admittedly limited directing experience, I know that the quickest way to undercut a timid actor's self-confidence is to step in and show him or her the "right" way to do it. A much more productive approach is to focus on building the actors' confidence, empowering them with a sense of ownership in the creative process so that they can find an effective solution for themselves—or, at least feel like an equal participant in working with the director or technique directors to find the best way to portray a particular moment. But when the solution is imposed from the outside, and operates as yet another reiteration that the performer is uncultured and uneducated, it is no wonder that the results would be less than satisfactory.

A Jia understood this and represents the third approach to Xiqu directing, an approach that includes instilling performers with artistic bravery. The young actress playing the leading role of the revolutionary grandmother in *The Red Lantern* (*Hong Deng Ji*) recalled how nervous she was heading into rehearsals, worried about her ability to create the character and about working with so many famous performers. She recalled:

A Jia told me, "You shouldn't be afraid, your natural talent is very good. Your vocal quality also has no problems. If you love to sing in a particular way, you just sing that way. There is no need for misgivings. Trying to perform exactly as was done [traditionally] would be the wrong way to go. In front of the audience, you can overcome your
shortcomings and do your best to give free reign to your strengths.” So A Jia helped me open my thinking. Under his encouragement and direction, my courage expanded. As a result, I was able to complete the rehearsal process quite satisfactorily. And while creating the character of Li Nainai, also develop some things that were new. (Gao Yuqian 1992, 291)

This sounds too simple, that a little encouragement would be enough to break through this kind of anxiety-based creative block. But in 1995 I watched an acting teacher from the Central Drama Academy lead Xiqu Academy students through a series of improvisational exercises involving abstract movement. The students were eager and open, not at all hesitant, and able to put their extraordinary skills to new uses. It was an absolutely thrilling thing to see. And while the actress playing Desdemona in the production of Othello, discussed in chapter 8, had a very difficult time finding an acceptable characterization, the other young leading performers, particularly the actor playing Othello, had no such problems.

Moreover, respondents to the survey in chapter 7 did not find actor creativity to be a problem, with 39 of 50 responses (78%) on the question disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that the performers had been too bound by role type to find a full expression of the character. And of the 57 responses to the request to describe their working relationship with the leading actors, 36 (63%) described it as a rich collaboration, with an additional 19 (33%) saying that although the process had been difficult, the results were positive. Only 2 (3%) respondents said that conflict with the actors reached the level of damaging the production. These results indicate that at least for the responding directors (who
as a group, it must be noted, had significantly more professional performing and
directing experience than the Xiqu Academy directing faculty), their work with
actors seems to be going quite well. Xiqu Academy directing faculty place an
unfortunate focus on deficiencies produced by the kind of training actors receive
in the Performance Department. Since they are not making a corresponding
attempt to develop means for dealing with problems in actor-director collaboration,
they manifest a passive attitude, similar to that identified by Wichmann-Walczak
at the end of the 1980s, of waiting for “the top” to resolve conflicts concerning
practices, expectations, and aims (Wichmann 1990, 166). Unfortunately, this
1980s practice continues.

The fourth and fifth directorial approaches are an extension of the third
approach, since they both require actors who are creatively self-confident. In the
fourth approach, Camel Xiangzi director imposed what can be described as rigid,
minimal structure. All actors were present at rehearsals, studying on their own if
not actively involved in working on a scene. But within that rigid structure, actors
were given extreme freedom to develop their own physical expressions, though
as discussed in chapter 6 they had less freedom regarding vocal expression.

The fifth approach was the kind of creative free-for-all I saw during
rehearsals for Othello and that Wichmann-Walczak saw in Shanghai. Director,
composer, actor (and in Shanghai, experts and administrators as well) all have
equal input. This sounds perhaps like a recipe for chaos, and the rehearsals I
witnessed were often quite chaotic. I found, however, that this chaos eventually
produced some very effective results, as did Wichmann-Walczak in her observations of Shanghai Jingju Company rehearsals. Since everyone involved in this chaotic collaboration has a deep understanding of the form, the chaos at least has a common, solid foundation on which to build.

The first two approaches, which discount the creative authority of the performer, seem less worthy of continuation. Building on the third approach that enhances the creative courage of performers, the fourth and fifth approaches have already proved successful. One can imagine additional approaches that adjust the balance of creative authority to fit the needs of a particular project and the individual artists involved. The search for a universally effective “system” of Xiqu directing seems a waste of valuable creative energies.

On a much brighter note, one of the main concerns documented by Wichmann-Walczak at the end of the 1980s was that artists perceived a disturbing lack of stylistic consistency in the shows produced by the patching together of elements from various theatre forms that constituted most of the experimentation occurring in new productions at that time (Wichmann 1990, 160). At the end of the 1990s, with productions as stylistically strong and unified as Camel Xiangzi, as well as most of the other participants in the Jingju festival, this problem seems well on its way to resolution.

Reception

Once the source material has been encoded and transmitted, it must be received and decoded by the spectators. When Xiqu productions tour abroad,
they must compete with Western “postmodern” ideas of innovation. In the current situation where Xiqu directors are engaged exclusively in “tell the story” rather than “confront the story” kind of interpretation, even a production as innovative as *Camel Xiangzi* would likely be received as “traditional” on the international theatre festival circuit. And similar pressures are occurring within China as well. Arjun Appadurai notes that with the infiltration of images, ideas and opportunities that “come from elsewhere,” more and more people throughout the world “see their lives through the prism of possible lives offered by mass media in all their forms.” In such a situation Appadurai asserts, “standard cultural reproduction (like standard English) is now an endangered activity that succeeds only by conscious design and political will, where it succeeds at all” (1996, 53-54). Appadurai is clearly referring to popular culture, but the argument is equally apt in the context of the more elite, constructed cultural reproduction of Xiqu. This globalizing prism distorts the previously engaging event of Jingju actors on a stage in China singing Chinese lyrics using Jingju melodies for initiated spectators. Today, even Jingju’s astounding acrobatics cannot compete with Keanu Reeves’s physics-defying contortions in the Hollywood blockbuster, *The Matrix Reloaded*.

On the other hand, trying to contain the enormous inequities that exist on this planet within the confines of one tiny human being’s imagination can be exhausting. It may be this exhaustion that is helping to maintain Xiqu’s vitality in China’s countryside. The Jixian Pingju Company (*蓟县评剧团, Jixian Pingju Tuan*) tours the rural areas around the city of Tianjin for seven months each year,
averaging 380 shows per year, all of them admission free. In 1999, the 42-member troupe was receiving about 2,000 yuan per performance from the government and receiving housing and food from residents of the villages where they performed. A reporter attending one of these rural performances noted the large audience, and interviewed a spectator who was there for her fourth night in a row. The woman said she enjoyed the performances because she understood most of the lyrics, while she was “tired of watching TV” (Liu Jun 1998, 9). Such events are evidence that the forces of globalization can be undercut when artists choose to align themselves closely with the concerns of small communities and to create art that serves those communities in ways that larger media outlets cannot.

Because it is trying to reach the national community, Jingju’s task is much more daunting. Even with the most innovative and effective work of Xiqu directors, it may indeed go the way of Kunqu to become a stunted museum art form. Or it may lose its national prominence and return to serving a geographically smaller community. But with China’s rising international prominence this seems unlikely. China’s new president Hu Jintao is demanding a new governmental openness surrounding the SARS epidemic. China has entered the World Trade Organization and Beijing will host the 2008 Olympics. Xiqu and particularly Jingju, as well as the directors and other artists working in these traditional forms, are likely to experience renewed energy from the rise in national pride that will surely accompany China’s full emergence into the world community.
APPENDIX A

Dear Director! I am a doctoral student at University of Hawaii in the United States. Dr. Elizabeth Wichmann-Walczak is my advisor. Nine months ago I arrived in Beijing for research about Xiqu directors. The goal of this questionnaire is objectively to evaluate the situation of today's Xiqu director. It is very important to my doctoral dissertation. I also plan to give the results of this survey to the Chinese Association of Xiqu Directors. Although the questionnaire appears quite long, it should not take more than 15 minutes to complete. You may respond anonymously. Please return the completed questionnaire to me by November 1. Thank you for your help! Megan Evans

1. Your date of birth? (year) Gender: F M
Regarding your current employment, which of the following is the best description:
_____ Xiqu troupe specialized director
_____ Xiqu troupe actor, also director
_____ Xiqu troupe administrator, also director
_____ Freelance director
_____ Xiqu teacher, also director
_____ Huaju, film, or television director
_____ Other please explain:

2. Have you had formal Xiqu performance training? No Yes>> How many years did you train?
Where did you train? Xiqu school Xiqu Academy Disciple
Role type?
Xiqu form? Older Xiqu form such as Kunqu, Jingju, Chuanju
Newer Xiqu form such as Huangmei, Quju

3. Did you perform Xiqu professionally? No Yes>> How many years?
Role type?
Xiqu form? Older Xiqu form such as Kunqu, Jingju, Chuanju
Newer Xiqu form such as Huangmei, Quju

4. What is the highest education level you achieved?
Xiqu school General middle school General High school
Associate's Bachelor's Master's PhD

5. Do you have a degree in Xiqu directing? No Yes>
Highest directing degree? Associate's Bachelor's PhD

6. Excluding the above directing degree, do you have any other formal training in Xiqu directing? No Yes>> Altogether, how long did you study?
90 days or less 91-180 days 181-365 days 1 yr or more
7. Do you have formal Huaju directing training?  
   _____No  _____Yes>> How long did you study?  
   ____________________________
Do you have formal film or television directing training?  
   _____No  _____Yes>> How long did you study?  
   ____________________________

8. How many Xiqu works have you directed?  
   ____________________________
How many Huaju, Opera (歌剧, geju), other live performance have you directed?  
   ____________________________
How many works for film or television have you directed?  
   ____________________________

9. What is your opinion on the following statement?: “In the most successful Xiqu performances, it is indispensable for the actors to enter deeply the emotional experience of the character portrayed.”
   _____Strongly disagree  _____Disagree  _____Agree  _____Strongly agree

10. Regarding the artistic center of Xiqu today, in your opinion which of the following is the best description:
   _____Actor is center
   _____Playwright is center
   _____Director is center
   _____Composer is center
   _____Under the leadership of the director, the performance is center
   _____Other>>Please explain: _______________________________________

11. Regarding your working time in the last 2 years, please estimate the percentage of time you have spent on each of the following activities:
   _____% working as a Xiqu director
   _____% working as a Xiqu actor
   _____% working as a Xiqu teacher
   _____% working as a director for Huaju, Opera, other live performance
   _____% working as a film, or television director
   _____% other
   100% your total working time

12. Regarding your income in the last 2 years, please estimate the percentage of income you have received from each of the following activities:
   _____% working as a Xiqu director
   _____% working as a Xiqu actor
   _____% working as a Xiqu teacher
   _____% working as a director for Huaju, Opera, other live performance
   _____% working as a film, or television director
   _____% other
   100% your total salary
13. In your opinion, what is the most difficult problem facing the Xiqu director today? What method can be used to resolve this problem and help Xiqu develop? 

Consider your two most recent Xiqu directing projects. Below there are two identical sets of questions. Please respond to one set according to each project.

Please answer the following questions According to your most recent Xiqu directing project

14. Year the production was rehearsed? _____ What was your relationship with the theatre troupe? _____ Company member _____ Specially invited

Xiqu form? _____ Older form _____ Newer form

Type of play? _____ Traditional _____ Newly-written historical _____ Modern

Plot type? _____ Comic _____ Tragic _____ Tragicomic _____ True story

_____ Mythological

Length of rehearsal period? _____ Weeks

What was your opinion of this period? _____ Too short _____ Barely enough

_____ Enough

What was your salary on this production?

_____ 0 yuan (volunteer)

_____ Not exceeding regular salary (company member director)

_____ 1000 yuan or less _____ 1001-2000 yuan

_____ 2001-3000 yuan _____ 3001-4000 yuan

_____ 4001-5000 _____ >5000 yuan

15. Including you, how many directors worked on the project? _____

If there were other directors on the project, regarding your working relationship with them, which of the following is the best description?

_____ Rich creative collaboration

_____ Although the process was difficult, the result was comparatively successful

_____ Damaging conflict

_____ Although there was no big conflict during the process, the result was not too successful
16. Did you use a technique director during rehearsal of this production?
   ☐ No ☐ Yes

   Regarding their responsibilities, which of the following is the best description?
   ☐ He designed performance technique alone that I approved
   ☐ We just collaborated, there were no strict divisions of responsibility
   ☐ Other, please explain: ________________________________

17. Regarding your assessment of the overall artistic success of this production, which of the following is the best description?
   ☐ Very successful ☐ Successful
   ☐ Not too successful ☐ Unsuccessful

18. Regarding the commercial success of this production, which of the following is the best description?
   ☐ Very successful ☐ Successful
   ☐ Not too successful ☐ Unsuccessful

19. Regarding your participation in the script development process, which of the following is the best description?
   ☐ I wrote the script myself ☐ Very big input ☐ Big input
   ☐ Not much input ☐ No input

20. Regarding your working relationship with the playwright, which of the following is the best description?
   ☐ Wrote the script myself
   ☐ Rich creative collaboration
   ☐ Although the process was difficult, the result was comparatively successful
   ☐ Damaging conflict
   ☐ Though there was no big conflict during the process, the result was not too successful

21. Regarding your participation in the process of setting song vs. speech, which of the following is the best description?
   ☐ Very big input ☐ Big input ☐ Not much input ☐ No input

22. Regarding your participation in the process of setting modes and metrical types, which of the following is the best description?
   ☐ Very big input ☐ Big input ☐ Not much input ☐ No input

23. Regarding your participation in the process of setting the percussion, which of the following is the best description?
   ☐ Very big input ☐ Big input ☐ Not much input ☐ No input
24. Regarding your working relationship with the composer, which of the following is the best description?
   _____ I myself was the composer
   _____ Rich creative collaboration
   _____ Although the process was difficult, the result was comparatively successful
   _____ Damaging conflict
   _____ Though there was no big conflict during the process, the result was not too successful

25. Regarding your participation in the design of movement and dance, which of the following is the best description?
   _____ Designed the movement myself
   _____ Very big input
   _____ Big input
   _____ Not much input
   _____ No input

26. Regarding your participation in the process of developing the stage design, which of the following is the best description?
   _____ Designed it myself
   _____ Very big input
   _____ Big input
   _____ Not much input
   _____ No input

27. Regarding your participation in the casting of leading and supporting performers, which of the following is the best description?
   _____ Full control
   _____ Very big input
   _____ Big input
   _____ Not much input
   _____ No input

28. Regarding the participation of the leading performers in the rehearsal process, which of the following is the best description?
   _____ Usually participating
   _____ Intermittent
   _____ Substitutes were used until later in the process

29. Regarding your working relationship with the leading performers, which of the following is the best description?
   _____ Rich creative collaboration
   _____ Although the process was difficult, the result was comparatively successful
   _____ Damaging conflict
   _____ Though there was no big conflict during the process, the result was not too successful

30. What is your opinion of the following statement: "While we were rehearsing this production, the leading actor(s) perceived the performance conventions of their own role type or school/style of performance as though they were shackles, as a result their performance did not achieve an ideally complete expression of the character."
   _____ Strongly disagree
   _____ Disagree
   _____ Agree
   _____ Strongly agree
31. Regarding your working relationship with the theatre troupe's administrators, which of the following is the best description?

   ____ Rich creative collaboration
   ____ Although the process was difficult, the result was comparatively successful
   ____ Damaging conflict
   ____ Though there was no big conflict during the process, the result was not too successful

32. Regarding your working process in staging this production, which of the following had the strongest influence?

   ____ Preserve Xiqu tradition
   ____ Please the audience
   ____ Give full expression of lead actors' performance skills
   ____ Pursue my own artistic vision

Please answer the following questions according to your second most recent Xiqu directing project

[Repeats questions #14 - #32]

!!!!!!!! MANY THANKS !!!!!!
APPENDIX B

导演您好！我是美国夏威夷大学的博士生，魏莉莎女士是我的导师，我去年9月到北京，从事戏曲研究。她的论文写的是我对中国戏曲的考察。在她对我的论文的指导下，我写下了这份问卷，希望它能帮助您了解中国戏曲的现状。虽然问卷看起来很长，但请用15分钟可以签完，答错可以不填您的名字。请您每月1日以前把它寄回给我，谢谢您的合作！

范思琪

1. 您的出生日期： 是
   性别： 男
   女
   其他
   以您现在的任职情况为限，下列哪一个是你最理想的？
   ①戏曲剧团的主演出演。
   ②戏曲剧团的副演出，也当导演。
   ③戏曲剧团的话剧，也当导演。
   ④戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   ⑤戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   ⑥戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   ⑦戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   ⑧戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   ⑨戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   ⑩戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。

2. 您参加过正式的戏曲表演训练吗？
   计算机 电子 学校 > 学了几年？
   行当？
   剧种？
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。

3. 您是经过正式戏曲表演训练的？
   计算机 电子 学校 > 学了几年？
   行当？
   剧种？
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。

4. 您得到了硕士学位是什么？
   计算机 电子 学校 > 学了几年？
   行当？
   剧种？
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。

5. 您有没有经过戏曲表演的专业训练？
   计算机 电子 学校 > 学了几年？
   行当？
   剧种？
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
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   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。

6. 除了上面戏曲专业以外您有其它正式戏曲表演训练吗？
   计算机 电子 学校 > 学了几年？
   行当？
   剧种？
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
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   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。

7. 您是否有正式的戏曲表演训练？
   计算机 电子 学校 > 学了几年？
   行当？
   剧种？
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
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   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。

8. 您参与过几个戏曲作品？
   计算机 电子 学校 > 学了几年？
   行当？
   剧种？
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
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   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。

9. 您对上面的句子有什么感受？
   “在最有意思的戏曲演出中，演员深入戏剧角色的表演是必不可少的”
   计算机 电子 学校 > 学了几年？
   行当？
   剧种？
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
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   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。

10. 关于你目前戏曲艺术中的表现，您认为下列哪一个是你最理想的？
   计算机 电子 学校 > 学了几年？
   行当？
   剧种？
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
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   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。

11. 在您最近三年的工作时间中，请估计您花了百分之多少在下列的活动里？
   计算机 电子 学校 > 学了几年？
   行当？
   剧种？
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
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   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。

100% 总共你的工作天数

12. 在您最近三年的收入中，请估计您所挣的现有百分之多少是从下列的活动所得的？
   计算机 电子 学校 > 学了几年？
   行当？
   剧种？
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。
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   戏曲剧团的编曲，也当导演。

100% 总共您的薪金

(继续)
请根据您最近的戏曲导演作品答复下面的问卷

14. 所在单位：__________ 您和剧组的关系是：__________ 本剧的 ________ 选角的 
剧种：__________ 的 ________ 剧目来源：__________ 传统剧  现代剧 
编导是谁：__________ 戏剧  现代剧 
时间安排：__________ 选角  现代剧 
您对这个时期有什么看法：__________ 仅有 ________ 期间合适 
您认为在戏曲中的多少钱？__________ 元（含导演）__________ 未经报批且导演工资（本剧导演）__________ 1000元下 
__________ 1001-2000元 __________ 2001-3000元 _________ 3001-4000元 __________ 4001-5000元 __________ 5000元上 

15. 请根据您最近的戏曲导演作品答复下面的问卷：__________ 位 
如果有其它的导演相互沟通，你认为他的导演，下列哪一个最好的描述？
__________ 具体的编导工作 ________ 在具体的过程中谁能 ________ 按照导演的要求进行 ________ 没有导演的要求，演出效果不好 

16. 你认为您在戏曲导演的过程中，下列哪一个最好的描述？__________ 领导 ________ 其他 ________ 没有 ________ 请具体地阐述 ________ 

17. 关于您在戏曲导演的过程中，下列哪一个最好的描述？
非常成功 ________ 不成功 ________ 不太成功 ________ 没有成功 

18. 关于您在戏曲导演的过程中，下列哪一个最好的描述？
非常成功 ________ 很成功 ________ 不太成功 ________ 没有成功 

19. 关于您在戏曲导演的过程中，下列哪一个最好的描述？
自己编导 ________ 非常大 ________ 很大的 ________ 不太大 ________ 没有作用 

20. 关于您在戏曲导演的过程中，下列哪一个最好的描述？
自己编导 ________ 非常大 ________ 很大的 ________ 不太大 ________ 没有作用 

21. 关于您在戏曲导演的过程中，下列哪一个最好的描述？
非常大 ________ 很大的 ________ 不太大 ________ 没有作用 

22. 关于您在戏曲导演的过程中，下列哪一个最好的描述？
非常大 ________ 很大的 ________ 不太大 ________ 没有作用 

23. 关于您在戏曲导演的过程中，下列哪一个最好的描述？
非常大 ________ 很大的 ________ 不太大 ________ 没有作用 

24. 关于您在戏曲导演的过程中，下列哪一个最好的描述？
自己编导 ________ 非常大 ________ 很大的 ________ 没有作用 

25. 关于您在戏曲导演的过程中，下列哪一个最好的描述？
非常大 ________ 很大的 ________ 不太大 ________ 没有作用 

26. 关于您在戏曲导演的过程中，下列哪一个最好的描述？
非常大 ________ 很大的 ________ 不太大 ________ 没有作用 

27. 关于您在戏曲导演的过程中，下列哪一个最好的描述？
非常大 ________ 很大的 ________ 不太大 ________ 没有作用 

28. 关于您在戏曲导演的过程中，下列哪一个最好的描述？
非常大 ________ 很大的 ________ 不太大 ________ 没有作用 

29. 关于您在戏曲导演的过程中，下列哪一个最好的描述？
非常大 ________ 很大的 ________ 不太大 ________ 没有作用 

30. 关于您在戏曲导演的过程中，下列哪一个最好的描述？
非常大 ________ 很大的 ________ 不太大 ________ 没有作用 

(续)
25. 关于您对演技、导演设计的作用，下列哪一个是最为的描述？
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26. 关于您对导演设计的作用，下列哪一个是最好的描述？
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27. 关于您对演出中主要演员与配角的作用，下列哪一个是最好的描述？
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28. 关于演员在演出过程中的参与，下列哪一个是最好的描述？
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29. 关于您与我合作的关系，下列哪一个是最为的描述？
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请根据您第二个最近的戏曲导演作品，回答下面的问卷。

30. 您和剧本的关系是什么？
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31. 关于您和剧本的关系，下列哪一个最好的描述？
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32. 关于您在演出中的配合，下列哪一个最好地描述？
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33. 您和剧本的关系是什么？
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34. 在演出中，下列哪一个最能满足您？
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38. 您和剧本的关系是什么？
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>选项</th>
<th>常常有</th>
<th>非常大</th>
<th>没有</th>
<th>不太大</th>
<th>没有作用</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>自己设计</td>
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39. 您和剧本的关系是什么？
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>选项</th>
<th>常常有</th>
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<th>不太大</th>
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<td>自己设计</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
4. 关于您在确定决策过程中的作用，下列哪一个是最好的描述？
- 非常大
- 很大的
- 不太大
- 没有作用

4.1 关于您在制定决策和执行过程中的作用，下列哪一个是最好的描述？
- 非常大
- 很大的
- 不太大
- 没有作用

4.2 关于您在确定目标和过程中的作用，下列哪一个是最好的描述？
- 非常大
- 很大的
- 不太大
- 没有作用

4.3 关于您和作曲的合作关系，下列哪一个是最好的描述？
- 自己作曲
- 非常好的
- 适合在各段过程中
- 造成损害
- 适合在不同情况下
- 适合于不同对象
- 没有作用

4.4 关于您对音效、舞蹈设计的作用，下列哪一个是最好的描述？
- 自己设计
- 非常大的
- 没有作用

4.5 关于您对舞美设计的作用，下列哪一个是最好的描述？
- 自己设计
- 非常大
- 没有作用

4.6 关于您对导演参与的影响，下列哪一个是最好的描述？
- 完全的
- 非常大
- 没有作用

4.7 关于您在排练过程中的参与，下列哪一个是最好的描述？
- 参与
- 华丽的
- 指挥以前没有参加过

4.8 关于您与主演的合作关系，下列哪一个是最好的描述？
- 非常大
- 非常小
- 完全的
- 没有作用

4.9 关于您与剧团领导的关系，下列哪一个是最好的描述？
- 非常大的
- 没有作用

4.10 关于您在排练出错的创作中，下列哪一个因素有最大的影响？
- 缺乏戏剧
- 使观众
- 充分展现主演
- 使您自己

想对您的句子有什么看法？“我们在排练出错的时候，主演（们）把他的（们）负责当成主角的表演程
式看看是合适，因此他（们）的演出达不到理想的主角角色的表演。”
- 非常不同意
- 不同意
- 同意
- 非常同意

5.1 关于您在排练出错的创作中，下列哪一个因素有最大的影响？
- 缺乏戏剧
- 使观众
- 充分展现主演
- 使您自己

辛苦了！非常感谢！
APPENDIX C
Description of delay in receipt of surveys

The timing of my mailing perhaps could not have been worse since the surveys went out mid July of 1999, barely two months after the United States bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. Chinese media had vilified the United States and saturated the airwaves with images of the grieving relatives of those who had died in the bombing. Though I have no way to verify any causal connection, I have personal knowledge of the following events occurring in the two and a half months following the bombing: cancellation of a planned regional Xiqu production based on Eugene O’Neill’s *Desire Under the Elms*,¹ cancellation of the Xiqu Academy’s production of *Othello*, discussed in chapter 8, and confiscation of video tapes I had made of the final stages of rehearsals for *Othello*. These events, plus rumors of American researchers being shut down all over China indicate a pervasive atmosphere of official anti-Western sentiment. In my personal experience, however, enforcement of this sentiment at a local level was inconsistent. Rehearsals of *Othello* at the Xiqu Academy resumed after a pause of several weeks following the bombing, and I was allowed to observe them. In addition, less than a month after the bombing, the secretary at the Office of Research in Xiqu Performance and Directing in the National Arts Research Institute’s Xiqu Research Department (中国艺术学院戏曲研究所戏曲表演导演研究室, Zhongguo Yishu Xueyuan Xiqu Yanjusuo Xiqu Biaodaoyan Yanjiushi), where

¹ The production was to have been directed by Luo Jinlin, director of *Medea* discussed in chapter 5. He had arranged for me to observe the rehearsal process and he himself speculated that the bombing was a major factor in the company’s decision to cancel the project.
the Chinese Association of Xiqu Directors is based, gave me the membership list with no hesitation less than a month after the bombing. She did warn that I should not expect a high percentage of responses, but in her view this would be due to general unfamiliarity in China with this kind of survey process and the fact that many of the directors on the list would be busy with projects for the upcoming celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Communist Party victory. Based on her advice, I requested that the surveys be returned to me by November, a month after the October 1999 celebration.

For reasons that may or may not have anything to do with the embassy bombing, I did not actually receive the 33 completed surveys until September 2001. The responses were all postmarked between July and November 1999. The Chinese postal system also stamps the date letters are received in Beijing, and all of the surveys had arrived by November 1999. I had returned to the United States in July of that year. A friend who was staying longer at the return address of the Foreign Students Dormitory of the Central Drama Academy agreed to collect and forward any responses. When she left in February 2000, she forwarded to me the single response she had received. In late summer 2000, a fellow American researcher staying at the Central Drama Academy was shown a stack of mail addressed to me literally as she was heading out the door to the airport to return to the United States. In that hurried moment, she did not recognize my name though we had met briefly in Beijing in 1996. After returning to the states, she realized who I was and sent an e-mail describing what had happened. I sent a letter to the Foreign Students Office of the Central Drama
Academy with money for postage and a request that they forward the mail to me. I received no response, and assumed that the letters had been destroyed. The following summer, my colleague returned to the Academy and asked about my mail. Amazingly, the mail had not been destroyed and I finally received the responses in September 2001.

I have no way of knowing whether the failure of my original plan to have the responses forwarded to me by my friend was caused by the embassy bombing (such that the mail was withheld) or simply by my not having informed the right people of the plan. I had informed the Foreign Students Office, but I had not informed the caretakers of the dormitory who physically handled the mail. In any event, the envelopes I received had all been officially postmarked and did not appear to have been opened. All of the surveys contained at least one handwritten response and a number of the respondents included individual notes to me, some with their name cards. In other words, I have no reason to question that, despite the long delay in their arrival, they are in fact the individual responses of the directors to whom they were addressed.
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